

The patience of plants

A note on agency in Bali

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According to the *Taru Pramana*, a widely known Balinese text¹ (1), the names and uses of important Balinese plants were established through an encounter worth briefly repeating. The famous Javanese sage, Mpu Kuturan, after arriving in Bali meditated and was given knowledge of the pharmacopoeia. One by one, trees, shrubs and plants came before him. The first was a tree named Wandira which inquires politely why it was summoned. Mpu Kuturan addresses it as ‘Baingin’ (*Waringin*, the banyan tree, or *Ficus Benjamina*). He explains that Balinese healers do not know about plants and asks the tree what its use is, what it consists of and for what medicine it may be used. Instead of answering, the tree begs permission to depart: it re-appears later as one of the series and offers a reply. It is followed by another which says: ‘My name is Kasiligwi (Seleguri in Indonesian, *Sida rhombifolia*), my flesh is cooling, my leaves are cooling, my roots are cooling, I can be used as medicine to be drunk by babies five days after birth. Take my leaves, mash and drink them. My roots can be used as unguent.’ Its place is then taken by another which introduces itself as *da(p)dap* (*Erythrina lithosperma*) and explains how it in turn is to be used medically.

When the seventh tree, the Kepuh, is asked what medical use it has, instead of replying, it demands the reason for this listing of all the plants. Mpu Kuturan tells it about medicine and explains that his knowledge is a gift (from the God of the six great temples of Bali). The Kepuh begs forgiveness and regrets that it has no medical use, whereas its relative the Kepah has, upon which it is promptly succeeded by the Kepah.² With slight variations, a hundred and fifty or so plants in all then present themselves and explain their uses. The work concludes by linking a number of parts of the body with gods, colours, numerals, animals and various countries, temples, textual heroes, human capacities and so forth associated with each.

At first sight the theme is unremarkable: a figure possessed of unusual knowledge and power comes from another country and introduces, or confirms, a natural taxonomy and its uses. In these texts, such persons usually hail from India

¹ The version I use here is from a manuscript belonging to I Wayan Samba, from Kubutambahan, Bulèlèng.

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The present work is partly the product of a complex agency (an expression which is explained below), as many of the central themes have been thrashed out in discussion with Professor Ron Inden, who also read an earlier draft. On re-reading the draft, I was interested to note of the influence of my teacher, the late Dr. C. Hooykaas, who tried to impress the dangers of simplistic generalizations about Bali on a recalcitrant anthropologist.

² Ascription of Latin names to plants needs to be treated with some care because they may embrace local equivalents of well known species. For instance there is particular confusion over the Kepuh and Kepah. The former is given in various sources as *Sterculia foetida* (after its faecal-smelling flowers), *Bombax malabaricum* (sometimes known as the wild kapok) or *Gossampinus heptaphylla*. Balinese consider it the male form of the Kepah: both are grown in graveyards and are identified by de Clercq as *Sterculia foetida* (1909: 331).

or Java and are sometimes attributed with the dissemination of important knowledge. There are some puzzling features about the Taru Pramana though. It is not Mpu Kuturan, but the plants, which know their medical use and inform him about them. And why should the two plants which ask questions be treated so differently from the others and from one another? It is possible, of course, to dismiss such conundrums as common in pre-rational or mythological thought. Consigning whatever defies our current canons of common-sense or rationality to some rag-bag class of 'the symbolic' effectively begs the question. So I shall argue a case for taking the seemingly odd behaviour of plants in the text seriously. To do so, however, obliges us to reflect on our ideas about the nature of agency and on some of the basic presuppositions of much Western writing about Bali.

On agency

There are theoretical grounds for reconsidering existing accounts of agency. Explanations of action tend exclusively to stress either individual humans as agents (methodological individualism) or collectivities of some kind (methodological collectivism). There are problems with both. In this section therefore I sketch out some of the problems of popular assumptions about agency and outline an alternative approach. In particular I question two widespread tendencies in anthropological writings, including those on Bali. One is reliance upon implicit dichotomous classifications (individual or society, village versus state etc.) where reference to overlapping categories may be more useful. The other is the assumption that social action may be essentially explained by the operation of some class of (commonly) abstract entities like 'rules', 'structures' or 'symbols', often only evident to the superior academic observer. There are grounds for focusing instead on the maze of actual practices and considering the degree to which the reasons for action may be partly uncertain or under-determined and open to alternative explanations by the participants themselves. The results are less tidy; but the apparent tidiness has more to do anyway with the models than with what they refer to. In the following sections I draw on two case studies to examine how a different approach to agency may help in understanding observed practice. I then consider the possible use of the approach in explaining how non-human agency may be represented in different situations in Bali, before returning finally to consider what light the discussion throws upon the behaviour of plants in the Taru Pramana.

There are two immediate reasons for raising questions about agency. The first is to explore analytical approaches to social action which permit a more finely-grained account of Balinese ethnography. The second is to take a step towards exploring Balinese ways of talking about action. There is evidence to suggest that Balinese ideas and usage are sufficiently rich and distinctive that it would be unwise to impose Western models a priori. Indeed there are theoretical and empirical grounds (Bourdieu 1977; Hobart 1990) for questioning how appropriate such abstract models really are to the study of Balinese society at all.

My main aim is to try to develop an analytic approach which is more perceptive, and faithful to Balinese interpretations, of ethnography than is the insidious imposition of Western academic models which presume their theoretical constructs to apply essentially to all cultures equally. The latter looks increasingly like the hegemonic extension of the tawdry ethnocentrism it so often is. So I

eschew technical definition as far as possible and for the moment simply use such terms as ‘agent’, ‘instrument’ and ‘patient’ and their associated abstract nouns in the senses found in the Oxford English Dictionary. This chapter is therefore a tentative step towards exploring the differences and overlap between English and Balinese usage. Initial evidence suggests that these terms connote something of common Balinese ways of talking about action and consequences. There is one significant difference. Balinese stress in addition the observable consequences or outcome of actions (*pikolih*) and their less obvious effects (*suksema*) on those concerned. The ways in which these notions are used often seems to give a practical, at times pragmatic, flavour to their appreciation of action.³

To begin with though, why should one bother to question the nature of agency? After all, is it not obvious that humans are the agents in producing, or inventing, their culture and society? Would that the issue were so simple! For a start, Balinese attribute responsibility for all sorts of events to the actions of invisible beings or even material objects which we, but not they, tend to consider Imaginary Agents.

