

War of the World-views: The Rise of the ‘Religious’ Traders

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In the village of Boneoge, in Buton, a ceremony called **kaagono liwu**¹ should be held twice each year, at the changing of the seasons (from west monsoon to east, and vice versa). The kaagono liwu, which translates as ‘the healing of the village’, is held to prevent sickness and misfortune in the village by appeasing the ‘spirits of the land’ (**miendo wite**). In November 2003, at the beginning of the west monsoon, the ceremony was overdue, and the *adat* leaders² were having difficulties organising it. It was the month of Ramadhan, and many people were busy every night with the *solat taraweh*³. In addition, as one of the adat leaders told me, ‘many think it is contradiction [with Islam]’. In fact, many of the rituals centered on these spirits, including the kaagono liwu, were discontinued in the 1960s because of this perceived contradiction with Islam. Those villagers who felt the ceremonies were necessary eventually began to hold them again in secret, but this time the clash with Ramadhan made it difficult for them to do so. An adat leader explained to me:

According to those who are fanatic⁴ about *agama*⁵, [these ceremonies] are *bida’a* [heresy], or false. But for us, there is adat and there is agama. The ceremonies are not in contradiction with Islam, they’re only assumed to be. We stopped the ceremonies for a while in the past, but many people got sick, so we had to hold them again, albeit in secret⁶.

This paper will explore this conflict over proper religious practice in Boneoge. Reflected in these divergent opinions are various changes which have occurred in Boneoge over the past century. All Boneoge people used to live off farms in the hills, but now agriculture has

¹ The first time they are used, terms in the Indonesian language will be shown in italics, and terms in the Muna language will be shown in boldface.

² Adat leaders, or leaders in matters of adat, occupied official offices under the Wolio Sultanate, until 1960. Now, adat leaders are informally acknowledged as such. Adat can be defined as custom or tradition.

³ An extra prayer during the holy month of Ramadhan, taking place after *solat isya*, about 7pm.

⁴ The use of ‘fanatic’ here does not correspond exactly with the English ‘fanatic’, which carries a negative connotation of ‘going too far’. Although the term used in Indonesian was *fanatik*, it had the more neutral sense of ‘*sangat taat*’ or ‘following all the rules’.

⁵ I don’t translate *agama* as religion, since the sense is not the same. *Agama* in Indonesia refers to a particular kind of religion, namely world religions such as Islam and Christianity, and excludes local religions which the term ‘religion’ would include. This distinction is particularly important for this paper.

⁶ The original: *Menurut orang fanatic agama, acara tadi itu disebut bida’a, artinya dibuat-buat. Sementara kita ini, ada adat ada agama. Tidak bertentangan dengan agama, hanya dianggap bertentangan. Dulu sempat hapus, tetapi banyak penyakit, jadi terpaksa bikin lagi, diam-diam.*



declined, with under 10% of the village population now subsisting from their gardens. The people moved down from the hills to the coast during the past century, and many people began sailing throughout the archipelago, eventually becoming migrant traders in places such as Ambon and Papua. The current split in opinion about religion corresponds to the split between those oriented more towards a trading lifestyle and the remaining farmers. Some of these traders have become wealthy and powerful, and it is they who run village affairs. Their views on acceptable religious practice have come to hold sway. The farmers, on the other hand, have become a marginalised community on the outskirts of the village of Boneoge. Many of these farmers are unhappy that ceremonies which they consider necessary for health and prosperity have been banned by the village elite. But they are powerless to change the situation.

1. Boneoge

Boneoge is a village of about 3500 people, situated on the coast of an inlet, on the island of Muna, southeast Sulawesi. The southern part of Muna Island, including Boneoge, was part of the Sultanate of Buton⁷. The island of Muna is dry, rocky, and infertile. Weather follows the west/east monsoon pattern found in the region, with the west monsoon running from November to May, and the east monsoon from May to November. Rainfall is mostly in the west monsoon, the main season for agriculture. In Boneoge the main crops are cassava and corn.

Today, some Boneoge people engage in fishing, farming, and wage employment. But most of the money in Boneoge comes from remittances, either sent or brought home by relatives working elsewhere. Many of these migrant workers are traders. Migration is an extremely important part of Boneoge life; almost all the men in Boneoge, and many of the women, have at times migrated to live and work in other parts of the country⁸.

Boneoge today is made up of several quite separate communities. The main community, at the centre of the village politically and geographically, is the region which I will call Boneoge

⁷ Vermeij has described how the diversity of ethnic groups within Buton can be traced to the formation of the Sultanate, when VOC support allowed the Sultan to unify the different groups in the region (Vermeij 2000).

⁸ I conducted a survey of all households in Boneoge. Of 775 married men, fewer than 5% had never migrated outside of Buton for work, and the few that hadn't were mostly the teachers working in the village. At the time of the survey, only 60% of the family heads were actually present in Boneoge, 18% were in Papua, 10% in Ambon, 7% working on fishing boats in international waters, and the rest elsewhere. Before the Ambon conflict erupted in 1999, a much higher number of Boneoge people were in Ambon; 67% of the people surveyed had worked in Ambon. Many of these returned to Boneoge in 1999 as refugees. Even amongst those in the survey who were not refugees from Ambon, 40% had worked in Ambon.



proper. Attached to the edges of Boneoge proper are several marginal communities. One of these, Matoka, is composed of several hundred refugees who have returned from Ambon since 1999. They identify as Boneoge people, but had either been living in Ambon for some decades or were born there. Most of the Matoka people today are neither traders nor farmers; rather, they work as labourers in construction, or mining limestone.

