Deliverable 4.3:

Macro-Micro Dialogue Studies (WP4: The State)

Date: 22 June, 2020

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement N°770562.

QUESTIONING NATIONAL RELIGIOUS COMPROMISES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: LOCAL ACCOMMODATIONS AND TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGES IN LAOS AND INDONESIA

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Scholars and policy makers have long thought that the Western theories of modernization adopted by rulers of the new Southeast Asian nation-states would lead to an increased secularism.

In *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, Keyes, Hardacre, and Kendall argued, to the contrary, that "as these states have modernized, religion has become more, not less, significant" (1994: 3). As they point out, the process of creation of modern Southeast Asian nation-states has led to two contradictory reactions to religion. Modernization leads to a lessening of rituals or spiritual practices while nationalism, as it evolves, can promote certain practices and even lead to the invention of new rites (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). While modernization emphasizes rationality, nation-building emphasizes a commitment to faith.

Twenty years after *Asian Visions of Authority*, we wish to reconsider these simultaneous and opposing movements with the following questions: How did states build a national religious identity? What place has this construction left for local spiritualities or regional variations of world beliefs? How is the character and legitimacy of the Southeast Asian state contested by religion? Recognizing that faith remains an important source of legitimating ideas in the region, we would like to examine if and how religious movements, beliefs, and practices challenge state rationalities and modes of governance.

Though in terms of headcount Islam is the largest religion of Southeast Asia, it is the predominant faith in only three states in the region; of the remaining eight, six are dominated by Buddhism, and two by Christianity. Aside from the prevalence of these so-called "world religions," Southeast Asia is home to a multitude of 'local' or 'indigenous' religions and traditional belief systems. As the diversity of religion-state relations in Southeast Asia is indeed wide, we limit our study to two countries and their dominant religions: Laos PDR with Buddhism and Indonesia with Islam.

The interest of comparing these two countries lies in their points of resemblance and difference: both nation-states have faced significant religious and ethnic diversity since their formation. In each, the State has defined on the one hand, what a good religion is (Buddhism in Laos, Islam in Indonesia) and on the other hand, has rejected other less prominent or local religions, considered as 'false beliefs'. As the nature of the State is quite different in the two countries (Laos is a post-socialist single-party authoritarian state; the Indonesian Republic is a multi-party electoral democracy), contrasting visions of the relationship of the central power to its margins, of the national with the local, prevail. In Laos, building the nation-state was a challenge as it had to address traditional centers of power inhabited by the majority Buddhist ethnic Lao population as well as margins inhabited by various ethnic minorities, most of them animists but increasingly Christian. Indonesia represents a very different case as since conception, the nation-state has recognized, with the first principle of its ideology, Pancasila, a religious plurality that places Islam, the religion of an overwhelming majority, on an equal footing with other religions. Many studies have been devoted to Pancasila, an original formula, unprecedented in the history of religious policy of a modern state, based both on spiritual inventiveness and a keen sense of political pragmatism (see among others: Assyaukanie 2009; Bonneff 1980; Darmaputera 1988; Ichwan 2011; Raillon 2011; Steenbrink 2015). But very few of these studies have looked at what can be called the 'birthplace' of Pancasila. Yet such a micro approach provides a better understanding of the role of Javanese identity in nation building. It also allows us to analyze both the reasons for the contestation of Pancasila and the way in which the state handles these disputes.

Besides tensions arising between the local and national, tensions between the national and the transnational manifest themselves in different ways in both cases. As Keyes, Hardacre and Kendall noticed (1994: 14), “Because Buddhism is not organized transnationally in ways comparable to Christianity or Islam, the Buddhist religion in those societies where it is dominant (Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia) has been vulnerable to control and manipulation by the state.” In the case of Laos, the dominant religion is tightly linked with the state at the national level while—as we will see—‘minority religions’ prove to be more and more connected to transnational networks. In contrast, Islam as the main religion in Indonesia is increasingly linked with transnational religious organizations.

One of CRISEA’s key goals is to encourage ‘macro-micro’ dialogue between disciplines and the incorporation of different levels of analysis so as to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of social and political change in Southeast Asia. This paper reflects that ambition. At a macro level, and through a historical perspective, we will look at the two Southeast Asian states in order to illuminate how they gradually addressed the religious dilemma and analyze the public policies produced within a specific framework or context. The logical extension of this perspective would be to look at the importance of religion, and the tensions between ethnic, national, and religious identities in the daily lives of individual actors. Through ethnographic insights considered at the micro level, we will then delve into the finer details of local reception, appropriation and contestation. However, the very nature of each State will lead us here to two approaches: a top-down approach for the Lao PDR authoritarian State (Vanina Bouté), and a bottom-up approach for Indonesia where the central State is more permeable to local influences (Rémy Madinier).

