What's in a name? An enquiry about the interpretation of *Agama Hindu* as "Hinduism"

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Abstract

In this article, I question the conceptual categories of "religion", "*agama*", "*dharma*", and "Hinduism", in order to investigate through which processes and within which contexts the Balinese religion resulted in being construed as *agama Hindu*. After having investigated how the Sanskrit loanword *agama* came to designate in Indonesia an Islamic conception of what "religion" is about, I assess the similarities between the construction of Indian Neo-Hinduism and the interpretation of the Balinese religion as *agama Hindu*. In particular, I pay attention to the controversy which has been dividing the Balinese intelligentsia over the proper name of their religion, as it reveals a perennial conflict between the Balinese who want to retain the specificity of their customary ritual practices, and those who aspire to reform the Balinese religion by conforming it to what they think Hinduism is about.

Keywords: Religion, *agama*, *dharma*, Hinduism, *agama Hindu Bali vs agama Hindu*.

"Search through all the vast records of pre-Mohamedan India, nowhere will you meet with even such a word as *Hindu*, let alone *Hindu religion*. Search through the whole of that record, and nowhere will you meet with such a word as *religion*. The word *Dharma*, which is used in the modern vernaculars as its equivalent, was never used in pre-Mohamedan India in the

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> same sense as *Religion*… For religion, the ancient Hindu had no name, because his conception of it was so broad as to dispense with the necessity of a name. With other peoples, religion is only part of life, there are things religious, and there are things lay and secular. To the Hindu his whole life was religion." (Bankim Chandra Chatterji, *Letters on Hinduism*)

> "Sebeloem poetra-poetra dan poetri-poetri Bali ada jang bersekolah, dan di Bali beloemlah pernah berdiri soerat-soerat chabar, maka keadaan di Bali soedahlah memeloek agama ini, jang mana berdjalan teroes, tiadalah ada mentjela dan menjalahkan, jang mana kita dengar tjoema ada pembitjaraan 'adat desa anoe begini dan desa anoe begitoe'... Lantas ini tiada diseboet oepatjara agama, melainkan diseboet adat desa. Djadi ringkasnja agama jang sebenarnja tiada diketahoei; jang diketahoei perbedaannja tjoema adat desa dan agama jang diketahoei tjoema agama Bali." (*Djatajoe*, 1937, 2/5: 131)

The Balinese are said to be *panganut agama Hindu*, which is commonly taken to mean that the Balinese religion is Hinduism.

There are at least three words that I find problematic in that statement – "religion", "*agama*", and "Hinduism". In this article, I intend to question these conceptual categories, in order to investigate through which processes and within which contexts the Balinese religion resulted in being construed as *agama Hindu*.[1]

Some caveat is in order before I proceed. Questioning authority is one of the main features of the academic disciplines. This responsibility is compounded for the scholars of religion, who are faced with the task of questioning the bases of authoritative claims put forward by the believers themselves. In this, I must agree with the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who argued that "No common analysis of religion can be given by a believer and a non-believer" (Lévi-Strauss 1972:

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188).

The problem is further muddled by the fact that within any religious tradition there will be competing voices claiming to speak with authority for that religion – as is indeed the case with *agama Hindu* in Bali.

Religion

In the last 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 highly contentious one at that.[2]

Indeed, "religion" is neither a descriptive nor an analytical term, but a prescriptive and normative concept. Originating in the Roman notion of *religio*, it was appropriated by Christian theologians, who radically shifted its meaning by uprooting it from its "pagan" framework. To the Romans, *religio* was what *traditio* is all about, a set of ancestral practices developed by a people and transmitted over generations.[3] 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 opposed its doctrines to the prevalent practices, rejected as false beliefs marred by superstitions. This distinction between true and false religions marks a conceptual shift, characterized by a

[2] See e.g. Asad (1993), Staal (1996), McCutcheon (1997), Fitzgerald (1997), Dubuisson (1998), Smith (1998), King (1999), Balagangadhara (2005), Masuzawa (2005).