Another marginal community on the outskirts of Boneoge is Kampung Baru, a community of about 500 people, where almost all of the remaining farmers live. Kampung Baru was established in 1969 when the people of Lawonolita, a farming community on the hill above Boneoge, were induced to move down to Boneoge⁹, and were allotted land joining the south side of the village.

The people of Kampung Baru were historically part of the same group as other Boneoge people. The people from Boneoge proper also used to subsist from gardens and live in the hills above the present village site. But they came down to the coast around 1910, when the Dutch had pacified the surrounding islands, removing the threat of piracy and inducing many hill villages down to the coast (Pannell 2003: 16). Thus the people of Boneoge proper were down on the coast 60 years before those of Kampung Baru. During those 60 years, the people on the coast adopted a more maritime lifestyle, sailing throughout the archipelago on wooden *lambo* ships, fishing and trading with the monsoon. These experiences have led them to occupy the positions of power in Boneoge today (as will be explained), which has in turn empowered their version of proper religious behaviour to be accepted as the norm.

People from Kampung Baru, like those from Boneoge proper, have engaged in migration, but their migration styles were different. Many of the farmers migrated to the Ambon region, going to rural areas and engaging in farming there. People of Boneoge proper, after their years of post-war sailing, began migrating to Ambon and to towns in Papua in large numbers in the 1970s. There, they mostly worked as traders, in the fish market, or in textiles once they were more successful. They tended to travel to more places, and to be more mobile than the farmers.

All Boneoge people are Muslim. Indeed, Muslim identity is very important in Buton. Southeast Sulawesi has the highest percentage of Muslims of any province in the country (Tirtosudarmo 1997: 361). It is a point of pride for Butonese that Buton accepted Islam before

⁹ Many hill villages were coerced or forced to move down to the coast by the government in the late 1960s, in Buton and elsewhere in Indonesia, presumably for ease of governing.



the Bugis and Makassar kingdoms of South Sulawesi. Although Buton has been an Islamic Sultanate since 1540¹⁰ (Yunus 1995), Islamic influence in Buton spread from the Wolio Sultanate in Baubau outward to the villages in a slow and partial manner (Schoorl 2003: 147-150), meaning that although people identified as Muslim, the adoption of Muslim beliefs and practices did not immediately occur. In fact Boneoge villagers, as they told me, have only been actively Muslim since the 1960s, in the sense of obeying the five pillars of Islam (the confession of the faith, praying five times per day, fasting during the fasting month, giving alms, and going on the pilgrimage if able). Informants said that before the 1960s, people only prayed on Fridays, and were Muslim ‘in name only’, or ‘not deeply’.

Although all Boneoge villagers are Muslim, there are differences in how closely they observe various Islamic practices. During the 1950s and 1960s, several *haji*¹¹ from elsewhere in Buton came to live in the Boneoge region, and were instrumental in encouraging observance of the five pillars and the cessation of various practices relating to spirits. This radical change in Boneoge Islamic practice coincided with increasing military control of local government to discourage certain adat practices, as was happening in many parts of Indonesia¹². According to Gibson, writing about South Sulawesi, ‘[t]he period since 1965 is best characterized as a ‘cold war’ between the adherents of the old spirit cults, traditional Sufism and Islamic modernism.’ (Gibson 1994: 61). During this period of change in Boneoge, many traditional rituals were banned and ritual objects confiscated.

Some of those traditional ceremonies have not been held since that time. These include **kaombo** (where young women were sequestered as a rite of passage) and **kangkilo** (a coming of age rite for boys, including a symbolic circumcision). Other ceremonies were discontinued for some time but then were restarted in secret by the farmers of Kampung Baru, such as the use of the **sahiga** (personal shrines with offerings for the spirits, kept inside the house), and the kaagono liwu. These two ceremonies will be described further below. Annual harvest festivals have also been largely discontinued; the most prominent village celebrations are now Lebaran and Lebaran Haji (*Idul Adha*). Entertainment events such as **khabanti**, an often lewd kind of pantun-trading accompanied by *gambus*, have fallen out of favour with the conservative elite of the village. Instead, entertainment events such as Islamic kasida music

¹⁰ The date of 1540 comes from oral tradition. Reid (1993) and Ligtoet (1887, in Zuhdi 1999) hold that Sultan Baabulah of Ternate converted Buton to Islam in 1580.

¹¹ A *haji* is someone who has completed the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca.

¹² *Adat* practices were not universally suppressed under the New Order. Rituals relating to non-Islamic spirits, as long as they were a ‘sanitized version of custom and tradition’, could be called ‘culture’ (*kebudayaan*) and thus not be seen as being in opposition to Islam (Gibson 2000: 68).



and MTQ (*Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an* - Koranic reading/chanting competitions) have proliferated.

Not all traditional ceremonies were discontinued. Those which fell out of favour were ceremonies which involved leaving offerings for spirits, as that came to be considered *syirik* – idolatry, i.e., in contradiction with Islam. Many of those who do not want to participate in such ceremonies still profess belief in such spirits, but making overt offerings to them is now considered outside acceptable religious practice in Boneoge, at least for the non-farmers. The farmers themselves know that there is a stark gap between what they consider proper religious practice and what is acceptable in the village as a whole. This serves as a reminder of their marginal position; their farming lifestyle is of lower status, and their religious practices are considered morally inferior.