I.– State and religions: the formulation of religious compromises

In this first part, we would like to address several points. On the one hand, the position of the new states regarding religion at the moment of their creation—Indonesia in 1945, and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (hereafter Lao PDR) in 1975. We will show that the two states had to deal with multiple religious dimensions and adopted different positions. In Laos, the recognition of the multi-ethnicity of the nation was not accompanied by an equivalent recognition of the diversity of religions. The latter have been strictly delimited to a fixed number of categories and placed under state control. In Indonesia, the idea of a harmonious cohabitation between different religious currents is an ancient Javanese phenomenon extended to the national level.

In both cases, the States have proposed at different times their own vision of religious pluralism: the Lao State proposed in recent years a category called “religion-tradition” which aims to represent the cultural heritage of the different ethnic groups of the country; however, the enhancement of these ‘religion-traditions’ has been done to the detriment of their devotional dimension. In Indonesia, the cohabitation of different religions has also been thought of in terms of a common cultural heritage, but the action of the State through the Ministry of Religions has led to an increased emphasis on orthodoxy of religions in general and of Islam in particular.

1. 1. Lao State Management of the Multi-ethnicity of the Country

On 2 December 1975, after two decades of civil war, the communist Pathet Lao government under Kaysone Phomvihane, along with the Vietnam People's Army, and backed by the Soviet Union, overthrew the royalist Lao government and renamed the country as the *Lao People's Democratic Republic*. When it was created, the Lao PDR government had to deal with extraordinary levels of ethnic and cultural diversity, a feature which sets Laos apart from neighboring countries. The ethnic Lao account for only 50% of the country’s total population (6,400,000 inhabitants in 2015), while the other 50% are divided into 48 officially recognized ethnic groups.

Upon taking power in 1975, the communist government of the Lao PDR made it clear that it would make the unity of the country a priority. Polyethnic solidarity in the context of a single and indissoluble Lao nation was proposed, to be supported by a national culture, and modelled on the Lao-Tai cultural norms. Thus, the Lao State adopted a contradictory stance towards ethnic minorities: on the one

hand, the national Constitution acknowledges and hence protects the pluriethnicity of the country; the State has been tasked with preserving the intangible heritage of all ethnic groups within the country; on the other hand, as a promoter of "modernity" and "progress," Lao PDR deploys policies strongly prompting ethnic minorities to join what is regarded as the better ethnic Lao way of life (Goudineau 1997; Evrard and Baird 2017).

Religious diversity, on the other hand, is quite a different and challenging issue for the Lao State. Since its advent, the communist government of Pathet Lao has relied on Buddhism for establishing national unity. The latter was integrated into the official rhetoric to show that Buddhism and Marxism share a similar vision of the world, e.g. an ideal of social progress. In addition, in order to avoid jeopardizing the establishment of a 'modern' and scientific socialist nation, the communist State rejected anything related to beliefs in spirits (*phi*).

The attitude of the Communist Party towards Buddhism softened after the economic reforms of 1986. Although the 1991 Lao PDR constitution ensures the right of Laotians to practice or not a religion, and the right to choose a religion, all religious activities remain under the strict control of the Central Committee of the Lao Front for National Construction and, since 2016, of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Religion is indeed identified as a possible threat to the Lao State as it is considered the most likely channel for two 'evils': superstition and division.

Beliefs in spirits, worship towards territorial spirits, cults addressed to ancestors inside the houses, and sacrifices to spirits—being mostly religious practices of the non-Buddhist ethnic groups—are considered as superstitions. Religious practices are also suspected to cause division. Article 9 of the Constitution (revised in 2003) discourages all acts that create divisions between religious groups and persons, and the government has interpreted this clause to justify restrictions on religious practices. Authorities have intervened in activities of minority religious groups, especially Protestants, on the grounds that their practices disrupt the local community.

A tangible sign of this will to control religion is that, despite the extensive diversity of religious and spiritual practices in the country, only five religions are officially recognized. The first four are Buddhism (64.7 percent of the population) and three "foreign religions" (Bahai: 800 persons; Islam: approximately 1600 adherents; and Christianity: more than 100,000 persons). The fifth category is a recent addition. It was first called "Others" in the 2005 Census mentioning that "animism was not regarded as a religion," then re-labelled in the 2015 Census. "*bo thü satsana/seua thü phi lü banpha bulut*," e.g. "Those who don't believe in religion/belief in spirits or spirits of ancestors" and is used in the provincial census and among the population under the unregistered name of *satsana phi* (spirit cults). This latest category includes the diverse religious practices of one third of the population of the country. Like Buddhism, the spirit cults are considered as local and indigenous practices.