[3] As is well known, Cicero's etymology related *religio* to *religere*, meaning to retrace or to read anew. In this sense, *religio* involved the scrupulous reiteration of the ritual traditions of one's ancestors. In the 3rd century, the Christian theologian Lactantius rejected Cicero's etymology, arguing instead that *religio* derives from *religare*, meaning to bind or to link, which eventually became the common understanding of "religion". On the origin and evolution of the category "religion", see Sachot (2003).

scriptural turn, a substitution of dogma for ritual, of orthodoxy (allegiance to normative precepts) for orthopraxy (respect for ancestral rites) (Assmann 2007).

Once 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 references, 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*, *dharma*, or *agama* – should not be taken for a conceptual tool, but ought to be the object of analysis (Saler 1993).

Now, it appears that the terms under which Christianity defines itself as a religion are also the terms under which Islam and Judaism recognize themselves as religions. Therefore, the category "religion" is to some extent common to these three Abrahamic traditions, which are related by a similar belief in one exclusive God and divine revelation recorded in a Holy Book.

By contrast, in Asian cultures prior to the modern period, there was no indigenous terminology corresponding to the category "religion". In my opinion, if there is no equivalent term in another culture, it is not only the word that is missing, but that particular entity "religion" itself, as a consciously perceived phenomenon, does not exist.

The spread of Islam and Christianity – along with colonialism, orientalism and nationalism – 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 categories as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism,

Confucianism, Shinto, and so on.[4] From the 19th century onward, religious reformers emphasized the doctrinal features in their traditions, 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 were expanding their global reach, they demarcated their boundaries and consolidated their corporate identity, while endeavouring to control the variegated rituals and observances which they encountered. The replacement of disparate local traditions by a normative and deterritorialized form of "religion" was marked by rationalization (the formulation of a canonical corpus, its institutionalization and its effective socialization), as well as by secularization (desacralization of the immanent concrete in favour of an abstract and transcendent divine) (Hefner 1993, 1998).

That is to say, "religion" is a taxonomic device, which has to do with the construction and maintenance of boundaries. Accordingly, scholars of religion should investigate how this taxonomy works, that is, what it includes and what it excludes. Hence the importance of delineating the vernacular conception of a religious field, by assessing how the category "religion" is construed locally, and how it operates in relation to other categories. In particular, one has to be aware that local actors do not usually concur regarding what their "religion" is about, as "religion" is a contested issue, having to do with institutionalized values and their relation to power and its legitimation. Therefore, one should elucidate what gets identified and legitimized as "religion", by whom, for what purpose, and under what political conditions.

To sum up, for the scholar of religion the relevant question is not "What is religion?", but "What gets to count as 'religion'

[4] See e.g. Almond (1988), Oberoi (1994), Brekke (2002), Goossaert (2004), Isomae (2007.

and why – and above all, who is to decide?"

Agama

In Indonesia, the category "religion" has been appropriated in terms of "*agama*". Most Indonesianists appear to take for granted that *agama* is but a word for word translation of "religion". And this is indeed the meaning one finds in the bilingual Indonesian dictionaries.

However, things are not as straightforward, since the word *agama* covers a much more restricted semantic field than does the common understanding of the word "religion", for which Indonesians had to borrow the Dutch loanword *religi*. In point of fact, *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 – that is, a Prophet, a Holy Book, and a belief in the One and Only God.[5] Accordingly, Indonesian religious politics can be labelled "religionization" (*agamaisasi*), implying that followers of indigenous traditions are "not yet religious" (*belum beragama*), and therefore are due to be "religionized" (*agamaized*).

On that account, *agama* is the object of competing claims between proponents of local world views and customary ritual practices, who consider them as self-sufficient and deserving the label *agama* in their own right, and advocates of a translocal religion of foreign origin, having a claim to universalism, who deny those local traditions the qualification of *agama*.

However, *agama* has not always meant "religion" in Indonesia. In order to assess how this word came to acquire

[5] Inasmuch as the Indonesian notion of *agama* is congruent with the Islamic definition of "religion", it is commonly equated to the Arabic word *din* as used in the Koran (see e.g. Hefner 1999: 212; Ramstedt 2004: 9; and Hosen 2005: 426, n. 21). In this respect, one should know that, before being used as an equivalent of "religion", the word *din* – which signifies "practice, custom, law" – referred to "the body of obligatory prescriptions to which one must submit", according to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

such a meaning, we have to inquire about its significance in Sanskrit.