2. Kaagono Liwu: The Healing of the Village

This section provides an outline of the village-wide and personal spirit-appeasement ceremonies which have come to be considered improper in Boneoge.

Traditional Boneoge cosmology admits three kinds of spirits: malevolent spirits, ancestor spirits, and *miendo wite*. Malevolent spirits originate from humans engaging in black magic (**doti**). A **kabhindu boroko**, for instance, is a human who can send its head out at night to eat babies – there is one suspected **kabhindu boroko** in Boneoge. Ancestor spirits have the power to cause their descendants to become ill. The way to prevent this is to frequently remember ancestors with a **fosumanga** prayer ceremony. *Miendo wite*, the ‘spirits of the land’, or territorial spirits¹³, are connected with various places such as caves, water springs, and trees, and can get angry if they are not left offerings at particular times. These *miendo wite* have power over harvests, and can influence the health of villagers. Various ceremonies in the agricultural ceremony cycle aim to pacify these spirits, thus protecting the village from sickness and bad fortune, and ensuring a good harvest. Most names for places in and around Boneoge seem like names of people, for they are named after those *miendo wite* that ‘watch’ the particular place.

Miendo wite collect at certain places of spiritual potency (**sangia**) in and around Boneoge, for instance, at a sacred banyan tree¹⁴ in the ancestral village on the hilltop above Boneoge, or

¹³ The Indonesian gloss used for *miendo wite* is *tuan tanah*, meaning ‘lords of the land’.

¹⁴ The banyan tree is **pu'uno woha'a** or *pohon beringin*.



various water springs in caves in or near the village itself. When one is near a sacred site, one can be struck ill if the spirits become angered. One can anger the spirits by failing to ask their permission upon approaching the site, by acting in a reckless manner, by making a lot of noise, or by speaking improperly.

The kaagono liwu ceremony (healing of the village) is to be held twice yearly to ensure that the *miendo wite* do not cause illness or misfortune in the coming season. It is a vital protection ritual, carried out by adat leaders, and its central focus is the preparation and distribution of offerings for the *miendo wite*. The offerings must consist of certain foods, be laid out on leaves on woven bamboo dishes, and be set down in particular places. One adat leader who had been involved in the kaagono liwu described part of it to me:

various offerings are arranged, and then blessed through a **kalolei** ceremony. You make movements with an egg, like this...[running an egg along his arm] so that we are not disturbed by the spirits. Then we put the offerings in certain places, in trees, in front of the house. The offerings include tobacco, rice¹⁵, egg, betel nut, *sirih* leaf, lime, *gambir* [ingredients for chewing betel nut], *cucur*, *waje* [types of cakes], fish, chicken, banana, young coconut...

The offerings are placed at key locations such as by the main roads which enter Boneoge, on the beach, in the middle of the village, and at various sangia sites. Villagers should also place offerings outside their house, on a small stand called a **kataasa**, in order to protect the inhabitants from illness which the spirits might cause. An adat leader explained how that works:

If the spirits want to enter the house, they will stop at the kataasa [shrine], and eat the offerings placed there, so we will be safe. If the offerings are gone before long (eaten by chickens, for example), that means they have been accepted. If they are not eaten, that means that they have not been accepted. This means that the *miendo wite* are angry, and we have to think what our mistake has been. We apologise to them, and put betel nut materials outside the front door. You have to feed them, and to say **batata**¹⁶, invite them to eat.

The kaagono liwu ceremony used to be held twice yearly for the whole village, but was ceased during the 1960s, during the political unrest and 'purification' of local Islam. The farmers in Kampung Baru eventually began holding it again in secret.

The kaagono liwu was held to protect the village from misfortune, but it was also necessary to protect one's own household from spirits, through the use of a device called a **sahiga**. The *sahiga* is a kind of personal shrine, and its use was also discontinued in the 1960s, and

¹⁵ The rice is seen to be important. It was insisted that 'the spirits of the land have to have rice'. In the past most people ate corn, and only the rich ate rice.

¹⁶ *Batata* is a kind of prayer, usually involving particular phrases directed at the *miendo wite*, entreating them to eat what we have left for them, and to protect us.



restarted at some point by the farmers of Kampung Baru. The sahiga consists of a small table and a wooden box, which are placed on a white cloth and used to leave offerings to spirits. Before the 1950s, each house in Boneoge had a sahiga. The box is filled with items such as betel nut and associated condiments, and tobacco, which serve as offerings and should be replaced every month or two. In addition, one must hold a ceremony yearly in order to feed the *miendo wite*, preparing offerings of rice, fish, banana, egg, and young coconut. The ceremony involves the preparation of the offerings, the burning of incense, and some *batata* prayer, as well as a ceremonial meal with some neighbours. This ceremonial meal, called a **haroa sahiga**, is a kind of Butonese *slametan*, involving prayer and communal eating of specific foods.

An adat leader, La Bustam, explained that the sahiga is used to protect us against birth spirits as well as *miendo wite*. Because the mother's water breaks, and spills upon the earth, the *miendo wite* insist on getting fed - with offerings. The placenta is placed inside a coconut and left near the house for several days, by which time the placenta disappears, and has become a spiritual 'elder sibling'¹⁷, called **yisano** (*kakaknya*). Every year this *yisano* will 'come back to us'. We have to 'remember' him/her, by means of a sahiga ceremony, or we will become ill.