Further, and more analytically, we need to distinguish between humans as the means, the instruments, of carrying out actions from the agents who command that those actions be done and from the subjects of the action, the patients. For instance, there is a genuine sense in which the soldiers in a firing squad are the instruments of the authority which decided who was to be shot (the patient) and ordered certain people on pain of punishment to do so. To what extent are people agents when they are compelled to do things? Variations on this kind of question lie behind the protracted debate over methodological individualism and collectivism.⁴

In anthropological writing then, the question of who, or what, is responsible for actions and events has been commonly phrased in terms of the relative importance of individual humans and collectivities as agents: the two conventionally being linked by the notion of role or status. So we speak, for instance, in terms of so-and-so in a Balinese village acting as the father of someone, as a member of a particular kin group or irrigation association, or as the elected head of a ward. In this way the relationship of individuals and groups is articulated through social roles. There are two serious problems with this approach however. First it postulates the existence of two dissimilar kinds of agent, ultimately pre-social humans and society (as unspecified collectivities, systems of ideas or whatever) and leaves the relation between them unclear. In practice, it does not matter if an account privileges individuals or the collective in some form, explanation tacitly embraces, and oscillates between, the two

³ Balinese tend to use a wide range of verbs - rather than nouns - for action, even for being subject to something, *kena* (see Hobart 1990, where this discussion of agency is developed further). My initial impression is that the replies to interrogatives may vary to some degree according to relative status. So the inferior party is more likely to answer with the way, *cara*, something is done (‘knowing how’) rather than why it is done (‘knowing that’) than is the superior. The relationship of *pikolih* and *suksema* is linked to that between the manifest (*sakala*) and unmanifest (*niskala*) outlined below. *Suks(e)ma* is both a Sanskrit and Old Javanese term which is used by Balinese to imply the subtle or the non-manifest aspect of the perceptible (cf. Zoetmulder 1982: 1841-3).

⁴ On the argument between Durkheim and Tarde see Lukes 1973: 302-13. Critiques of methodological individualism include Mandelbaum 1955, Lukes 1968, and also Gellner 1973 who criticizes the Popperian position of Watkins 1952-3, 1953.

(Bhaskar 1979: 31-101). Second, such explanations also presuppose a convenient isomorphism between 'the knowing subject' and the world, by which the world is at once transparent and knowable, and so directly manipulable. Whether one treats knowing subjects as intrinsically selfish or reflective, in arguments of this kind they are often supplemented as agents by invoking supra-human transcendental entities - be they History, the Market, Modes of Production, Meaning or whatever - which are attributed with properties of agency and mind. Humans appear then as the instruments or objects, through whom, or upon which, they operate. So it is not uncommon to encounter statements in which 'history' or 'modes of production' 'determine', 'markets decide' and meanings 'emerge', 'sink in' or 'reveal themselves'.

In such writings events are seen as important for the light they throw on the essential workings of agents as entities. These may be instantiations of 'Culture', 'the village' or 'the State', or else individual Balinese as the embodiment of human nature or Balineseness, according to one's predilection. Texts, history, symbols and so on attain a substantive existence independent of the contexts of their use. The images are strikingly metaphoric. Texts reveal; history unfolds; symbols mould perception or mirror reality; states decline, collapse or get absorbed; princes lose the power they once wielded. Disclaimers notwithstanding, the study of humans usually treats them more as objects or instruments than as agents. People are considered either as driven causally by their needs and desires (whether shaped by nature or the market) or dramaturgically as actors - not agents - in a play whose subjectivity is decided by someone else's script. Here Balinese are to be discovered pursuing their interests, looking for meaning in things, or suspended in their own webs of significance. Ironically, whether they survive and how they inscribe their predicament must usually wait on the understanding ethnographer to reveal to a largely unconcerned world.

It is possible to sketch out an alternative approach by drawing on the work of that oddly under-estimated philosopher, Collingwood, who cast a critical eye on attempts to extrapolate essential structures from changing discourses about agency, society and history.⁵ For present purposes it is helpful to mention two related arguments of Collingwood's. The first deals with taxonomy; the second with agency. Science, Collingwood argued, is predominantly concerned with establishing exact differences in kind (as with the classification of natural species, kinds of molecule and so on), whereas philosophical and, by extension, anthropological analyses require recognition of the ways in which differences of degree, and of kind, may overlap in different situations (1933: 26-53). Subsequently Collingwood went on to develop an account of agency which makes use of the idea of overlapping classes and which is particularly useful in analyzing social ascriptions of agency (1942). Let me therefore examine how recourse to overlapping categories may help to resolve long-standing debates about the

⁵ If lack of space makes my discussion somewhat cryptic, the reader will find a useful introduction in Hirst 1985: 43-58, who has advocated the contemporary relevance of Collingwood and has noted how the hegemonic discourses of the time required him to be ignored. By including Collingwood's less known works *An essay on philosophical method* and *The new Leviathan*, in which he discusses theories of classification and agency in detail, I hope to meet Hirst's concern that Collingwood tended towards methodological individualism and the separation of natural and historical sciences.

relationship of sacred and secular, and of village and State in Bali, before considering how Collingwood's arguments offer an interesting new way of talking about agency.