1. 2. Javanism: The Heart of the Indonesian Compromise on Religion

Adopted at independence in 1945, the official Indonesian ideology enshrines as the first of its five principles (Pancasila) "the Belief in One Almighty God" (*Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*) as the foundation of the Indonesian nation.[1] It emerged from the convergence of a Javanese conception of the place of religion and the "multiple modernities" linked to the country's experience of colonialism (Eisenstadt

[1] "Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa" has been translated into English in many different ways: "Divine Omnipotence" (Sidjabat 1965, p. 20); "The Being of Supreme Deity" (Kafrawi 1956); "Oneness of God" (Kafrawi 1956-2). Until the end of the 1980s the most frequent official translation was "Belief in God" (*The Guide of the Living and the Practice of Pantja Sila and GBHN, the Broad Outlines of the State Policy*, Jakarta: Yayasan Proklamasi, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1978) but, interestingly, "Belief in the One and Only God" seems to be the new official translation. As was rightly noted by Darmaputera (1988: 153), "God" is Allah in Indonesian, a particular God of Islam and Christianity. "Tuhan" is "Lord" in English. The prefix "ke" and the suffix "-an" denote an abstract idea or a concept. So the correct way to translate "Ketuhanan" is "Lordship." The word *Maha,* from Sanskrit, means great, abundant, or mighty. *Esa* is also from Sanskrit and means existence, but in Malay and Indonesian it has taken on the meaning of "one". So a more literal translation of "Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa" should be "belief in the great one Lordship."

2002). This convergence took place in the 1910s and 1920s in the principalities (*vorstenlanden*) of Central Java, particularly Yogyakarta.

After the emergence of Islamic principalities north of Sumatra at the very end of the thirteenth century, the Muslim religion spread along the trade routes running from the Java Sea to the east of the Archipelago. In Java, the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of Madjapahit was overshadowed by the mercantile power of the sultanates of Pasisir, the northern coastal region of the island, during the sixteenth century. From the seventeenth century onwards, the Islamization of the Javanese hinterland provoked conflicts but also gave rise to many accommodations towards a harmonious cohabitation between these different spiritual worlds. Extending from palatine circles to the whole of Javanese society, a complex religious culture flourished, defining the main elements of what Merle Ricklefs called a "mystic synthesis". On the one hand, the Islamic identity of the Javanese was affirmed, but the Muslim practices were combined with the recognition of older local spiritual forces (Ricklefs 2006).

From the middle of the nineteenth century however, the development of the pilgrimage and the multiplication of the number of *pesantren* (koranic schools) led to the formation of a new pious class, initially calling itself *kaum putihan* (the white group), named after the color of their garment and later *santri* (pupils or former students of *pesantren*). Within this group a very critical attitude arose toward the Javanese spiritual components of the mystic synthesis. By attacking rural Muslims, pejoratively termed *abangan* (red or brown, also named after the color of their garment), *santri* helped to bring about the emergence of this popular religious sensibility as a marker of group identity In response to the demands of the *santri*, the *abangan* gradually moved away from strict observance of the five pillars of Islam and accentuated the syncretic aspects of their spiritual practices, without denying their membership of the Muslim community. At the same time, there developed within a noble class known as *priyayi*, an aristocratic version of the defense of this mystic synthesis against *santri* conceptions (Ricklefs 2007). Recruited from an indigenous branch of the colonial administration (Pangreh Pradja), they overlay the Dutch colonial hierarchy of the Binnenlandsch Bestuur and perpetuated this religious tradition at the very heart of the new colonial empire.

It was the two principalities (*vorstenlanden*) of Surakarta (Solo) and Yogyakarta, vestiges of the Javanese kingdom of Mataram, that saw the most accomplished form of that remarkable consensus supported by the mystic synthesis which would give birth to the *Ketuhanan yang maha esa* principle.[2] At the dawn of the 20th century, the two principalities' capitals were the scene of a remarkable hive of intellectual and spiritual creativity. This vibrancy turned them into unlikely laboratories for an alternative form of modern spirituality which strived to keep the challenges posed by Muslim and Western values at bay. Unlike Malaysia (where the British protected Islam), or the Philippines (where Spaniards and Americans promoted Christianity) or other parts of the Dutch East Indies (where colonial authorities feared fierce competition between religions), the colonial government allowed, in the ancient domains of Mataram, a unique form of religious emulation. In Yogyakarta and Solo, numerous religious communities (Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Theosophists and Javanese mystics) lived side by and thus helped foster the idea that being modern meant being inspired by religious pluralism. The overlapping of religious identities—one could be Muslim and a theosophist, or Christian and an adept of Javanese mysticism—foreshadowed the approach of the future Indonesian state.

1.3. The Collusion Between Ethnic Traditions and Religions: A Way for the Lao State to Gain Control?

How has the Lao state dealt with the multiplicity of religions of the country's many ethnic minorities? As Goudineau (2015) has shown, the discourse on multi-ethnicity has not fundamentally changed, but its form has evolved over recent years in Laos. Never before has so much importance been

[2] After the last stage of its colonial dismantling, the former empire of Mataram was reduced to a narrow territory within the two principalities (*vorstenlanden*) of Solo and Yogyakarta and divided among four ruling families which retained a semblance of autonomy.

officially given to the cultural heritage of minority groups. Officials at the District Level are required to ‘present’ their local traditions. In addition, increasing numbers of villagers are mobilized to show their own ‘ethnic characteristics’ in new festivals or on new ‘stages,’ and foreign experts—who were mistrusted before—are now invited to share their knowledge of specific groups or to participate in the creation of museums in the provinces.