Beginning in 1960s, use of the sahiga was banned because it was seen as a shrine to gods other than Allah. A neighbour of mine in Boneoge proper explained how the use of sahiga was now prohibited:

Sahiga are not allowed to be used. Before the 1950s, everyone used them. People used to pray using local language, mentioning every spirit [*djin*]. There was an incense burner with the sahiga. Maybe in Kampung Baru people still use sahiga, they might keep them in the attic so people don't see. They still use lots of offerings too. In the past, for garden ceremonies, you would leave offerings in the corners, to ask permission from the local spirits [*penghuninya*]. Now we pray using Muslim prayers, but some still use offerings.

I was told by an adat leader of Kampung Baru that some farmers do indeed continue to use a sahiga. But now, he told me, since it is considered shameful to use it, one just prepares the offerings for the sahiga inside the house, and stores the sahiga in the attic afterwards. The neighbours are no longer called to feast. He explained why the sahiga ceremony, which had been discontinued, began to be held again:

most people disposed of their sahiga when they came to be seen as *syirik*, but then we were forced to make new ones, since everyone was getting sick.

¹⁷ See Nourse (1989) for an ethnography relating to such birth spirits in Sulawesi.



Thus the spirits became angry at being ignored and sent sickness into the village, and the people of Kampung Baru were forced to begin using them again.

3. Adat and Islam

In the introduction, I quoted an adat leader of Kampung Baru, who was defending his right to hold the kaagono liwu by saying that ‘for us, there is adat and there is agama’. This section will further explore how these terms are used in Boneoge, and how the terms are used in literature on Indonesia. The above usage seems to suggest that adat and agama are two complementary parts of proper conduct. This is generally the view of the farmers, that both Muslim prayers and ceremonies such as the kaagono liwu are necessary for a healthy life and afterlife.

Most Boneoge people agree that Islam and adat¹⁸ are not in contradiction. It is common for farmers to use the terms ‘adat’ and ‘agama’ in defending their desire to hold the banned ceremonies. One informant used a house metaphor to describe the connection between adat and agama: ‘adat is the foundation, agama is the walls’. This implies that if adat is neglected, agama will fall apart also, showing adat and agama to be complementary and mutually dependent. Another such view is present in a Butonese saying, ‘people exist with their religion, the village exists with its adat’ (Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah 1978: 155)¹⁹. Here adat is being presented as playing a role for the village as a whole, whereas religion is seen as being more oriented towards the person.

The traders also assert the importance of adat. They tend not to assert that adat and Islam are in contradiction, but rather that particular *practices*, such as the kaagono liwu, are leftovers from an animist past, are in contradiction with Islam, and must be discontinued. In other words, they separate the ‘contradictory’ practices from other adat, which they continue to value.

Since Boneoge people are using the terms ‘adat’ and ‘agama’ to defend their ideas of proper religious behaviour, it is worth examining how the terms have been used historically. In colonial times, the Dutch also separated Islam from adat (Newland 2001: 314), but this

¹⁸ Boneoge people use the term ‘adat’ in a number of ways. It is often used to refer to something like ‘good manners’, in cases like ‘we have different adat to Muna people; when they are leaving a group they shake the hands of everyone present’, or, ‘that child doesn’t know adat’ meaning ‘he is impolite’. Another common use of ‘adat’ is in referring to bride price payments (*mahar*), for example ‘they married according to Buton adat’. It can also be used to refer to customs and practices, the old ways of doing things, and especially rituals such as the kaagono liwu.

¹⁹ In the Muna language: **maanusia nonaando bhe agamano, oliwu nonaando bhe adhatino.**



‘distinction between endogenous ‘custom’ and exogamous ‘Islam’ imposed an artificial separation on a highly unstable relationship’ (Hefner 1993: 33). In fact it is difficult to separate adat and Islam in this manner, for a number of reasons; one is that they have developed alongside each other, and thus ‘adat and Islam mutually define each other’ (Kipp & Rodgers 1987: 4).

Views of religion and adat as complementary have a historical precedent in the traditional administrative structure of villages in Buton. This local form of government had two parallel hierarchies, one governing agama and one governing adat. Members of the adat council were ritual specialists, as well as playing important roles in the day to day administration of the village and relations with the Butonese Sultanate. Those in the agama council presided over Muslim prayers and ceremonies, including those associated with death. Marriages in Boneoge now reflect this dual structure; there are two conditions to be satisfied, the adat (satisfied by the bride price arrangements and payments) and the agama (satisfied by the Islamic wedding ceremony witnessed by villagers).

A house fire in 2003 furnished an example of the farmers’ view of adat and agama as complementary. One evening, a house in Boneoge proper belonging to La Fadli burned to the ground while he was at the *maghrib* prayer at the mosque (*maghrib* is the time around dusk, said to be a particularly likely time for accidents to happen). While the cause of the fire was not clear, I later got an explanation from La Bustam, an elder of the farming community. He said that La Fadli had recently cleared a garden plot near his own house, angering its guardian spirits (*miendo wite*) in the process, because he did not ask their permission. La Bustam said that the spirits came to demand their offerings of betel nut, but La Fadli wouldn’t give them anything, saying that he didn’t want to know anything about ghosts (*setan*). La Bustam was critical of this attitude, which he saw as deliberately forsaking the spirits. Referring to Muslim prayers and spirit offerings, he said ‘actually, the two are the same – the mosque is for the afterlife, but what about *this* world?’²⁰ This implies that in order to achieve a comfortable afterlife, one needs to pray at the mosque, and in order to carry out one’s daily life without being disturbed by the spirits, one needs to respect them in the proper manner. Telling such stories allows La Bustam to assert his view about proper religious practice with regard to the spirits, as opposed to the views of those such as La Fadli. There seemed to be a trace of satisfaction that those powerful villagers who prohibit ceremonies for the spirits get punished from time to time for disrespecting them.