Much has been made of the supposed contrast between sacred and secular institutions in Bali (see Swellengrebel 1960). These attributes are often identified at the 'level' of the State with the distinction between Brahmana as priests and Satriya as princes (e.g. Lekkerkerker 1926). Such an identification however omits the religious aspects of royal rule (evident *inter alia* in coronations, see Swellengrebel 1947), as well as the extent to which Brahmana could act as political and military strategists or tactical commanders in battle. Caste functions overlap far more than a rigid classification would suggest. The obfuscations so caused pale by comparison with the implications of a widespread tendency to divide village society into two kinds of group: the *désa* portrayed as a religious community focused essentially on the sacred space of the village and the *banjar*, wards or hamlets, depicted as concerned exclusively with organizing profane activities (or as matters of custom, *adat*, as opposed to government, *dinas*, c.f. Goris 1935). On this account there are two radically distinct kinds of local group, a view which overlooks the extent to which *désa* and *banjar* are ways of talking about problems of organization and overlapping aspects of social life, which differ in degree and kind on different occasions, as we shall see in the next section.

The second debate is over whether Balinese villages were effectively independent 'village republics' or inextricably tied to the State (e.g. Clifford Geertz's critique, 1961, of Goris 1935 and Korn 1932). Recognition of the extent of local networks and State intervention is obviously important but, paradoxically, it has served subtly to perpetuate old assumptions in new guises. Rather than 'village' and 'State' being reified geographically, they have become transcendent ideas or symbols (C. Geertz 1980) which somehow govern or guide immanent actions.⁶ The contributors to the debate tend to assume that the village and State - exemplified as villagers and princes - correspond to something essential, be it geographical or symbolic. Instead one might consider how far these are ways of talking about relationships which differ in degree and kind in different situations. In fact the whole debate gets off on a hopelessly wrong foot by importing conceptions of kings, ministers, and the entire panoply of re-created European monarchies. It might be more instructive radically to rethink our usage of notions like 'the State', 'kingship', 'corvée labour' and the like in describing Bali. For, although Western and Balinese discourses have obviously overlapped for centuries (see Boon 1977: 10-69), such woolly-minded essentialism merely perpetuates the hegemony of alien categories.

The observable position is more complicated. Most courts (*puri*) and high priests' residences (*geriya*) are in, but not entirely part of, village settlements; while at the same time their spheres of activity are in other ways quite distinct. Priests, princes and peasants are caught up in each others' lives in all sorts of fashions beyond the supposedly elementary exchange of commands, resources and services. Anyhow it is simplistic to consider *puri* and *geriya* just as bounded

⁶ Consider the use of 'planes of social organization' or 'the Theatre State' in Geertz, C. 1959 and 1980 respectively.

physical structures. From my experience, courts at any moment may include resident kin, dispersed family members, *parekan* (a term which embraces anyone from junior relatives and courtiers to 'traditional dependents' and *marmitons*), locals and visitors from other places. They are also the locus of endless *tête-à-têtes*, discussions, meetings and decision-making in which villagers play a crucial role not just as audience and work-force but less obviously as sources of information, amanuenses, emissaries, executors, paracletes and more besides.

For this reason, it may be more appropriate to speak of 'courts' not 'princes', as the latter misleadingly suggests an undispersed sovereign agent. Peasants in no small part still make up the entourages and participants at royal rituals, as they did armies in the past. And priests and princes are integral to many village rites, as experts, officiants or participants, just as they initiate, oversee, or assume responsibility for, various peasant activities. They are locked together in constituting one another's identities according to more or less shared assumptions, sometimes in competing or contrary ways. Many painters of epic scenes were low caste; and high caste authors depicted popular life (see respectively Vickers 1983, Worsley 1984; and Vickers in press). We are dealing with ways of classifying the social world which vary in their degree of differentiation and the kinds of distinction they draw. Such construals are made on different occasions by different people who may invoke hierarchies of values (themselves overlapping and contested, see Collingwood 1933: 54-91) to organize or justify their actions.

'Village' and 'State' are not discrete entities simply because it is sometimes possible to point to them as vaguely geographically bounded, any more than Bali is an unadulterated and homogeneous polity and culture simply because it is an island (for which reason I refer where possible to 'Balinese' rather than to any essential class 'the Balinese'). Not only is there significant variation from one region to another but people on Bali were also linked in relations of trade, alliance and war with other parts of the archipelago long before the Dutch arrived. One wonders how much the apparent cohesiveness of Balinese religious belief and practice owes to earlier threats from the Buginese and later Javanese; or the focus on Ida Sang Hyang Widi Wasa as Divinity to more recent national pressures to have a supreme deity. We are dealing arguably not so much with the manifestation of essences, but perhaps more with multiple agents dialectically engaged in exploring and working on contradictions, or eristically trying to eliminate one another entirely (on the significance of the difference between the two modes see Collingwood 1942: 181-2, 192-3, 207-245).

What bearing however does this discussion of overlapping classes have on action and agency? Classically actions are divided into those motivated by either desire, self-interest or duty. Such a division is problematic because motives may be mixed. What are distinct kinds of motive in one perspective are matters of overlapping degree in another. This conjunction of differences of degree and kind has broader application to an understanding of action. Balinese speak of themselves as divided for certain purposes by caste or kin group. The distinctions may be represented as decreasing degrees of purity (*kasucian*) from Brahmana to Sudra, or as people who differ by lineage (*wangsa*) or kind (*soroh*) and so are predestined, or potentially suited, for distinct public duties (*darma*). In other words, agents and actions may differ both by degree and kind. Under these circumstances, classifying agents by exclusive properties and substantive

differences is vacuous and often profoundly misleading (cf. Needham 1975 on some drawbacks of ‘monothetic taxonomies’).