Etymologically derived from the root *gam*, meaning "to go", and the preposition *ā-*, meaning "toward", the word *agama* means "that which has come down", and it refers to "anything handed down as fixed by tradition", according to Jan Gonda in his study of *Sanskrit in Indonesia*.[6] Besides, *agama* is one of the sources of knowledge – the *pramana* – which vary according to the different Indian *darshana*. In this respect, *agama-pramana* refers to authoritative scripture as a means of valid cognition, and as such it is equivalent to *shabda-pramana* (verbal testimony).

In a more specific sense, *Agama* is the name of the canonical texts of the Shaiva-Siddhanta order in South India (Davis 1991). The primary sources of Shaiva-Siddhanta are the 28 *Shaivagama*, a body of Sanskrit texts that are treated as authoritative because they claim to have been revealed by Lord Shiva to his *shakti* Parvati. They usually consist of four parts: theology (*jñana*), concentration (*yoga*), ritual (*kriya*), and rules (*carya*).

Surprisingly few scholars 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 could surmise that the fact that the word *agama* came

[6] Here is how Gonda accounts for the appropriation of *agama* 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'" (Gonda 1973: 499-500)

to mean "religion" in Indonesia had to do with the paramount importance of the Shaivite agamic texts in Java and Bali. 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 19th century.

Although we don't know when the word *agama* came to mean "religion" in Indonesia, we know that in Javanese and Balinese textual traditions the generic title *Agama* "used to refer to a range of texts dealing with moral, religious and legal sanctions and practices" (Creese 2009: 242, n. 2; see also Hoadley & Hooker 1981, 1986). These texts are mainly drawn from the Sanskrit *Manava Dharmashastra*, the "Laws of Manu" – the most prominent of all the *dharmashastra* literature.

This is also how the Bengali historian Himanshu Bhushan 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: (1) the *Niti* literature, which expounds moral precepts and maxims – e.g. the *Sarasamuccaya*, the *Kunjarakarna*, and the *Navaruci*; and (2) the legal literature, or jurisprudence – e.g. the *Shivasasana* or *Purvadhigama*, the *Agama* or *Kutaramanava*, and the *Adigama*. 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.

Dharma

Therefore, in order to assess how the word *agama* came to mean "religion" in Indonesia, it might be instructive to investigate what happened to the word *dharma* in India.

The concept of *dharma* is complex and cannot be reduced to one general principle; nor is there one single translation which would cover all its significations. *Dharma* is both an account of the world and a norm on which to base social life, at once describing how things are and prescribing the way they should be – it is an all-encompassing category, whose scope is considerably broader than that of the category "religion" (Rocher 2003; Holdrege 2004).

The word *dharma* comes from the root *dhr*, "to uphold, to maintain", and *dharma* may be defined as "that which upholds and supports order". Accordingly, *dharma* is the continuous maintaining of the cosmic and social order, which is achieved by the Aryans through the performance of their Vedic rites and traditional rules of conduct. On that account, *dharma* is the normative foundation of the Aryan form of life, that which upholds the identity of the *arya* (the "noble one") and distinguishes them from the *mleccha* (the "barbarian"), and which also legitimizes the privileged position of the Brahmans as the teachers and guardians of the *dharma*.

In the *dharmashastra*, the word *dharma* refers to the *varnashramadharma*, the "duties" and "qualifications" bearing on the *arya* according to their social class (*varna*) and their stage of life (*ashrama*). That is to say, the differential norms of *varnashramadharma* determine the *svadharma* of specific groups of people according to their degree of participation in the *varna* and *ashrama* systems – meaning that only the male members of the twice-born *varna* (Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas) are participants in both *varnadharma* and *ashramadharma*. *Dharma* is thus an exclusive and personal norm, as attested by the well-known verse from the *Bhagavadgita* that states: "It is better to perform one's own *dharma* badly than to perform another's *dharma* well" (B.G. 3.35).

Now, as a result of the requirements of British colonial administration, on the one hand, as well as of the pursuits of

Christian missionaries, on the other, the significance of the word *dharma* would end up being at once fragmented and universalized.