²⁰ The original: *Sebenarnya, dua-duanya sama, mesjid untuk akhirat, tetapi untuk dunia bagaimana?*



Although farmers argue that adat and Islam should be complementary, they complain that adat has been left behind, neglected, and that the powerful village leaders see adat as in opposition to Islam. Those of higher status in Boneoge (none of whom farm) tend not to speak of a contradiction between Islam and adat, but between Islam and animism. These people acknowledge the importance of adat, and agree that it must not be neglected, but they use the term adat in a narrower sense than do the farmers (for instance, to refer to ‘good manners’, or ‘bridewealth’). Then they assert that Islam does not permit beliefs in spirits in trees and rocks, so certain ceremonies in Boneoge tradition must indeed be discontinued. The politicised narrowing of the range of the term ‘adat’ in order to set boundaries on allowable practice has been discussed by Acciaioli (1985).

Islam in Indonesia has long been seen to interact with local adat or with pre-Islamic ‘animist’ traditions. Newland has criticised the use of the concept of animism, since ‘it can be used to refer to anything ranging from diffuse energies throughout the environment to notions of ancestor worship, thereby homogenising quite different orientations to the world’ (Newland 2000: 200). When people of Boneoge proper refer to ceremonies as indicative of animism, they are supporting the Indonesian government’s political project of promoting world religions at the expense of local ones. This criticism of the use of ‘animism’ applies to the use of the concept of syncretism²¹ as well:

...the basic assumptions in the notion of syncretism as Geertz used it appear to have much in common with the assumptions made by state institutions about religion as both tend to perpetuate the opposition between authentic world religions and inauthentic folk variations. In this sense, the notion of syncretism shares and reinforces the split between tradition and modernity. (Newland 2001: 324).

Thus labelling a practice or belief as Hindu²², animist, or pre-Islamic can be ‘a local way of dismissing the authenticity of that particular practice’ (Newland 2001: 315). This happens in Boneoge when traders say that the offerings left by farmers are ‘leftovers from animism’.

I have avoided framing this paper as a conflict between Islam and adat or between pure Islam and syncretic Islam. Geertz’ division of Javanese religious practices into a more ‘pure’ Islam and a more syncretic Islam (Geertz 1964) has been criticized as taking on the definitions held by his *santri* (orthodox) informants (Hefner & Horvatic 1997). Use of the term ‘syncretic’

²¹ Syncretism can be defined as ‘reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief, as in philosophy or religion, especially when success is partial or the result is heterogeneous’ (www.dictionary.com)

²² For example, as a part of the New Order project to render Nahdatul Ulama less powerful, certain religious ritual forms were designated as ‘archaic survivals of a Hindu past’ (Newland 2001: 324).



implies that a 'pure' Islam mixes with a traditional pre-existing culture. But the idea of a universal Islam, or even a uniform authentic Islam in the Middle East, is problematic (Newland 2001: 324; see also Aragon 2000: 46). In fact, Islam is distinctive in every context, and it would be better to see local Islam as fluid rather than syncretic (Gardner 1995: 230). Eickelman suggests that we study *islams* rather than *Islam*, meaning that there are the islams of the elite and nonelite, literate and illiterate, and theologians and peasants (Eickelman 1982: 1) – or in Boneoge, the islams of the farmer and the trader. Finally, Reuter has criticised the utility of the concept of syncretism: 'to proclaim ... that Javanese religion, or any other religion, is a product of 'syncretism' is to say no more than that it has a history, as every religion inevitably does' (Reuter 2001: 329).

Even referring to 'Butonese adat' is problematic. What is presented as adat is different from village to village - even within Boneoge, as I have shown, people have different ideas on what is adat. Li, researching the Lauje people in Sulawesi, writes: 'There are, of course, many beliefs and practices of a spiritual nature relating to ancestors as well as to features of the landscape, but these are described as matters of personal, family, or at most hamlet-wide conviction, rather than pan-Lauje tradition.' (Li 2000: 160). Thus it can be misleading to speak of 'Boneoge adat', since different people have different beliefs about adat.

To summarise, although the traders might portray the conflict as being between Islam and non-Islam (i.e. animism), and the farmers might portray it as between 'Islam with adat' and 'Islam without adat', it is difficult to endorse either of these views. The farmers also consider their Muslim identity important, and the traders also affirm the importance of adat.

Rather than putting emphasis on categorising particular practices as Islamic or something else, it is more useful to focus on understanding how people utilise particular concepts in order to act in their current context (Reuter 2001: 327). This means that religious practices must be related to a context of economic, social and political conditions (*ibid.*). Religious action or professed belief can represent strategic positionings in terms of, for example, modernity, nationalism, or progress. This will be discussed in a later section.