Religious festivals of some ethnic groups have been included in this cultural staging. By virtue of the principle of equal treatment of all ethnic groups, and at the request of high-ranking military ethnic officers in particular, the two most populous ethnic minority groups, the Khmu and the Hmong (who are also depicted—with ethnic Lao—as emblematic of the multi-ethnic nature of the nation) have each been granted an emblematic festival modeled on the Lao New Year (*Pimay*). This acknowledgment has been extended to other minorities, and now every official provincial radio and TV station covers all regionally associated ‘New Year’ celebrations.

Interestingly the officially recognized ‘ethnic’ festivals do not have much to do with what people used to do in the past: they have been emptied of their devotional and spiritual content. From household or lineage ceremonies, they have become—according to the State vision— collective and village festivals. They mainly consist of the promotion of beautiful costumes and ‘nice traditions’ and the celebration of the perpetuation of a reinvented-normative-tradition. An indicative key of this ‘folklorization,’ and especially of the forced hybridization of tradition and religion, would be the term newly invented by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2016 to replace the category “spirit cults”: *satsana hitkong* (religion-tradition).

The effect and/or objective of this policy of ‘culturalization’ of local ethnic religions was to empty them of the ‘cultural’ or devotional aspects formerly practiced by these local and collective entities. Everything has been done to eliminate practices that might help groups to federate, forms of ‘localisms’ being perceived as competitive and dangerous to state legitimacy and national unity. This is reminiscent of similar forms of repression carried out by the rulers of the former Sipsong Panna kingdom (now in southern Yunnan, PRC) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against village cults, seeing them as competing with kingdomwide cults (e.g. *phi müang*) (Tanabe 1988). In another way, too, we can relate this situation to what Mendelson (1963) pointed out for the religious history of Burma: when Buddhism is strong, spirit worship is weakened—partly because of repressive measures; Buddhism accompanies a strong centralized monarchy, while animism coincides with the triumph of local forces and rebellion. There is thus a permanent feature in the articulation between state and centralized/local powers, Buddhism/spiritual cults that transcend the case of the particular relationship of the Laotian Party-State to religions.

1.4. The Pancasila: The Recognition of religious plurality inspired by mystical synthesis

In contrast to what happened in Laos, the forces that have sustained the diversity of religions in Indonesia were those of the main ethnic group, namely the Javanese.

Although Soekarno, founder and first president of the Republic of Indonesia, grew up in Surabaya in the east of Java and not in the *vorstenlanden*, he was a perfect representative of this modernized version of the mystical synthesis that flourished in the principalities of Central Java. His grandfather had been initiated into Javanese mysticism, his father into Islam and theosophy, while his Balinese mother had been brought up surrounded by Buddhism and Hinduism. He was also influenced by the ideas formulated by modernist Islamic thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al Afghani, whom he discovered during his stay in Surabaya with H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, at that time the leader of Sarekat Islam. Finally, he completed his spiritual education during his exile in 1934 on the Catholic majority island of Flores, where he regularly visited the missionaries who allowed him access to their library (Darmaputera 1988).

The spiritual vision, which ‘inspired’ Soekarno on the day he delivered his famous speech of June 1945, later caller “the Birth of Pancasila” was thus the product of a complex religious legacy. In this speech, the founding father of the Republic of Indonesia proposed to adopt five founding principles

gathered under the term Pancasila (Bonneff 1980).[3] The most important one was undoubtedly the *Ketuhanan yang maha esa* principle ("the Belief in One Almighty God") which reflected a deep-rooted religious sentiment. It was a principle mainly elaborated in Central Java but subsequently disseminated across the country. The Muslim religion was recognized as part of a spiritual legacy which included other beliefs.

The new Indonesian state's coat of arms reflected this delicate balance. Pride of place was given to the star representing Islam in the center of the shield, surrounded by four symbols, each representing one of Pancasila's principles. The eagle Garuda carrying the heraldry, however, was Vishnu's sacred mount, and it recalls, along with the nation's motto (*Bineka tungal Ika*) held in the eagle's claws and written in Sanskrit, both the long-standing and important place of Hinduism in the country's heritage.

The compromise sealed by the Pancasila worked relatively well as long as parliamentary democracy in Indonesia lasted, i.e. until the end of the 1950s. In the atmosphere of national unity that presided over the proclamation of independence, the overwhelming majority of the Muslim community accepted this compromise. Only a few militias, disappointed at not being integrated into the new national army, continued to call for the creation of an Islamic state and entered rebellion against the young Republic (Dijk 1981). Paradoxically, these movements, united under the banner of Darul Islam (1948-1963), favored, in response, the defense of Pancasila by the main Islamic party (Masjumi) which, bringing together most of the representatives of political Islam, allowed the spread of the Javanese compromise to the whole of the archipelago (Madinier 2015).