In 1772, in order to prevent Indians being subjected to English law, which was totally foreign to them, the Governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings, decreed that the Hindus shall be governed by the laws of the Shastra, and the Muslims by the law of the Koran. Thus, the entire body of *dharmashastra* literature was elevated to the rank of law books to be used by the Anglo-Indian courts of law to decide civil and religious matters among Hindus. As a result, "law" and "religion", which were inextricably linked in the *dharmashastra*, were artificially set apart.

Then in 1801, when Christian missionaries in India translated the Bible – which they titled *Dharmapustaka* in Sanskrit – they chose the term *dharma* as an equivalent to "religion", and started to proclaim Christianity as the "true *dharma*" (*satyadharma*). By trying to deprive the Hindus of their *dharma*, which they expounded as a false "religion", the missionaries channeled the Hindu reaction in two directions (Halbfass 1988: 342). On the one hand, in order to meet the Christian challenge, Hindus themselves started using the word *dharma* in the sense of "religion", with the result that the Hindu *dharma* became one religion among others, to be compared and opposed to the Christian *dharma* or the Muslim *dharma*.[7] On the other hand, some Hindus disclaimed the exclusive character of

[7] While Christian missionaries were introducing the term *dharma* as the vernacular equivalent of "religion" in India, missionaries in Sri Lanka were appropriating the term *agama* for the same purpose: referring to Christianity as *Kristiyani agama*, they named the "religion of the Buddha" *Buddhagama*. Later on, this name gained acceptance among the Sinhala Buddhists themselves as a term of self-reference. Furthermore, in the late 19th century, the syntagm *agamadharma* was used in the sense of a system of teaching (*dharma*) that is based on canonical texts (*agama*). On the colonial construction of Buddhism as a "religion" in Sri Lanka, see e.g. Carter (1993), and Malalgoda (1997).

the *varnashramadharma* and attempted instead to universalize *dharma*, by invoking the inclusive principles of *sadharanadharma*, as well as the related notion of *sanatanadharma* as the "eternal religion" that is universal in scope. In that respect, *dharma* was considered as a principle superior to and, moreover, encompassing religions.

Hinduism

As it happens, it was not only the word for "religion" that was borrowed by Hindus from Christian missionaries, it was the very name of their own religion as well.

The word "Hindu" – which is the Persian form of the Sanskrit Sindhu (the Indus river) – was originally a geographical term, used by the Persians to designate the inhabitants of the country which they named "Hindustan" (meaning "the land of the Hindus"). For the Persians, Hindus were Indians other than Muslims.

Those designated as "Hindus" began to use the word themselves by the 16th century. But even when used by indigenous Indians, it is clear that the term "Hindu" did not have specifically religious denotations, as revealed by the fact that in the 18th century it was still common to refer to natives who had converted to Islam or Christianity as Hindu Muslims and Hindu Christians.

Later on, Europeans took the term "Hindu" to designate the followers of a particular Indian religion. Through a process of reification, the word "Hinduism" was first coined in 1787 by the Protestant missionary Charles Grant to name an imagined religion of the vast majority of the population, something that had never existed as a "religion" in the consciousness of the Indian people themselves (Oddie 2006: 71). Up until then, there had been only multiple communities identified by locality, language, caste, occupation, and sectarian affiliation.

The Hindu religion, having acquired its own specific

name, could then be seen as a distinctive and unified religious system, with clear boundaries marking it off from other religions. In 1816, the term "Hinduism" was appropriated for the first time by a Hindu, the Bengali religious reformer Rammohun Roy, who was also the first Indian to speak of *dharma* in the sense of "religion" (Lorenzen 1999: 631).

In due course, the name "Hinduism" was adopted by the anglicized Indian intelligentsia, in their attempt to establish a religion that could compete with Christianity and Islam for equal standing. For these Western-educated elites, the English language was not just a means of communicating with a foreign culture, it also served as a medium in which they articulated their self-understanding and reinterpreted their own traditions.

They initiated reform movements that looked to models from both the contemporary West and an idealized Indian past. Whereas Hindu practices were traditionally localized, sectarian, and exclusive, reformers formed pan-Indian associations that promoted the idea of a single inclusive religion for all Hindus, now being defined as a national religious community.