In studying the 'concrete historical and geographical settings' which give meaning to religious behaviour, we should be careful not to look for a coherent 'worldview' (Gibson 2000: 69), since there might not be one; rather, there might be a *mélange* of different identities competing for expression at particular moments:



[In communities where] Islam and ethnic or regional identity vie for the allegiance of the local population in an often unstable way...the study of religious change within these Muslim communities provides an opportunity to investigate the individual motivations and strategies of action that influence actors' commitments to one or another of these divergent, unfinished identities (Rossler 1997: 275).

Thus to understand the current debate in Boneoge, one must closely examine the history, current context, and individual motivations which have brought about the different viewpoints. These elements will be interwoven through the next section.

4. The Marginalisation of Kampung Baru

4.1 Kampung Baru vs. Boneoge Proper

Today, although Kampung Baru is administratively a part of Boneoge, it is a marginalised community, economically, politically, and socially. In this section I will discuss some of the disparities between Kampung Baru and Boneoge proper.

Economic disparities are immediately apparent. Kampung Baru has no electricity, with the majority of residents living in simple wooden houses (**lambu tadha**) or **lambu kaki 1000** houses²³. There are stacks of wood for the cooking fire, few TVs, and rocky uneven roads. In Boneoge proper, there are many houses with electricity, many concrete houses (including some two and three stories high) with tile floors, mostly kerosene stoves, many TVs and VCDs, and many paved roads²⁴. About 4% of Kampung Baru houses are concrete²⁵, whereas in many parts of Boneoge proper, about 50% of the houses are concrete.

Many of the concrete houses and TVs come from money made either by trading in Papua, or by working on international fishing boats (which villagers refer to as 'working in Hawaii', since many of the ships are based in Hawaii)²⁶. Kampung Baru people have not been able to access the jobs in Hawaii at all, and their Ambon migrations tend not to earn them the capital which would enable them to become traders in Papua. Differential access to migration opportunities has exacerbated differences between these communities. The people of Boneoge

²³ 'Houses of 1000 legs'. These simple houses are built with hand-cut trees as supports, in contrast to the *lambu tadha* which are prestigious and have a particular arrangement of shaped posts supporting them. The houses of 1000 legs usually have walls from woven bamboo, and roofs of sago fronds (**ato panasa**, *daun rumbia*), whereas the *lambu tadha* have plank walls, corrugated iron roofs, and decorative painting.

²⁴ In 2000, Boneoge won a provincial award for village cleanliness, resulting in a prize of some kilometers of paving for the village. The village leaders then decided where the paving would go, and it is telling that Kampung Baru received none of it. This clearly reflects their lack of power in Boneoge decision making processes.

²⁵ At the time I carried out a house survey. There are more concrete houses being completed each month, but the construction is mostly in Boneoge proper, not in Kampung Baru.

²⁶ Working in Hawaii earns a high wage in US dollars, and is the goal of most young men in the village.



proper, through their different experiences, were able to mobilise social networks and gain access to more lucrative migration opportunities than were the Kampung Baru people.

Economic disparities in Boneoge are paralleled by disparities in political power. No Kampung Baru people are involved in the core of male elders who decide village affairs. As new resources, such as aid, are filtered through this group of decision-makers, Kampung Baru receives very little. When electricity first came to Boneoge, there were fifty hookups available; this elite group decided which fifty houses should receive the hookups. The list of recipients is a good indicator of who is powerful and important in Boneoge. Statistically, Kampung Baru's share should have been six (since about 12% of Boneoge houses are in Kampung Baru), but they got none. Kampung Baru also has no haji, whereas there are 23 in Boneoge proper²⁷. Statistically one would expect three haji in Kampung Baru. Also there are only three people from the noble (**kaomu**) class, whereas one would expect ten. Kampung Baru is relatively powerless in terms of wealth, education, traditional status, and religious-based status.

Socially, the two communities are quite separate also. There is not a great deal of socialising between Kampung Baru and Boneoge proper. Marriages between the two communities are infrequent. I noticed that Kampung Baru people are timid when in Boneoge proper, as is proper when one is around one's superiors. Kampung Baru people often complain that people in Boneoge proper are arrogant, and rule the village to their own advantage. People from Boneoge proper often make disparaging remarks about the farmers, describing them as poor, unsophisticated, and traditional. Another sign of social separation is that Kampung Baru has its own mosque, although technically (and fittingly) it is a *mushola*, not a mosque, since it doesn't fulfill the requirements to be a full-fledged mosque. Since much village interaction takes place at the mosque between prayers, the presence of a *mushola* in Kampung Baru signals separate spheres of socialising as well as a somewhat separate religious community.

Historical conditions contributing to the marginalisation of Kampung Baru include the decline of agriculture and the rise of the traders. These are discussed in the next sections.

4.2 The Decline of agriculture

Farming is now a low-status activity in Boneoge. Farming is seen as dirty, and one cannot make much money gardening, compared to other activities. Most Boneoge people have

²⁷ According to the data which I examined. In this past few years, there have been 5-10 more each year.



ceased gardening, and earn their money by migrating outside the village. Farming is seen as an activity from the past, a job for those without other options.

Until the 1960s, almost all Boneoge people had gardens, and many lived primarily off them. The technique used involves burning the garden plots before planting, and rotating to new plots every 3-4 years. Maize and cassava were and are the main crops. But now, agriculture has declined to the point where only a small minority is gardening, and most of those live in Kampung Baru.