II. Local Accommodation, National and Transnational Challenges: Community Responses to the State compromises.

To the syntheses proposed by the States—Indonesian, Laotian—in terms of religious diversity, the ethnic or religious communities have brought different and evolving responses. In Indonesia, the defense of Pancasila in the framework of authoritarian regimes has led some Muslims to defy the national ideology. Encouraged by the transnational networks of militant Islam, they sought to promote both the primacy of Islam and a greater orthopraxy. In Laos, the transformation of local religions into "tradition-religions" in a growing context of multi-ethnic localities has led, inter alia, to the growing use of forms of religion embedded in transnational movements.

2. 1. The Pancasila: weakened by an authoritarian version of the compromise

From the early 1960s onwards, the religious compromise established by Pancasila began to be increasingly contested within the Muslim community. The first reason was a change in Islam linked to the establishment of an authoritarian regime.

Pancasila's greatest asset was the religious ambiguity in which every spiritual current was able to recognize itself. However, the national ideology had left unanswered an essential question for the future of the independent Republic, that of democracy. In referring to a "democracy by consensus" (*Permyusawaratan*) the Forth principle of Pancasila drew on an old requirement of harmony, also typically Javanese, the famous *gotong royong* (communal cooperation) which, according to Soekarno, summarized the Pancasila. This idea of a social and political community united around an idealized village cooperation, contained the seeds of a form of authoritarianism that resurfaced in the late 1950s when the president became disenchanted with the disorderly functioning of parliamentary democracy.

This component of Pancasila became manifest during the two authoritarian regimes of independent Indonesia: Soekarno's Guided Democracy (1958-1965) and Suharto's New Order (1966-1998). During both periods the defense of Pancasila was transformed into a stringent ideology

[3] These five principles were nationalism (*Kebangsaan*), internationalism or humanism (*Perikemanusiaan*), democracy by consensus (*Permyusawaratan*), social prosperity (*Kesejahteraan sosial*) and belief in one God (*Ketuhanan*).

subordinate to the government. In 1959, when disagreement between those who supported a broader role for Islam and the advocates of Pancasila led the constitutional assembly to an impasse, Soekarno decided to dissolve the assembly and to forcibly reintroduce the 1945 constitution. The following year, 1960, invoking the necessity to defend Pancasila, he outlawed the major Muslim party, Masyumi. Similarly, General Suharto's New Order imposed a strict interpretation of Pancasila, both to combat communism and to marginalize political Islam.

For a large part of the Muslim community, Pancasila was thus associated with a repression that deprived them of their political representation. The bitterness linked to these events led to a mutation of reformist Islam which engendered the rebirth of a protest against religious compromise. The repression against political Islam led to a hardening of doctrinal positions (Assyaukanie 2009).

Moderate, confident and remarkably open-minded in the 1950s, by the 1970s the Masjumi leaders, like the majority of Islamist movements worldwide, increasingly suffered from a siege mentality. The West, hitherto regarded as an ally against the communists, was now viewed as a threat, and there was a drastic change in tone towards Christians. During this period, reformist Indonesian Islam opened up considerably to international Islamist networks, which was not without implications for its ideological development (Hefner 2000).

2. 2. From local to national or transnational: religious responses from Northern Laos regions

While Laos was originally portrayed as a rural, mountainous country where individual ethnic groups lived in separate villages, Laotian provinces are characterized increasingly differently today. Laos is experiencing a growing urbanization due to forced displacements of mountain populations towards the plains and the roads, to imposed and binding agrarian policies, and to the development of trade and the growth in wealth of a middle class. As mono-ethnic villages shrink, multi-ethnic small towns and provincial capitals are growing as a result of the rural-urban migrations. How does the religious coexistence of different groups function in this context? Is the religious heterogeneity a factor potentially challenging the hegemonic authority of the state? To answer this question, we consider three groups viewed as "ethnic minorities"—the Khmu, the Phounoy and the Ho—located in the provincial capital of Phongsaly province, in Northern Laos at the border with China and Vietnam.[4]

The Khmu: An Oscillation Between Integration into the State and Contesting the State

The Khmu are a Mon-Khmer speaking population of some 700,000 people—the largest one in Laos after the ethnic Lao—living mostly in Northern and Central Laos. Those living in Phongsaly City are mostly employed by the army. In rural areas, before joining the army and leaving for town, the Khmu had a ritual cycle focused on rice culture and dedicated to territorial spirits (mountain spirits, village spirits, cemetery spirits, etc.) with specialized and sometimes hereditary officiants.

When one of the authors—Vanina Bouté—enquired about religion and rituals among the urban Khmu in Phongsaly, I discovered that there was not so much left of their *satsana hitkong* (religion-tradition), especially among the growing majority who had never experienced village life. They could only speak about their annual festival, Boun Greu, officially recognized by the state and the other ethnic groups in town.