In the 19th-century European evolutionary worldview, monotheism was seen as the highest form of religion. Embracing the Protestant emphasis upon the text as the locus of religion, reformers singled out Vedic and Brahmanical scriptures as canonical, while dismissing popular religious practices. They claimed that Hinduism was originally a monotheistic religion, whose true doctrines were to be found either in the *Veda*, the *Upanishad*, or the *Bhagavadgita*, but which had degenerated into polytheism and image worship during the Puranic period.

In response to missionary criticism and for fear of conversion to Christianity, reformers pressed their fellow coreligionists to eradicate what the missionaries described as "evil" practices, and they set about drawing a distinction between true "Hinduism" and downright "superstitions".

This distinction was commonly framed in terms of a contrast between that which belongs to *dharma* and that which pertains to *acara* – that is to say, the established rules of conduct for specific castes or sects, which are endorsed by the *dharmashastra* but which the reformers did not consider as an essential part of "Hinduism".

In point of fact, reformers held divergent opinions on the principles of reformed Hinduism. Hence, one can distinguish three main reform-minded responses to the Christian attack on Hinduism. The first one saw Christianity as one instance of universal religion, and combined elements of Sufism, Vedanta, and Unitarianism into a common religion with strong deist tendencies. This was the approach taken by Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) and the Brahmo Samaj (founded in 1828) (Mitter 1987). A few decades later, Dayananda Sarasvati (1824-1883) and the Arya Samaj (founded in 1875) adopted a much more aggressive stance by rejecting Christianity altogether (Jordens 1978). A third response was developed by Vivekananda (1863-1902), who argued that Christianity was simply a lesser form of the universal spirituality found in all religions, but which had reached its highest level in Vedantic Hinduism (Radice 1998).

All these reform movements met with resistance from Hindu traditionalists, who formed conservative organizations dedicated to the defense of the *sanatana dharma* – which, despite its claim to be the "eternal religion", is as modern a construct as is "Hinduism".

In any case, it was not before the book *Hinduism* was published in 1877 by the famous British Sanskritist Monier Monier-Williams, that the term "Hinduism" gained full currency in English. But even then, it was not universally accepted in India itself. Thus, when the British colonial government introduced a census in 1871, many Indians either did not understand or else refused the label "Hindu" (Haan 2005). As there are no criteria for deciding who is and who

is not a Hindu, government officials decided that Hinduism could only be defined residually, that is, Hindus are Indians who are neither Muslim, nor Christian, nor Sikh, nor Jain, nor Buddhist, and so on. In other words, Hindus are what is left after others have set themselves apart.

That is to say, the question of defining Hinduism is not only difficult but contentious as well. The point is that "Hinduism" is a construct.[8] In this respect, the 19th century reform movements did not so much describe what Hinduism is, as prescribe what it should be. Hence the name "Neo-Hinduism" given to this idealized Hinduism (Hacker 1995), which never concerned more than a tiny minority of those regarded as Hindus, who go on worshipping their gods, singing their songs, and telling their stories.

Agama Hindu

Now, ever since I developed an interest in the way educated Balinese elites started reflecting on their religious identity, in the 1920s, I was struck by the similarities between the construction of Indian Neo-Hinduism and the interpretation of the Balinese religion as *agama Hindu*.

Besides the stress on monotheism, in response to criticisms levelled by Muslims and Christians alike, both these movements have been informed by colonialism, orientalism and nationalism. In addition, they have been marked by a proselytizing drive which was originally foreign to them both. Specifically, in order to have their religion legitimized by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, Balinese, just like their Indian predecessors, resolved to reform the ritual practices of their coreligionists by borrowing prevailing religious norms –

[8] Numerous studies have been published on the construction of "Hinduism" as a "religion". See e.g. Fitzgerald (1990), Frykenberg (1993), Dalmia & Stietencron (1995), Stietencron (1997), King (1999), Sontheimer & Kulke (2001), Sharma (2002), Sugirtharajah (2003), Sweetman (2003), Balagangadhara (2005), Pennington (2005), Lipner (2006), Bloch et al. (2010).

in the case in point, those pertaining to Abrahamic religions – all the while presenting their reforms as a restoration of their Hindu heritage.