The decline is related to a number of factors. In the 1970s, people from Boneoge began migrating to Ambon in a more permanent way, and many left their gardens in Buton to grow over. Although some people, especially those from Kampung Baru, engaged in agriculture in Ambon, most worked in the city. Many of these urban migrants returned to Boneoge in 1999, but they have not returned to gardening. Even for those households in which the woman stayed in Boneoge and the man migrated to Ambon, it became easy enough to acquire money so that the woman could stop gardening, and purchase rice.

The majority of Boneoge people prefer to eat rice over the local crops of maize and cassava, which used to be the staple foods. Since rice cannot be grown in or near Boneoge, people buy it. In the 1960s only the wealthy ate rice, which became a marker of high status. Others subsisted on cassava and maize which they grew. Now, almost all can afford rice, and this has contributed to the lowered demand for cassava and maize, which in turn makes farming less lucrative.

Gardening was made even less lucrative by the influx of refugees from Ambon in 1999. Government distribution of rice aid since 1999 has led to the lowering of prices for cassava and maize. This is because refugees sell their rice allotments, lowering the price, and since people would rather eat rice than maize or cassava, those prices drop also. The lowered sale price of cassava and maize provides a further incentive to stop planting.

There is also a momentum factor. As many have stopped planting, the task of guarding a garden from pests has become more difficult. Gardens must be tended both day and night (pigs work by night, monkeys by daylight), and with many people gardening close together, this work can be shared. But now, farmers complain that the guarding against pests has become very onerous, and this leads some people to stop gardening.



These factors have together resulted in a severe decline in agriculture in Boneoge. Those few people who retain the gardening lifestyle live in the now marginal community of Kampung Baru. Farming and farmers have become very low status; this is partly due to the success experienced by the traders.

4.3 The Rise of the traders

The people of Boneoge proper, who moved down to the coast in the early years of the 20th century, became more integrated into the Butonese maritime tradition than those who remained farming in the hills. Among the families living at the coast, the men spent the 1950s and 1960s sailing throughout the archipelago in the lambo boats²⁸, while the women stayed in Boneoge tending to the children and the gardens. Gardening provided a means of subsistence during the times that their husbands were away for months at a time.

In the 1970s, many of these people migrated to Ambon city, where most worked in the fish market. Their experiences trading on the lambo ships prepared them for a trading lifestyle. The traders of Boneoge proper continued to work in the market, with many giving up fish trading for clothes trading, when they accumulated enough capital, and moving on to Papua for markets with less competition. The farmers also migrated, but to rural areas outside of Ambon, where they took up gardening. Some of their children worked in Ambon city as labourers, porters, and becak drivers, but upon return to Boneoge, took up farming again. Thus the sailors became urban traders, while the farmers remained farmers.

Some of these migrants retained strong connections with the home village of Boneoge, but others did not return to visit until the Ambon riots of 1999. Even Boneoge traders living in Papua were affected by these riots. Many decided that since unrest in eastern Indonesia could erupt at any time, and the village of Boneoge is safe, it would be wise to build a good home in Boneoge as a backup in case anything happens in their migration location. Many of them came back to Boneoge, with the men then returning alone to the migration location in order to continue trading.

The most successful of these traders from Ambon and Papua have become the men of highest status in Boneoge today. Most of the people of Boneoge proper aspire to be traders, to become wealthy, to build a big house and go on the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, as the successful ones have done. The income disparities in Boneoge now are staggering, with

²⁸ For a description and discussion of these vessels see Horridge (1979).



farmers living off perhaps Rp100.000 per month, and others making as much as Rp10 million per month. The economic marginalisation of the farmers is instrumental in the denial of the authenticity of their religious practices. But more than just economic factors are at play.

5. Religion, Modernity and Power

In the struggle for the power to determine proper religious behaviour, the traders have the advantage of superior wealth, but their lifestyle also matches prevailing models of the properly modern, Muslim, nationalist Indonesian. Notions of modernity and nationalism have thus assisted the traders gaining their superior position.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the sailors of Boneoge proper would have found it advantageous to emphasize their Muslim identity in relations with other Muslim traders throughout the archipelago. Reid has described how periods of intense contact with other regions through sailing and trading have led people to emphasize more regional belief systems over more local ones:

Once away from his own familiar landscape, the traveler was at the mercy of unknown spirits manipulated by his enemies. He had to return frequently to his own village to attend to his ancestors. Those who left the village world for trade, warfare, cash cropping, or service to a new lord were in need of universally valid values and identity.... animism is not readily portable The process of religious change, therefore, was in part the natural attraction of the ritual practices of those who seemed most successful in the new world of commerce (Reid 1993: 159-160).

During this crucial period of mobility, the people of Boneoge proper would have begun to see advantages in emphasizing a more Muslim identity. The same forces would have induced them to have a nationalist orientation, since the existence of Indonesia as a political entity allowed them to expect fair treatment from their fellow countrymen as they traveled to different ports. The suitability of Islam with a trading lifestyle may run deeper than just by enabling easier travel, however. It has been suggested that the moral universe of Islam is more suitable to the trading endeavour than are belief systems based on a 'cycle of rites' such as was found in Boneoge:

Among fundamentalists there is a stronger allegiance to the Pillars, a more developed notion of 'individual responsibility', and a tendency to rely upon the self and its relation to God rather than upon a cycle of rites. This is linked to a belief that individual choices and actions lead to success or failure in life and salvation or damnation in the hereafter...Individualism and activism in trade is praised.. (Peacock 1973, in Ellen 1983: 62).