In this context, two tendencies of religious conversion emerge among the Khmu. A tendency to occasionally join the Buddhist temple for practical reasons (for instance for the cremation for the deceased) and social motives (everybody is going). But the majority of converts do not master the Buddhist models, codes and rules, and as a consequence they are often considered by other Buddhist ethnic groups as second-rate Buddhists. Khmu conversion to Buddhism is strongly encouraged by

[4] Since 2018, Vanina Bouté has enjoyed the support of the European Research Program CRISEA to conduct fieldwork in Northern Laos. The data presented here are the result of field surveys carried out in January-February 2018 and January-February 2019 as part of the present publication.

the state which also encourages monks to teach Buddhism to minority ethnic groups. The second tendency is Protestant Christian conversion. As Keyes (1996) and Salemink (2009) noted, this is a widespread phenomenon in continental Southeast Asia among the groups where "the practice of localized animistic religions is markedly disjunctive with the world in which they now live" (Keyes 1996: 288).

But unlike the cases pointed out by Salemink (2009: 47), where "Christian conversion can be seen as marking difference without breaking off contact," the conversion in the Khmu context works as a point of rupture with the State. Converts cannot ignore that they adopt a religion which is considered as "foreign", to which the Lao state is strongly opposed, and of which a negative vision has been widely spread through national rhetoric. As many Khmu people explain: "We already have a religion, Buddhism is good enough" or "We do not want people to take religion from another country".

The Phounoy: Mirroring the Power through Religion

The second group are the Phounoy—a Tibeto-Burman speaking group of nearly 40,000—who historically established themselves as indispensable intermediaries between state power and the other mountain ethnic groups (Bouté 2018). They are the only ethnic group—apart from the Lao and Tai groups—to be Buddhist and they have been so for quite a long time.

However, despite most Phounoy now living in urban settings, unlike the Khmu, they maintain a strong identity based on religious tradition. As the largest Buddhist population in the province, Buddhism is here closely associated with the Phounoy (rather than with the Lao, as would be typically be the case in Laos). The Phounoys themselves finance the construction of new pagodas, supply them with monks, and thereby establish religious prestige.

Playing the game of integration into nation-state through an old and strong commitment to religion seems at first sight to be a strategy which pays off for the Phounoy. At the provincial level, as well as in other northern provinces, their Buddhist practices allow the Phounoy to assert a local variant of the 'national' religion; being at the heart of the organization of Buddhist ceremonies in places where they are the majority offers them greater ethnic visibility. It also offers them a way of showing 'their' great traditions embodied into several various Buddhist festivals—unlike other provincial ethnic groups who are allowed to express their 'ethnic' identity only once a year.

However, according to the National Census, between 1995 and 2015, 25 per cent of the Phounoy people did not register anymore under the ethnic category "Phounoy". Given that a quarter of the group has thus merged into the ethnic Lao population, the state's goal of integration is being realized.

The Ho: Toward a Transnational Religion: Escaping the State?

The Ho, with a population of 12,000, are the third ethnic group in size in Phongsaly's capital. The Ho were originally Han peasants who, fleeing Yunnan wars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, settled in Phongsaly Province. Among the Ho, some were former Chinese dignitaries and official. In Phongsaly, they became public figures notable for their acute sense of business and trade.

Several waves of migration eventually dispersed them across the country and abroad. After the communist take-over in 1975, many Ho fled to North America, Australia, and Macau. Gradually, investments of opium money and expanding trade in the country's major cities led them to relocate to Vientiane and to major northern cities where they developed trade with Chinese companies.

In the current urban context, where religious minorities (*satsana phi* and Christians) tend to maintain a low profile if they do not fully abandon their ritual practices, the Ho are an exception. The Ho are not Buddhists. In Lao language, they say they belong to the *satsana phi* category. The cycle of Ho ritual ceremonies is not related to the agrarian or livestock cycle but to ancestors (and to trade). There is no institutionalized priest and ritual practices are performed within individual households; migration therefore did not affect Ho ritual practices.

The growth of cross-border trade even led to a revival of Ho rituals in urban locations. Household rites gain more visibility, and above all, there is an increasing interest in participating in the transnational 'great religion' practiced by the Chinese of Southeast Asia, China, and beyond. This link with the transnational community is manifested on Chinese New Year with increasing demands on members of the community at the transnational level to donate and participate.

2. 3. A global contestation: A re-reading of Indonesian history inspired by international Islamism

The influence of transnational movements in challenging the state's religious policy has been even more pronounced in Indonesia. From the mid-1970s onwards, Indonesia became a target for the rigorous Wahhabi propaganda dispensed by Saudi religious foundations. Thousands of new mosques were built, and the publication and preaching programs of Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII) received substantial subsidies. Thousands of students were sent to universities in the Gulf, thanks to cooperation between DDII and the Institute of Islamic and Arab Studies in Jakarta (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab, LIPIA). On returning to Indonesia, these students advocated the Arabization of Indonesian Islam, which they considered too heterodox. Their influence spread within the university campuses, but political action was prohibited there and so mosques became the only vehicles of mobilization (Feillard & Madinier 2011).