Furthermore, in their efforts to assert a distinctive identity, both to themselves and to others, Indian and Balinese elites had to resort to foreign conceptual categories – by means of English for the Indians, of Malay-Indonesian for the Balinese. And we find in Bali the same kind of opposition between reformers and traditionalists that we encountered in India.

My working hypothesis is that, in the manner of what occurred with the concept of *dharma* in India, the legal and religious features 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 word, Muslims and Christians added new implications to it, namely, the exclusive worship of one Supreme God and the requirement of conversion to a foreign doctrine whose teachings are contained in a Holy Book.

Such a scriptural turn appears to be as old as the coming of Islam to the Archipelago, as attested by 14th-century Malay chronicles, in which the word *agama* is always associated with Islam, and appears to be equivalent to the word *din*. Therefore, one has to conclude that for centuries the word *agama* had in Indonesia two distinct denotations, that of *dharma* as well as that of *din*, according to the context and to the language of its occurrence.

By taking on the meaning of "religion", *agama* was not only being dissociated from "law" but also from "tradition", which is rendered in Indonesia by the Arabic loanword *adat*. In the same fashion as *dharma*, *adat* refers to the cosmic order and to social life in agreement with that order – at once describing the ideal order and prescribing the behaviour required to achieve that order. This universal scope was fragmented by Islam and Christianity, which strove to curtail the religious

import of *adat* by confining its significance to the customs of a people. In particular, the word *adat* entered the language of Islamized populations to refer to indigenous "customary law" as opposed to Islamic "religious law" (*hukum*).

However, in contrast to Islamized (or Christianized) areas of Indonesia, in Bali the word *agama* has retained its original polysemy, as attested by Balinese-Indonesian dictionaries, which translate *agama* as (1) *agama*, (2) *hukum*, and (3) *adat*.

Admittedly, we don't know when Balinese started using the word *agama* in the sense of "religion" – nor when they actually chose to label their own *agama* as *Hindu*. But we do know that long before they began defining themselves as *Hindu*, the Balinese had already been "Hinduized" by orientalists, at a time when they had yet to learn the word "Hindu" (Guermonprez 2001: 272).

Thus, in the report to the Asiatic Society of Bengal of his brief visit to Bali in 1814, the British administrator-cum-orientalist John Crawfurd took it for granted that the Balinese were Hindus, and further, he used the word *agama* in the sense of religion: "When interrogated respecting their religion, the natives of Bali say that they are of the religion of Siva (*Agama Siva*) or of the religion of Buddha (*Agama Buddha*)" (Crawfurd 1820: 129).

This assertion was repeated by the German Sanskritist Rudolf Friederich, who had been sent by the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences with the first Dutch military expedition against Bali in 1846, to collect manuscripts and document Balinese religion and culture: "In the Malayan and common Balinese language *agama* signifies religion; in the names *Agama*, *Adigama*, *Dewagama*, it has evidently more the old Indian meaning, and especially that of law-book" (Friederich 1959: 30, n. 21).

Yet, these statements beg the question whether the word *agama* did already mean "religion" for Balinese in the 19th

century, as this would have required that they discriminate clearly between the respective senses of *agama* as "religion", "law", and "tradition".

I think this is unlikely. It is significant, for example, that, in the catalogue established in 1928 by Balinese literati for the *Kirtya* library, the entry *agama* refers not to "religion" but to *Dharmasastra*, *Nitisastra* (ethical and didactic precepts), and *Sasana* (rules of life). There is no entry corresponding to the category "religion"[9], whose semantic field is split between two headings: one – termed *Weda* – including *Stuti* and *Stawa* (songs of praise), *Mantra*, and *Kalpasastra* (rituals); and the other – called *Wariga* – composed of *Wariga* proper (astrology), *Tutur* (cosmology, mysticism), *Kanda* (technical manuals of grammar, metrics, mythology, and sorcery), and *Usada* (medicine) (Kadjeng 1929).

On the other hand, when the first generation of Balinese educated in colonial schools started to question their identity – in Malay, not in Balinese – they used the word *agama* in the sense of "religion", as they were attempting to promote their own religion on a par with Islam and Christianity, in order to resist their proselytism. For the Balinese, Islam and Christianity were seen not only as a threat, but also as a model of what a true religion should be. Confronted with Muslim schoolteachers and Christian missionaries, they were challenged to formulate what exactly their religion was about.