The growth of Islam is also related to notions of modernity. Rossler, in a study of Islam in South Sulawesi, found that 'in rural areas where Islam is the dominant religion...the population often perceives modern development and Muslim identity as intimately related; to



be “modern” is to be Muslim.’ (Rossler 1997: 275). Migrants might see Mecca as a place to acquire religious modernity, accessed through the *hajj* pilgrimage (Gardner 1995: 239), and it is the traders who have the money to undertake the *hajj*. Here we have connections between linking more with the Muslim world, commerce, and becoming ‘modern’²⁹. The history of Islam in Indonesia has, especially in the New Order period, been intimately related to ideas of progress, development and modernity.

In this regard, it is common to see a division between coastal and interior groups in terms of religious practice. Rossler found ‘profound [religious] differences between the coastal Makassar and the mountain population’ (Rossler 1997: 298). The different opinions on proper religious behaviour in Boneoge could be categorised as those of a coast group vs. those of an inland group. Here the point is that rather than being two separate populations, these two groups were separated merely by a 60 year gap in time, during which one inland group went down to the coast and entered a period of rapid change.

Nationalism has been important in religious identity in another way. During this period of change since the 1950s, there have been strong political influences on expressions of religious identity. For instance, since the early days of the New Order government, the fight against communism assisted in the marginalisation of local religions: ‘Religious identity became a life and death issue for many Indonesians ... in the wake of the violent anti-Communist purge of 1965-1966’ (Beatty 1999 in Reuter 2001: 331). Those not adhering to one of the five accepted ‘world religions’ could be seen as communists. Villagers wanting to carry out certain agricultural rituals, or visit important graves in the hills above Boneoge, were well aware of the dangers of being branded a communist due to these activities. One could show one’s nationalism by dropping local rituals and adopting a more ‘national’ Muslim identity.

Islam is one badge of the nationalism and modernity of the traders; concrete houses are another. The wooden houses of the village are being replaced with concrete ones in Boneoge proper, but not in Kampung Baru. The link between modernity and concrete houses has been described by Pannell: ‘[in Maluku], many people aspire to live in a *rumah batu* (usually a cement block house with an iron roof), the new architectural status symbol promoted by the central government and inspired by nationalist sentiments.’ (Pannell 2003: 21). In Boneoge, building a concrete houses further establishes one’s credentials as wealthy and modern as opposed to the traditional (backward) people of Kampung Baru.

²⁹ Similarly, according to Atkinson, ‘religion thus becomes a badge for the educated, the progressive, and the nationalistic’ (Atkinson 1998: 50).



Islam also provided a method of overturning the Butonese class system, which consisted of four distinct classes, and was integral to the functioning of the Wolio Sultanate. Rossler has described how, in a Sulawesi village, ‘growing numbers of individuals use Islam to challenge traditional hierarchies...[Islamic devotion can be] a strategy for achieving prestige or redefining [one’s] social position’ (Rossler 1997: 296-7). When the Sultanate was disbanded in 1960, Islam provided an alternate hierarchy, with haji at the top. The potential to contest class hierarchy provided another powerful advantage in emphasizing a more Muslim identity (at the expense of local beliefs and rituals) for the traders. With all the advantages described above, it becomes easier to understand why they ‘embraced Islamic universalism over ethnic parochialism’ (Bartels 2003: 138).

Since the collapse of the New Order in 1998, many parts of Indonesia have experienced a resurgence of pride in local history and adat. Sultanates have been revived, provinces and districts have reformed based on historical groupings, and ceremonies have been resurrected from the past. This has happened in Buton, but not in Boneoge. Even in villages neighbouring Boneoge, there have been efforts to revive precisely the kind of ceremonies which have been banned in Boneoge, although certain elements are generally altered so as to avoid charges of *syirik*. These have met with varying success, due to continued resistance of the local government and religious elite, ambivalence of the local population for whom agriculture no longer plays a central role, and confusion over exactly how to hold the ceremonies after a 30 year hiatus. In Boneoge I have not yet seen any signs of such a revival. It seems that most Boneoge people no longer need the power of the spirits.

Conclusion

I have tried to show that the current struggle over proper religious practice can be understood through an examination of the historical, political and economic factors which have led to these divergent viewpoints. I have argued that the people of Boneoge proper have a closer association with Islam-trade-mobility-wealth-power-modernity, whereas for the people of Kampung Baru it is adat-agriculture-sedentarism-poverty-powerlessness-traditionalism. Different migration practices contributed to their diverging fates, which favoured the traders of Boneoge proper. The power has fallen to them to determine proper religious practice in Boneoge.



Academic debates about syncretism, agama and adat alert us to various pitfalls in how we use those terms. Villagers in Boneoge also tend to juxtapose the terms 'agama' and adat' in the context of their own religious struggles. In particular, the farmers of Kampung Baru argue that agama and adat are complementary, and that both are necessary for the welfare of the village and the individual.

The prohibition of ceremonies involving local guardian spirits (miendo wite) has shown that the traders of Boneoge have the upper hand over the farmers in determining acceptable religious practice, for the time being. Nevertheless, the farmers have retained some of the banned rituals, albeit in secret. It remains to be seen whether the enthusiasm for reviving and revitalising local adat will spread to Boneoge and enable these observances to return to the public sphere.



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