The *dakwah* (here understood in the sense of a religious awakening) that they advocated progressed thanks to the introduction of the Muslim Brotherhood's mode of organization, adopted both by student circles and by *pesantren* linked to Darul Islam. Through these networks, a whole body of literature emblematic of globalized neo-fundamentalism, written by figures who inspired both contemporary Salafism (Ahmad ibn Taimiyya, Ibnu Qayyim al-Jauziyyah and ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab) and militant Islamism (Sayyid Qutb, Abul A'la al-Mawdudi and Sa'id Hawwa) was translated into Indonesian and disseminated throughout the archipelago.

Under the influence of this literature, some Muslim reformists adopted a revisionist approach to the recent history of their country. Pancasila was no longer seen as an opportunity but as a conspiracy hatched by a minority that had deprived the Muslim majority of its rights.

Within a few decades, the Indonesian Muslim community changed its worldview. The Javanese monarchies, in which the principle of *ketuhanan yang maha esa* was coined, saw themselves as the center of the world. Spiritual diversity was all the more encouraged since it situated the Javanese synthesis as the most efficient path to the sacred and therefore superior to any religion with exclusive claims. Once this inclusive principle had become part of the national ideology, it gave Indonesian Islam a modernity that set it somewhat apart from a Middle Eastern Islam which was given little attention. But with its marginalization in the 1970s and its rapprochement with international Islamist networks, Indonesian Islam discovered (or rediscovered) a globalized narrative in which it occupied a marginal place. The *santri* developed an inferiority complex towards the Arab world and, as part of a global victimhood narrative, accused the *abangan* but also other religious minorities of depriving them of the central role that the country's demographics should have conferred on them. The local anchoring of the religious compromise, which had long been perceived as a guarantee of authenticity for Muslims became, on the contrary, a source of frustration for many as it represented the incomplete state of the country's Islamization which needed to be concluded. This process of identification with global Islam progressively increased during the next decades in line with the increased interaction between the different parts of the Muslim world. The entry into the digital age at the beginning of the 2000s was, of course, a tremendous accelerator of this phenomenon, even more so as Indonesia has become one of the countries where social networks are the most developed.

This globalization of Islam had two major consequences. The first was, in Indonesia as elsewhere, the rise of tensions between religious communities. The second consequence of competing narratives was the impoverishment of religious knowledge, with the emergence on the media scene of new actors who were less well trained than their elders in religious matters but much more media-savvy and whose ideas rapidly gained ground. By impoverishing theological reflection, this spread of a "holy

ignorance" (in the words of Olivier Roy, 2010) that is not peculiar to Indonesia or Islam, led to the domination of fact over belief, of ritualism over doctrine and of orthopraxis over orthodoxy. Over the past three decades belonging to the Indonesian Muslim community has become much more a matter of behaving than of believing. The outward signs of Islamization, especially in 'converted' *abangan* circles, have multiplied.

This increasing visibility of Islam and its community demands have, since the end of the 1980s, had important political consequences. Anxious to preserve or conquer power, Indonesian political leaders have tried, through a holier-than-thou approach to capitalise politically on the Islamic revival. Suharto was the first to use this strategy. His fall in 1998 and the democratic opening called Reformasi did not put an end to the slow erosion of religious consensus.

The increase in displays of religious devotion by public representatives, which were motivated by a complex mixture of conviction, opportunism, and pusillanimity, led to an Islamization of public norms that was muddled and often nefarious (Van Bruinessen 2013). In May 2017, the conviction for blasphemy of Jakarta's first non-Muslim and ethnic Chinese governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as Ahok, was very much in line with this decline of religious tolerance. It reveals the influence of Islamic purism on the judiciary and was a shock for Indonesians attached to the religious status quo.

In response to this manipulation of religious tensions, supporters of a nationalist and more liberal vision of Pancasila have on several occasions over the past ten years sought to renew the religious pact adopted at independence. On 1 June 2006, a demonstration celebrating the anniversary of Soekarno's foundational speech was attended by the then president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and included a wide spectrum of participants ranging from liberals and representatives of NGOs to religious minorities and proponents of Javanism (Raillon 2011). They gathered to reaffirm the cultural roots of Indonesia's pluralism in response to the global and exclusive approach to religion of a growing number of the Muslim community. Since then, successive governments have regularly taken initiatives to remind the public of the state's attachment to the compromise struck in 1945. In 2017, after Ahok's conviction, President Jokowi had little choice but to resort to the sort of measures which had not been seen since Suharto's fall. He launched, for example, an important organization to promote Pancasila with the support of the army staff who were worried about the resurfacing of past tensions potentially affecting the armed forces. Later in 2017, and for the first time since 1998, an Islamist movement, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) which had been deeply involved in the demonstrations against Ahok, was dissolved. For the supporters of Pancasila, this organization—founded in Jordan and fighting for a world caliphate—symbolized the excesses of a globalized Islam using the legitimacy of an Arab Islam, to impose intolerance.