This proved to be a highly contentious issue, that triggered a protracted conflict between the Balinese wanting to retain their religious traditions, and those who strove to reform them in accordance with Neo-Hinduism. This conflict – which goes back to the polemics between *Surya Kanta* and *Bali Adnjana* in the 1920s – set the rising elite of educated commoners (*jaba*) against the conservative nobility (*triwangsa*), in their attempt to

[9] There is no entry for *adat* either, nor for *hukum*.

hold sway over the religious life of the Balinese people.

For the *triwangsa*, Balinese religion was based on the customary social order, within which *agama* was inseparable from *adat*, whereas for the *jaba*, religion could and should be dissociated from a traditional order seen not only as unfair but also as a hindrance to progress. But they proved unable to differentiate between that which belongs to *agama* and that which pertains to *adat*.

This is not surprising, since, despite the presence of ritual elements of Indian origin, Balinese religious life is highly localized, as it consists of rites relating specific groups of people to one another, to their ancestors, and to their territory. Participation in these rites is a customary obligation for the Balinese, in the sense that it comes with membership in a village, a kinship group, and a temple network. Rather than something to be believed in, Balinese religion is something to be carried out. Such evidence led Frits Staal to conclude that "Balinese ritual is a classic case of ritual without religion" (Staal 1995: 31).

Hence, *agama* could not become a boundary marker for the Balinese before they started viewing Islam and Christianity as a threat. Up until then, the Balinese had not yet singled out a set of beliefs and practices that could be demarcated from other aspects of their life in order to be labelled as "religion".

In this respect, we should pay attention to the controversy which has been dividing the Balinese intelligentsia over the proper name of their religion, as it reveals serious contention regarding the main points in debate – that is, how is *agama* related to *adat* on the one hand, and how is the Balinese religion connected to Hinduism on the other.

In the past, the Balinese had no generic name to designate that which would later on become their "religion". Once they had adopted the word *agama* for that purpose, they referred to their religion simply as *agama Bali*. Afterward, Balinese started

using various names for their religion, such as *Tirta*, *Siwa*, *Buda*, *Siwa-Buda*, *Trimurti*, *Hindu Bali*, *Bali Hindu*, and *Hindu*.[10]

In 1925, a dispute erupted between *jaba* and *triwangsa* over the name of the Balinese religion. The *triwangsa* proposed to call their religion *agama Hindu Bali*, thus stressing the fact that the Balinese had appropriated and reinterpreted *agama Hindu* to such an extent that it had become indigenous to their island. In this way, they were clearly trying to preserve the established social and religious order, by retaining the religion actually practised by the Balinese.

Whereas in defending the name *agama Bali Hindu*, the *jaba* were claiming that the Balinese were truly Hindus. Yet, in order to become the true Hindus which they were supposed to be, the Balinese had to discard all the indigenous accretions which contaminated their religious practices. Hence the accusation proffered by the *triwangsa* that the *jaba* aimed to promote a form of Hinduism similar to the one found in India. This, so they claimed, amounted to inventing a new religion, which was alien to the Balinese as their religion originated not in India but in Majapahit (Picard 2004).

The issue remained unresolved until the Japanese occupation of the island. After Indonesia's independence, the Balinese religion was not acknowledged as a legitimate *agama* by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In order to make it eligible for the status of *agama*, the Balinese had to rationalize their religion and redefine it in monotheistic terms, so as to make it

[10] *Agama Tirta* referred to the holy water required for most religious rites. *Agama Siwa* and *agama Buda* pertained to the two categories of initiated Brahmana priests – the *pedanda Siwa* and the *pedanda Buda* – while *agama Siwa-Buda* pointed more specifically to the Tantric fusion of Shaivism and Buddhism that originated in East Java in the 13th century. The name *agama Trimurti* was promoted in 1939 with reference to the Hindu triad Brahma, Wisnu and Iswara. Finally, one found *agama Hindu* in relation either to the religion practised in India or to the religion of the Balinese. But even the Balinese who called their religion *agama Hindu* were aware that the word "*Hindu*" only became known in Bali in the 20th century.

look like a religion of the Book.

