INDONESIA

Tule, Philipus. *Longing for the House of God, Dwelling in the House of the Ancestors: Local Belief and Christianity, and Islam among the Kéo of Central Flores*. Studia Instituti Anthropos 50. Fribourg: Academic Press, 2004. xiv + 366 pages. Paper, sfr. 75.00; ISBN 3-7278-1478-0.

This book depicts how the Kéo people of central Flores in eastern Indonesia are able to live together on the basis of their common cultural values despite their different religious affiliations. Nearly ninety percent of the Kéo people are Catholics and the rest are Muslims and the unconverted. Catholicism was firstly introduced to this region by the Portuguese missionaries in the sixteenth century. After they left there in the eighteenth century the influence of Catholicism faded away. There were no Catholic remnants when the Divine Word Missionaries (S.V.D.) started missionary work in the 1920s.

The author is an indigenous Catholic priest, born in Kéo in 1953. After studying at the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries seminary in Flores, he was ordained in 1984 and obtained a Master degree in Islamology in Rome in 1988. This book is developed from his PhD thesis which was submitted at the Australian National University in 2001. Tule has long been committed to enhancing Catholic understanding of Muslims in Indonesia, especially on his home island of Flores where Catholics form a majority of the population (unlike the situation in Indonesia as a whole). The feature that makes this book particularly interesting is precisely this relationship between the fieldworker/author and the subjects of his research, which was mostly based on fieldwork conducted in 1991 and 1997.

Throughout the book Tule tries to address the following issues: presenting Kéo ethnography with the perspective of eastern Indonesia as a "field of ethnological study," within which there is cultural comparability in particular principles (see Josselin de Jong 1977: 167–68); elucidating how their shared adherence to traditional values and beliefs

engages the Kéo Catholics, Muslims and the unconverted in social life; warning that the currently increasing tendency of intolerance toward people of different religious affiliation in Indonesia and throughout the world may peripheralise the Kéo traditional values and beliefs and result in interfaith conflicts as in other regions within and without Indonesia. For these aims he carefully puts forward rich ethnographical data from his fieldwork.

After reviewing the literature on house-societies and Islam on Flores in Chapter One, Tule explains the ethnic category of Kéo in Chapter Two. Despite the region's cultural and linguistic complexity, the author asserts that Kéo people can legitimately be identified as comprising an identifiable population of not more than 47,000 people spread within an area of 400 square kilometers in the southern part of Central Flores. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Dutch designated the Kéo region as an administrative subdistrict, much as though it had been a well-defined pre-colonial political domain. However, Tule suggests that an indigenous polity with overarching power over this area did not exist; rather, numerous minor sociopolitical units were present.

The following four chapters deal with important ethnographical subjects—land (*tana*), village life (*nua oda*), house (*sa'o*) and kinship respectively—around which social order, cultural values and beliefs have been constructed and around which develops a dynamic and discursive social life.

Chapter Three describes how the original terms of social order and moral authority among the Kéo are understood as having been constructed around relationships with the land, which are (mytho)historically instituted and ritually sustained. Clearly for the Kéo, who live mainly from agriculture, land is important. But here it is revealed as being much more than a fundamental economic resource. Tule writes that land is not regarded as being owned and that, on the contrary, the land is understood as "the mother who owns the people" (57). In principle, any community member can cultivate land after fulfilling certain ritual and socio-political obligations, though Dutch colonial power and state-introduced administrative systems to manage people and land were eventually to challenge and transform this dimension of the indigenous authority system.

Chapter Four explores villages not only as a constellation of houses representing the harmony of the macrocosm but also as stages for the hybrid life of Catholics, Muslims and the unconverted, and for the celebration and competitive reenactment of the cultural values and beliefs. Tule meticulously describes those values and beliefs as manifested in myths and embodied in various houses and other constructions constituting a village.

Physical, symbolic and social aspects of houses are examined in Chapter Five. Tule elucidates the symbolic and cosmological connotations of traditional "houses" (of varying kinds) in terms broadly consistent with many existing anthropological studies of eastern Indonesian societies. A Kéo house is comprehended as the living body of its members, containing ancestral and other spirits. Harmony in a house will ensure the health, fertility and success of its members. Houses and their components also play vital specific social roles in organising people in terms of precedence and marital alliances.

Relationships of kinship and marriage are explored in detail in Chapter Six. Kin relations are envisaged as a "flow of blood," originating in respective source-houses. The ideal form of marriage should be kept restricted between a wife-giving and a wife-taking house-group, reflecting the fundamental basis of social reproduction provided by local visions of a primordial brother-sister relationship. While marriage between FZS and MBD was once preferential, this practice now seems to be avoided, under the influence of prohibitions within Catholic Canon Law and contemporary popular understandings of biological inheritance.

Contemporary religious diversity within the Kéo population is depicted mainly in Chapters Seven and Eight. It emerges that ninety percent of the Kéo are Catholic, less than ten percent are Muslim, and a relatively small number of elders remain unconverted, strongly maintaining indigenous beliefs. Notwithstanding historical conflicts and constraints involving the presence of foreign monotheists in the sixteenth to the eighteen century, the author depicts Kéo contemporary communities as harmoniously diverse despite their identification variously with Catholicism, Islam and traditional beliefs. Tule describes interfaith understandings based on a range of mutual social engagements in various rituals that are linked to the enduring presence of indigenous values and beliefs in daily life, to which he suggests the majority of Kéo people including Catholics and Muslims still adhere. Clearly in an orthodox or canonical sense, Catholicism and Islam both insist on their own absolute universalism; nonetheless, various opportunities exist for followers of either religion to contextualize their faith and practices within local culture. Tule as an indigenous priest with a tolerant understanding of Islam leads us to an original perspective of Catholic and Islamic inculturation (enculturation). He explains types of arguments about Catholic inculturation especially after the Second Vatican Council in 1963. He points out that on the one hand Islam is a universal religion and on the other hand it has been inculturated into Arabic and other cultural contexts since the beginning. With rich ethnographical data Tule argues that most people in Kéo appear to manage multiple religious and ritual identities almost seamlessly, including their affiliation to what he terms the "House of God"—namely the mosque or church—on the one hand, and to the Houses of Ancestors on the other, a feat achieved mainly by adhering to local values understood as embodied in various religious practices.

The concluding chapter certainly indicates that since the end of the 1990s religious and ethnic conflicts in Indonesia at national and regional levels have challenged the harmony and tolerance existing in Kéo. In the author's concluding words, we can clearly see his hope that Kéo society will cope peacefully with these new challenges, and in doing so perhaps provide more general solutions to resolving religious and ethnic conflicts, even at an international level

One could perhaps criticise the book for emphasising romanticised images of local harmony; it does not, for example, critically consider the role of state power in imposing monotheistic religions, as do most recent studies of religious conversion in Indonesia. However, it may be the case that the author strategically chooses this stance in order to commit himself, as an indigenous priest, not just to affirming the positive aspects of the Kéo's current situation but also to support effective visions for a better future in Flores. In this sense the book might be considered as constituting more than an exercise in academic ethnography, but rather as committing thought for a better future by an indigenous priest with a tolerant understanding of Islam.

REFERENCE CITED

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