If classes of action overlap, agency and patiency need not be exclusive: a person may be more or less willingly part agent, part instrument, part patient in relationships, and at different times. Agents may also be ranked in a hierarchy of command, so the subject of orders at one moment becomes the instrument or effective agent at another. People who imagine themselves agents may turn out from someone else’s point of view, or retrospectively, to have been patients; victims may affect the extent and kind of action to which they are subject. This account lends itself to irony as a dialectic of contrasting views and actions. In Balinese shadow plays of the Mahabarata, the Pandawa, Korawa, *raksasa* (‘demonic’ figures) and servants do not just enact ideas of what it is to be a good or bad prince, but provide distinct perspectives on, and contribute in different ways to, the unfolding action. Balinese paintings may be ironic in this sense, because they expatiate on the relations of castes and kinds of people (Worsley 1984). The point is less whether subjects depended on the king or the king on his subjects in the last analysis, or who relies on whom in a patron-client relation but, as enemies need enemies, how, when and by whom the interdependence is argued and contested. Agency and patiency are situational, overlapping, ironic and under-determined.

As agents never operate in a vacuum, in a sense they are always more or less complex. By a complex agent I mean that decisions and responsibility for action involve more than one party in deliberation or action.⁷ When removing someone’s appendix, the decision is not the consultant’s alone (he could be sued for doing so), but of an agent consisting of consultant and invalid. The consultant, or a proxy, who carries out the surgery on the patient is the appointed instrument. If the ill person is a child, it is totally dependent on the decision of an agent in which it has no say at all (the example is from Collingwood 1942: 141-2). To the sick person, of course, the surgeon may appear as the agent.

In this sense Bali is awash with complex agents. In the analogous case, healers (*balian*) work in conjunction with the patient or their family. Should they not, they invite suspicion of being the instrument of some other, most likely malevolent, agent. (The language of agency is, incidentally, a better way of distinguishing between the overlapping classes of *pengenen* and *pengiwa* than trying either to separate ‘white’ from ‘black’ magic, or to split religion into levels. It does so by focusing on the different ways in which actions are interpreted in different situations and on different occasions; and conveniently avoiding imputing essences to social institutions.) Or, if a ward assembly decides to harvest members’ crops communally, the voting members form a complex agent, work groups its instrument and the farmers whose lands are compulsorily harvested in this way the patients, who sometimes complain vociferously, but usually ineffectually. On the ceiling of the criminal court, the Kertagosa in Klungkung one of the punishments in hell portrayed is two men inverted in a giant mortar

⁷ An example is what anthropologists call ‘corporate groups’, stress being placed on their perduring essential attributes through time (Smith 1974). Recourse to the notion of agency permits a more finely detailed understanding of how such groups work and reconstitute themselves, and how participants talk about these processes, than does a structural analysis. ‘Complex agent’ is, of course, an analytic term. It has, however, parallels in Balinese language use.

being vigorously pummelled by demons for failing to fulfil their parts in the complex agent of the ward.

So far the examples are too trivial to merit introducing ideas of agency. Their usefulness in understanding Balinese ethnography will, I hope, become apparent shortly. For instance, it is often assumed that humans are the only, or at least the ideal or typical, agents. However, not only do Balinese speak of non-human agents, whether they are what we would call 'supra-human' or even 'inanimate objects', but there is also no necessary connexion between humans defined biologically and human agents defined culturally. In Bali, the insane normally, children often, and women in various contexts are not, or only partly, considered possible agents. In other words, they are not able to act, or are not held responsible for their actions. We may do something similar: the child in the surgical illustration is described as 'it'.

Privileging individuals as agents runs the risk of assuming all agents are generically simple, material and unitary. This is far from so. Ascribing agency, intelligence or will to a person is the act of a complex agent, be it parents, a village meeting or whatever, in a particular situation. Anyway, humans may be far more dispersed in various ways than we usually allow. In Freudian interpretations of mind for instance, the 'super-ego' consists, on one reading, of a person's experience or memories of parents, authority and genealogy in the broadest sense; just as the 'id' articulates the person with animality and nature. Similarly the more intelligent scientific alternatives stress a view of mind as part of an eco-system (Bateson 1973; Wilden 1980). If one needs to imagine a stereotypical agent, it may be wiser to start with a complex momentary one, like a meeting, as this has the advantage of highlighting problematic questions of unity, intelligence and will. This approach may be less contrived than might appear. What are usually referred to as person designators in Bali, I, Ni, Ida (low Balinese indices of male and female, and high Balinese for both sexes), may equally be regarded as prefixed of agents. It is not uncommon to speak, for example, of I *Désa* in contexts where it acts as an agent, c.f. Bateson 1973: 90-91.)

Finally, it is useful to note two partly distinct kinds of action. Analytically agents are continually reworking their environment, one another and themselves. However, as much activity is directed to more immediate goals, agents may be changing themselves and others without it being apparent to an observer, or even sometimes to all the participants. Disclaimers notwithstanding, ethnographic imagination still tends to delight in the exotic and erotic, of which Bali offers so much that it is easy to overlook (besides being much harder to study) the subtle shifts by which families, patrons and clients, local groups, courts and so on change themselves and their goals through unpretentious, if interminable, discussions, meetings and activities. As agency is far from confined to moments of dramatic public spectacle, let us start with some everyday instances.

In praise of being unobtrusive

Engkes-engkes pundung tuh.

The dry pundung fruit shrinks and shrinks
(but remains very juicy inside - used to remark
that the rich often hide their wealth and, more
generally, the able their capabilities).

For convenience I shall draw on events which occurred in the settlement of Tengahpadang where I did fieldwork. At this point one runs immediately into the problem of whether it is possible to provide a neutral description. There are quite marked differences between the way locals and other Balinese speak of Tengahpadang on the occasions they do and the more or less disinterested accounts of outsiders. Any such account is potentially agentive, in the sense that descriptions are not only acts of agents, but involve implicit judgements which prefigure the pattern of future action. In other words, descriptions do not occur *in vitro*, but are produced on occasions when someone plans to assert the status quo, find a reason for doing nothing or change something.