The first question to be settled was for the Balinese to agree on the name of their religion. After protracted debates, they resolved in 1952 to name their religion *agama Hindu Bali* – the name which had been championed by the *triwangsa* back in the 1920s.[11] It appears that it is only after some Balinese had converted to Islam or Christianity that the name *agama Hindu Bali* became customary, in order to distinguish *Hindu Bali* from *Islam Bali* or *Kristen Bali*.

Once they had reached an agreement among themselves, the Balinese still had to convince the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the legitimacy of the *agama Hindu Bali*. Stressing the theological import as well as the ethical implications of religion, reformers attempted to restrain the Balinese ritualistic leanings, while construing their Hindu heritage in accordance with Islam and Christianity.

In 1958, after years of lobbying, a *Hindu Bali* section was finally established within the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Picard 2011a). A few months later, a council was set up to coordinate the religious activities of the Hindu Balinese – the *Parisada Dharma Hindu Bali*. We notice that instead of the word *agama*, rejected on account of its Islamic connotation, it is the word *dharma* which was retained, by former Balinese students from Indian universities, to convey the normative idea of "religion".

Thereafter, in order to strengthen the position of their religion vis-à-vis Islam and Christianity, the *Parisada*'s leaders advocated replacing the exclusive ethnic name *agama Hindu Bali* with the inclusive name *agama Hindu*. As a result, in 1964, the *Parisada Dharma Hindu Bali* changed its name to *Parisada Hindu Dharma*, thus forsaking any reference to its Balinese origins.

[11] It is significant that the only opposition to this name came from the *pedanda*, who argued for the name *agama Tirta*, in reference to the holy water of which they are the main suppliers.

Cremation, an Hindu religious tradition. Ubud, Bali, July 2011.
Photo I Nyoman Darma Putra

From then on, *agama Hindu* was no longer the property of the sole Balinese people, who had to open it up to other Indonesian ethnic groups. Eventually, in 1986, after having established branches in every province of the country, the *Parisada Hindu Dharma* became the *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia*.

The spate of ethnic and religious identity politics unleashed by the fall of President Suharto led to strife within the Balinese branch of the *Parisada*, which in 2001 split into two contending factions. One, composed mostly of *jaba*, aimed to universalize *agama Hindu* further by cutting it off from *agama Bali*. The other, led by *triwangsa* – and particularly by Brahmana, eager to preserve their monopoly on the initiated priesthood – withdrew from the *Parisada*, reproaching their opponents for having renounced their Balinese identity. Finally, in 2007, this faction determined to revert to *agama Hindu Bali* and renamed itself the *Parisada Dharma Hindu Bali*, thus reversing the process

of globalization of the Balinese religion by relocalizing it (Picard 2011b).

This is, briefly stated, how some of the Balinese elites who had "Hinduized" and "Indonesianized" their religion in the first place ended up in "re-Balinizing" it, in an attempt at re-appropriating their religious identity.

In retrospect, it appears that the contemporary Hinduization of the Balinese religion is the result of a misapprehension. If it has indeed allowed the Balinese to counter Muslim and Christian proselytism, their adhesion to *agama Hindu* was effected at the expense of a denial. Far from restoring their Indian heritage as they claimed, by means of internal rationalization and alignment with transnational Hinduism the Balinese reformers have in fact dissociated themselves from their religious roots – particularly, those of Tantric persuasion. By thus renouncing their ancestral practices – be they of Indian origin – in order to embrace a Neo-Hindu orthodoxy which was perfectly alien to them, they assumed that they could withstand the Abrahamic religions on their own ground.

Now that the boundaries of Indonesian limited religious pluralism have been stretched, thanks to the *Reformasi*, the comeback of *agama Hindu Bali* might be regarded as a return to a signification of *agama* untainted by its Islamic and Christian interpretations, when *agama* had not yet been separated from *adat*. One could say that the *Parisada Dharma Hindu Bali* is reappropriating the power to identify as *agama* that which pertains to *adat* for the *Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia*, just as the latter had claimed the power to designate as *agama* that which the Ministry of Religious Affairs had classified as *adat*.

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