At the beginning of 2018, supporters of a local and liberal interpretation of Pancasila also won a major victory. A governmental decree and then the Supreme Court allowed Indonesian citizens to have their "traditional beliefs" (*aliran kepercayaan*) mentioned on their identity cards in place of one of the six recognized religions. In the future, they may even be able to not mention any religion, breaking with an obligation in force since 1966. But perhaps the most significant measure of this revival of a local and moderate Islam was President Jokowi's choice of Ma'aruf Amin, one of the principal leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama, as his candidate for the vice-presidency for his second term of office (2019-2024). Choosing to honour an organisation founded in 1926 to defend a traditionalist Islam rooted in Javaneseness against the attacks of reformist puritans delivered a double message. The first one was to acknowledge the importance of the Muslim revival that Indonesia has experienced over the past several decades by giving his campaign a much more religious tone than the previous one. But at the same time, as he recalled the age-old debates that have been stirring Indonesian Islam, he clearly indicated his preference for a religious current firmly rooted in the localism that gave rise to Pancasila. The Nahdlatul Ulama is certainly not an *abangan* movement but it represents the Islamic current most sympathetic to the mystical synthesis and to an egalitarian religious plurality. The new duo at the helm of Indonesia for the next five years is thus, in a way, the nationwide projection

of what the Sultan (and by law, the governor) of Yogyakarta represents for the province of Central Java: an undisputed religious authority guaranteeing an open and tolerant Islam.

Unlike most Muslim-majority countries that had to choose urgently and sometimes painfully at the time of their independence between a secularized regime and the adoption of Islam as the state religion, Indonesia is one of the rare cases in which in-depth political debates were held on the relation between religion and the state. In most Muslim countries, debates on Islam and secularism ended with the victory of one over the other, either with the victory of Islam, such as in Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, or the victory of secularism, such as in Egypt, Turkey and Tunisia. In Indonesia, the solution that was adopted reflected decades of debate within Javanese Islam which led to the formulation of an ideology based on compromise taking into account the complexity of the country's spiritual legacy.

Challenging the legitimacy of this local arrangement in the name of the universalism of Islam has led to a somewhat embarrassed reaction on the part of the state, which can hardly be satisfied with defending only a localized vision of Islam. For this reason, the strategy of the defenders of Pancasila, like the new vice president Ma'aruf Amin, seems to be to put at the forefront *Wasatiyyah Islam* (Ma'ruf Amin 2018). This Koranic notion, meaning "middle path" does not refer to the local "mystic synthesis" but to the implementation of a principle of moderation recognized throughout the Muslim world.

Conclusion

The dialectic between religion and the State has, until recently, been a national affair internal to each country.

In Theravada Buddhist countries, many observers note—from ancient times until the 20th century—how Buddhist monarchs and then nation-states attempted to suppress the threat to political centralization posed by 'spirit cults' or the 'supernatural,' because of their local influence and power.

In contemporary times, governments co-opt religion (or, more accurately, those aspects of religion of which they approve) in the interests of nation-building. Religion, in other words, often becomes a major and evolving ingredient in the construction of a new national identity. In Laos, it happened at the time of independence through Buddhism, and then through the extension of folklore from the category 'spirit cults' to 'religion-tradition.' In Indonesia, State ideology has first recognized, through the consecration of the Javanese "mystical synthesis", a very open conception of religion, inspired by diverse spiritualities. But for the past thirty years or so, even if the state continued to proclaim its attachment to Pancasila which treat all religions equally, the democratization and decentralization allowed by Suharto's fall permitted the proponents of an inegalitarian secularism, (i.e. one favouring Islam), to attempt to impose their views in many areas by claiming that they were the spokespeople of a silent Muslim majority. As a consequence, public norms have been increasingly Islamized.

Nevertheless, today in Southeast Asia, the challenges posed by religion to the State no longer originate at the local level. Events now unfold as if no state territorial-based sovereignty is capable of confining religion within its national boundaries. Powerful transnational religious networks challenge national governance. Supranational religious identity (for example, adherence to Christianity), renders state co-option more problematic than in the case of nationally organized religious traditions such as Buddhism or *satsana phi.* This is evidenced by the Ho who increasingly engage with Chinese religiosity and by Christian converts among the Khmu. The two cases demonstrate that groups have more room to negotiate with the State about the representation or evolution of their cultures if they are less isolated, involved in cross-border relationships, or are linked to diasporas.

Because of the diversity of its beliefs, linked to the influence of world religions and the importance of spiritual movements that are often very well established locally, Southeast Asia constitutes a fascinating laboratory for understanding and comparing national religious policies at a macro-level. However, a fine-grain understanding of the latter is vastly enriched by micro-level analyses that visualize the complexity of local situations and their influence at a more global level.

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