For example, according to the Archaeological Service, although Tengahpadang lies in a region which is supposed to be the centre of early Buddhist influence, there is only a minor stone inscription which seems to refer to settlement about a thousand years ago in Pisangkaja, the ward where the two main temples, the Pura *Désa* and Pura Dalem (Kauh) stand.⁸ The implication is that the area is of no great archaeological or serious tourist interest, and so does not merit exploration. Tengahpadang can be described geographically as lying towards the northern reaches of Gianyar, where the alluvial plain gives way to volcanic ridges and deep gorges. Also, as the Agricultural Service consider the land relatively fertile because of the good supply of water and nutrients, there have been plans to redirect part of the irrigation supply (see below). The economic planners with whom I talked regarded the landscape as so thoroughly remoulded to make rice terraces and the dams, aqueducts and even tunnels which carry water down to the densely populated South, that there is little scope for, or point in, development funding. Every description has implications for action.

People in the court centres further South often speak of Tengahpadang and the region round about as having always been rather in the wings of political events and economic changes. In the past they say it was important as a more or less willing contributor of tax and tribute, of labour and soldiers, for the grander undertakings of competing dynasties; and that it was the need to protect this supply of water which brought cadet lines of the powerful Cokordas of Sukawati, Ubud and Pliatan and their rivals, the Pradéwas, the family of the ruler of Gianyar to the area. These courts still regard much of the populace of Tengahpadang as clients on whom they may draw to help perform major rituals and whom they advise on dealings with the state because, they say, the villagers do not understand modern politics. Balinese visitors usually contrast the abundance of offerings, temple ceremonies and (by implied consequence) the rice crop favourably with that of the less conscientious, modern-minded Southerners.

In many encounters with the Southern courts the locals in Tengahpadang go along with this description, especially of their religious and agricultural zeal. They sometimes say that it is wise to be like the pundung and not to reveal more than they need. According to the occasion, they may accede to the image of hill-billies or portray themselves as independent, quite contrary, highlanders who have

⁸ I am grateful to Dr. M. M. Sukarto K. Atmodjo, the then head of the Archaeological Service in Bali, for this information. Tengahpadang, slightly unusually, has two Pura Dalem. Villagers usually say that the Western (Kauh) one in Pisangkaja is older; while the other lies to the East (*kangin*) of the settlement and is more senior, a view given some backing in the Babad Dalem Sukawati discussed below.

not degenerated like the folk down South. Although there is a sizeable high caste population, local Satriya are thought far less powerful or rich than in neighbouring places. And Brahmana are few. Not only is the area devoid of high priests, but the inhabitants of Pisangkaja speak with pride of its reputation that no Brahmana can stay there and remain sane (the last who tried, early this century, was known as Padanda Melalung because he ran around partly naked before his premature death). So low caste priests (*pamangku*) assume a wider range of functions than is common. As we shall see, these images of local distinctiveness may become relevant to the course of social action.

The population of the Balinese countryside is by no means only human. As Tengahpadang is an area of deep ravines, villagers say there are many *tonyo*, people who met bad deaths by falling. They do not go to the next world but remain living in villages along the river banks and several people are thought to be on good terms with them, and even to take them as lovers. Of the eighteen temples in and around the settlement, according to prevailing opinion the deities of five irrupt more or less regularly into human affairs. Whether this is in fact more than elsewhere in Bali or not, when such occasions happen, the more interested people tend to draw upon what they understand from theatre and texts of early Balinese history to see the landscape as strewn with the sites of the past actions of Divinity in some guise.

A brief discussion of Tengahpadang as a community is a good test case of any account of agency because of its apparent inactivity. It is the wards (*banjar*) which have attracted anthropological attention as the social atoms of Balinese society because they are the closest to multi-purpose communities, the smallest units of local government ('*dinas*') and the constituent parts of a larger administrative village, the *perbekelan* under an elected head, the Perbekel. Although villagers refer to Tengahpadang as a *désa* in all kinds of situations, it has sometimes been dismissed as 'in essence (sic), a specifically religious body' which forms 'a group for no other function' (e.g. Geertz, C. 1959: 993). On this account the *désa* curiously resembles van Wouden's East Indonesian ruler whose 'most important characteristic was his inactivity' (1968:165). Matters, however, are not quite so simple.

The term *désa* has also been rejected as a viable analytical notion because it lacks 'a single, uniform social referent' and is used in all sorts of senses (Geertz, C. 1967: 212). This polysemy might equally argue its importance. In Old Javanese (and Sanskrit) usage it connotes country, countryside (as opposed to town), region, place or village (Zoetmulder 1982: 393), which covers pretty well the range of ways the inhabitants of Tengahpadang used the word on different occasions. As a group the *désa* is responsible for the orderly continuity (*tata krama*) of its membership, local ways of doing things (*cara désa*) and the law or tradition handed down (*agama*), particularly concerning the use of offerings, the performance of associated ritual and the welfare of the settlement. It may also be treated as a broader region which is under the authority of local divinities and law. It is often spoken of as a distinct realm (*gumi* or *jagat*, terms used in low and high Balinese respectively for the State or the world) and its members as responsible for support of its main temple, the Pura Désa, and the protection of that realm. Under these circumstances attempts to define a single essential institutional referent for the whole of Bali may be misdirected.

For purposes of membership the *désa* in Tengahpadang is often considered to include the owners of compounds on the traditional settlement land, *tanah désa*, under the leadership of a *bendésa*. They participate (*makrama désa*) in holding festivals in the Pura Désa and meet annually, or more often if need be, in a long pavilion (the *balé agung*) there. Because of its size and because two or three sections are adequate to cope with the demands of the annual temple ritual, the *désa* is usually split for convenience into seven sections, or *banjar désa*, each notionally representing the compound owners of one ward and headed by an elder, the *klian désa*.⁹

This bald decontextualized description however is misleading. The authority or influence of the *désa* is often spoken of as extending over *cara désa* (or sometimes *tata cara*), agama and *krama désa*. The terms overlap and, while lexically they have distinct origins, their contemporary use defies easy definition. It might be best to see them as indicating different aspects, or phases of order. If *cara désa* or *tata cara* suggest orderly ways of doing things, agama (which is often glossed somewhat unsatisfactorily as ‘religion’) and *krama* seem often to imply something valuable which is fixed or handled down and the manner in which it is done respectively. *Krama* is particularly awkward because on occasion it connotes ‘progress, succession or manner’, but also ‘customary behaviour, conduct, order, the rules according to which something happens’ as well as those who embody and are responsible for the continuance of that order (cf. Sharer 1963: 74-5, on the notion of *adat*).

Attempts to establish rigid jural distinctions between the two kinds of *banjar* may present problems. Often, but not always, the *klian dinas* is a compound owner and, if so, is present at *banjar désa* meetings and may exert some ‘informal’ authority as representative of the *banjar dinas*. Similarly, the *klian désa* usually attends *banjar dinas* meetings as a household head, as representative of the *banjar désa* and as an authority on *cara désa*, the proper way of doing things according to *désa* precedent. As both groups deal with land, residents and their welfare, it is difficult both formally and in practice to demarcate unambiguous boundaries of corporate responsibility. At one meeting the relation of *banjar désa* to *banjar dinas* was spoken of, for instance, as like that of guardians of the (unspecified) land and the householders who lived on the land. Matters of *désa* and *dinas* may be interpreted in contradictory ways in different

⁹ . Under Indonesian government regulations, the seven wards of Tengahpadang, with four outlying hamlets, make up (*perbekelan*). The membership of a ward is made up of all the householders within its jurisdiction. Each ward periodically elects a head, the *klian dinas*, who is both its representative in official government matters and a deputy of the *perbekel* (see Warren in press on proposed changes since 1979). Notionally the *désa* of Tengahpadang is quite separate, its membership comprising the owners of compounds on *tanah désa*, the ‘traditional’ residential land of the settlement. The composition of its council is open to some uncertainty. Most people agreed that it should normally include the *bendésa* as head together with the seven *klian désa*. There was less unanimity as to whether, or under what circumstances, the council properly included the priest of the main temple, the Pura Désa or even the priests of the two Pura Dalem, the temples to the underworld where people are buried. In addition, the senior prince in Tengahpadang, a Cokorda, sometimes attended meetings. The grounds for his attendance are unclear. The most common explanations were that he was informed out of politeness or was invited as a witness (see below).

situations. Such descriptions are agentive and are perhaps best understood as part of processes of agency.

Not only then is the extent and nature of *désa* responsibility somewhat open, but there may be overlap between descriptions of action and agents, which is significant if one ceases to treat the *désa* as an essence but as reworked through the actions of human agents. For instance, a meeting of priests and select villagers - neither clearly *dinas* or *désa* - decided just before my fieldwork in 1970 that the birth of twins of opposite sex to a low caste family, which traditionally pollutes the entire community, should no longer constitute an offence at all. What is handed down and fixed is not eternally unchanging but depends on the manner of its application by some agent according to *désa kala patra*, place, occasion and circumstance.

The forms of order which villagers rework through, or as, the *désa* are more or less distinct from those imposed by courts and by the government through the local administration. Different kinds of order presume different kinds of hierarchy of command by which agents are ranked as relatively superior or inferior. So agency varies according to context and particular situations. In national elections almost all adults notionally have similar rights, but in ward affairs household heads represent their members and, in turn, are represented by their elders in dealings with the administrative village head. At *désa* meetings, compound heads speak for everyone who lives in the compound, while settlers in huts (*pondok*) built on agricultural land are notionally not part of the *désa* at all. Nonetheless, in many situations, everyone on the land, including those who live and work in the surrounding area, is bound by local ways of doing things. Yet, were one to judge events by manifest activity, the *désa* would seem to do relatively little.

The confusion arises partly from conflating evident activity with agency and efficacy; and partly from assuming groups have essences. The activities of *désa* and government (*dinas*) overlap. Wards often find themselves applying, following or interpreting *désa* rules and precedents when they legislate or administer the affairs of their members. As a matter of fact many of the written *désa* statutes (most remain oral) were adopted in 1967 from *Banjar* Pisangkaja, from which the *bendésa* came. These statutes (*awig-awig*) in turn had been 'borrowed' from another *désa* some eight kilometres away, (because it was thought to be particularly well organized), after the house of the klian *désa*, with the copy of the statutes in it, had been burned down in 1965. Increasing government intervention in local affairs on the other hand takes the form of ward and administrative village officials taking part in key *désa* decisions.

Rather than try to define some institutional essence of the *désa* then, we may gain greater understanding if we consider the situations and ways in which people in Tengahpadang appeal to the *désa*, argue over or assume it in judicial disputes, in the ways they prepare offerings and conduct rites, and run much of their lives on a daily basis. In this sense the *désa* is continually being reshaped through the gradually changing pattern of its activities and through other groups which assume and variously interpret its existence. The membership of its council also changes: at the routine meetings held under a *Waringin* tree in front of the temple (the pavilion was usually considered too formal), extra people - the prince from Pisangkaja, temple priests, ward elders and others - often drop in. On rarer occasions, when crises blow up, resignations occur or new situations demand, it

may reconstitute itself more drastically. So, to see the *désa* as ‘in essence...a bit of sacred space’ (Geertz, C. 1980: 52) is to transform it from being a complex agent at work into the manifestation of a transcendent essence of locality in human groups. I am not re-inventing the Durkheimian wheel, for it is not simply a question of corporate groups as on-going jural or moral essences, but of how the *désa* is represented, by whom and when.

An example may be worth outlining. In 1980 the *bendésa*, I Ktut Gendul from Pisangkaja who had held the post since 1949, finally decided to resign because he was approaching sixty. Despite his periodic requests to stand down, he had been persuaded to continue partly because he was fairly capable and honest, partly because there was no one else willing and qualified to take on the burden. So a meeting was arranged to discuss the appointment of a successor. If I go into some detail, it is not because I am concerned with ‘constitutional irregularities’, still less with discovering some essential model of the dynamics of decision-making, but because how it came about, who issued the invitations, how the committee was formed are all part of the activities of a continually changing complex agent. For example, I discovered subsequently that a small meeting of ward elders and others had been called some time before, about which neither most of the senior villagers nor I were informed. It seems that possible invitations were mooted then and a local Pradéwa, Déwa Putu Sandat, selected as head of the organizing committee of four, of whom the head and deputy held no public office whatsoever, let alone in the *désa*. This is important. For the meetings were kept low key almost to the point of secrecy. Nor is this necessarily to do with keeping a nosy anthropologist at bay. At times I suspect that my sources of information were as good as most villagers’ but the workings of complex agents in Tengahpadang is often dispersed, inconspicuous and exclusive, and what happens is always open to conflicting accounts.

The meeting took place on the second of March 1980 in a local primary school. Apart from the retiring incumbent and the administrative village head, (the *perbekel*, a local ex-army officer) as witnesses, ward elders, their deputies and the *désa* elders were invited. Not all the priests, however, seem properly to have been notified, as Déwa Putu Sandat circulated two different dates. Of these, all the ward elders, three deputies, four *désa* elders and the priest of the Pura Dalem Kauh in Pisangkaja actually turned up. Their number was almost matched by others who had no formal reason to be there. These included the prince (a Cokorda) from Pisangkaja, nine other men generally interested in local politics including two Pradéwas, five ward ex-heads, an irrigation association official and a ward elder from an outlying hamlet which was part of the administrative village but not of the *désa*. Ktut Gendul sent his apologies and the priest of the *désa* temple did not attend.

The composition of the meeting is important. These were the people who spoke for, and as, the *désa* and whose deliberations were both to determine the criteria for its future head and reshape the *désa* itself. Who invited whom is far from clear. And no one admitted to knowing how the composition of the committee of four had come about. Subsequent inquiry shows one or two people were there partly by chance; others seem to have been quietly included after discussion among key participants. Some were not properly informed; and absences like the *désa* priest’s, to judge from previous occasions, were probably

partly from lack of interest. I was told however that several priests were concerned at the politicization of religion and customary, and were responding by standing aloof, or helplessly by, according to different points of view. By whatever means they came to be there, the meeting included most of the active major interests in the settlement, including members of both local dynastic families. So the formal meeting was not the beginning of the matter: it was the culmination of weeks of quiet meetings and discussion about agendas, tactics, inclusions, exclusions and decisions to stay away.

By the time the participants arrived, the head of the committee had already written the agenda on a blackboard. It read (in Indonesian):

1. Introduction
2. Suggestions from the *bendésa*
 - a. Suggestions from the village administrative head
3. Introduction of suggestions from each *banjar*
4. A break
5. Concerning candidates for *bendésa*
6. Setting up a committee to formulate criteria
7. Conclusion

Déwa Putu Sandat, the head of the committee, apologized in Indonesian for sending out notes with conflicting dates for the meeting. He pointed out that all those present had been entrusted by the people with organizing the election of a new *bendésa* and inquired if the elders had discussed the matter with their respective groups. (Whether the elders belonged ward or *désa* was not specified; just as in the agenda '*banjar*' referred ambiguously to *dinas* and *désa*.) In turn, each of the ward or *désa* elders replied. The administrative village head then announced Ktut Gendul had dropped in earlier to offer apologies for being away for the day on unspecified business. He then remarked that the selection of a new head should comply with government regulations and that it was a difficult matter because the position was demanding, like a mother or father in a household. At the same time the *désa* also had to be progressive (an apparent reference to reorganization of local government which was in the air). He then switched to Balinese to ask what their respective assemblies had proposed. One ward elder piped up that they had already chosen their candidate, to be told by others that they had not got that far and he should observe the agenda.

The meeting went on to record the criteria which had been put forward. After a short break they got down to the serious business of deciding what stipulations to adopt. The short list required that any candidate be literate in Indonesian and Balinese; be between 21 and 50 years old and in good health (doctor's certificate required); be honest and without a bad reputation, nor be suspected of crime or complicity in the abortive Communist coup of 1965; and be versed in matters of Balinese custom and Hinduism. The *bendésa* should have assistants but they were not to be concentrated in one ward. These points were common to most proposals and so uncontroversial. The remaining conditions caused more of a problem.

A suggestion that candidates must not be *cacat* ('physically defective, deformed, disabled') started debate over whether the Indonesian definition was the same as the Balinese *cacad*. In the end the priest present elaborated on the Balinese criteria which were, he said, the relevant ones. A more serious difficulty arose over whether the candidate need own a compound, and so be a member of

the *désa* himself. One *désa* elder argued that, as they were supposed to be progressive, the office should be open to everyone. This caused concern and the matter was referred to I Suberatha, the ward head of Pisangkaja and, more important it seems, a senior local policeman. He invoked various government ordinances (the relevance of which escaped those I asked afterwards) before launching into a forceful speech in Balinese about how it was impossible for someone who was not a member of the *désa* to know about and take part in, let alone be listened to on, matters to do with festivals and custom. He was greeted with respectful silence and the meeting moved without comment to the next item.

A ward elder raised the issue of stipends for all *désa* officials. The priest pointed out that the size and nature of a salary for *bendésa* still had to be discussed, let alone for other officials. The latter, he added, was a subject for the *désa* anyway, not for that meeting. A Pradéwa with no official position took up the question of sanctions, were the candidate to retire prematurely from office and suggested the incumbent be fined Rp. 10,000 (about \$10) and imprisoned for a month. This was greeted with vociferous approval until I Suberatha pointed out that incarceration would involve problems (in part over who would pay for his food!). Upon which it was agreed that non-financial punishment should be left to the candidate's own *désa* section as it saw fit.

The meeting ended without a clear programme for how to implement its proposals or for gathering again. Nothing further had happened five months later when I left the field. Several people commented afterwards that, for this reason, the meeting had only had limited success (*pikolihné wantah akidik*) and few felt good (*suksema*) about it.

There are minor points of interest. If *désa* and civil affairs were exclusive classes, there were no grounds for the administrative village head and ward elders to be there at all. Overlap does not, however, entail lack of distinction: the issue of sanctions and stipend were argued to be *désa* affairs. (The latter had been introduced, I was told, in such a way as to open the way for public remuneration of *désa* officials who are traditionally unpaid. Government intervention in *désa* matters met with a temporarily unsuccessful counter-claim.) The severe penalty for premature retirement also reflects local, rather than Indonesian, concern with abuse of public office, but there was an interesting attempt to involve the police as an extra avenue for punishment. Unlike most *désa* and ward meetings, discussion was largely in Indonesian (the language of government), while a few speakers kept to Balinese or switched into it to make or contest an important point: the discussion of *cacad* and compound ownership for instance were mainly in Balinese. It is possible to interpret events as part of the gradual modernization of the Balinese. Whether this turns out to be the sole, or main, effect remains to be seen. The composition of the meeting, the cross-referral between institutions and the complexity of language switching suggests that categories overlap in ways which permit interested parties to construe what happened in different ways in the future. More immediately the same applies to the omission to decide who would implement the meeting's decisions and how.

My reason for introducing the meeting was as an example of a complex agent at work. Far from being the instantiation of some essence of locality, religiosity or whatever, the *désa* is re-constituted through a long process of activities, deliberations and referrals, of which the meeting was only a small part. The train

of discussions and meetings, some more public some more private, are the *désa*, in the form of the participants and absentees, reworking itself. This may at times be made quite explicit, as when the committee head noted that those present were entrusted by the *désa* to represent it. ‘Represent’ has, of course, two senses: ‘to speak, or act, on behalf of’ and ‘to portray as’. The ambiguity in our term points to the importance of agency, because one represents something as such-and-such to someone on a particular occasion (c.f. Goodman 1981: 9, something similar happens with words like ‘express’). There is no such thing as essentially representing: it is always the act of an agent in a particular situation.

As a complex agent the meeting had access to, and called upon, expert information on religion, custom and government plans. It could note the opinions and feelings of its members and other groups or ignore them, as it did with the ward elder who spoke out of turn. It engaged in reflective deliberation through a dialectic of different points of view and interests, abstentions and agreements to differ. And its will was its decisions as recorded, remembered and reinterpreted. One might note that no one considered it necessary to consult the gods to whom all this activity is ultimately supposed to be directed.

The *désa* should not be conflated either with some perduring essence which manifests itself in groups or with the office of *bendésa* who is part agent, part instrument (which makes in a different way the Balinese point that leaders are as much the servants as masters).¹⁰ Equally the *désa* is not constituted of whoever feels like taking part: there are, as we saw, elaborate mechanisms of exclusion, as there are situational, pragmatic and semantic restrictions on what is likely to be said, or accepted. One might note the degree to which the agenda, once agreed, was adhered to. Complex agents also work in an environment occupied by others of greater or lesser importance. Here too though there is ambiguity. Were the administrative village head and the old *bendésa* there formally as *pelindung*, an Indonesian word which implies protection, patronage, supervision? Or were they *saksi*, witnesses, a crucial role in Balinese society? Whether the *perbekel* was, or was supposed to be, there as the representative of district and provincial government, or I Suberatha of the police, is only part of the story. Events are what agents make of them; and make of them subsequently.¹¹

¹⁰ . One could argue that I have not dealt with basic Balinese conceptions of the *désa*, nor with the institutional framework of authority, but merely with informal practice and groupings. Such an argument assumes there to be fundamental conceptions or structures usually held to be evident at moments of crisis, a view which is not borne out by close ethnographic scrutiny. The fallback position that such notions may be incompletely instantiated in any instance but are necessary analytical abstractions imposes alien and transitory academic categories in an unwarranted act of agency. Empirically, it conflates assertions that there are such fundamentals, which Balinese may make in particular situations, with their actual, if transcendental, existence (cf. Hobart 1986, on essentializing as a style of speech or strategy). The argument embodies the kind of essentialism in much Western academic thought which I am questioning.

¹¹ To avoid confusion, the approach I am advocating is not a model of ‘action systems’ refried. Recourse to ‘system’ is inappropriate where so much is under-determined and open to conflicting interpretation. As I use ‘act’ or ‘action’ here, it is neither positivist, which excludes inaction, absence and silences, nor does it draw a sharp and unnecessary dichotomy between a behavioural world of causes of action and a mental world of reasons for action. Rather I am concerned with how the categories overlap and how assertions and interpretations are acts just as actions may be attributed with significance. If the themes of complex agents, responses to previous actions and constantly shifting attributions of agency, instrumentality and patiency are not fully distinguished

The meeting also illustrates something important about the nature of local agency in Tengahpadang. At two crucial moments - what *cacad* referred to and whether being progressive was more important than traditional knowledge and status - responsibility for the decision were deferred onto representatives of what could always be construed as superior agents. The priest's and policeman's pronouncements, unlike most other contributions, were adopted without discussion. If villagers ran into trouble, I was told afterwards, they would not be to blame. The onus lay on the policeman and priest with respect to their superiors. Responsibility had been deferred. So, while the meeting set about determining what was *manut* ring *désa*, *kala*, *patra*, what was appropriate to the place, occasion and circumstances, in a broader context it adopted a potentially passive stance in the face of government and God. 'It is much safer to obey than to govern.' (Thomas À Kempis, The imitation of Christ Ch. 9).

Willing patients?

Cara I Legu ngalih manusa.

Like a mosquito looking for humans
(it seems to will, and to determine,
the manner of its own death).

At times, people and public assemblies in Tengahpadang speak and act as if they had a certain mastery over their own affairs. This may involve confrontation, more eristical than dialectic, with notionally superior agents. At the time of my first fieldwork two men from nearby settlements were both executed by their co-villagers in defiance of the police. In one case an habitual thief stole a sewing machine from another *désa* member and was seized by villagers as a body from armed officers at the local police station by sheer superiority of numbers and torn to pieces on the road (at a place where tourists sometimes stop to photograph and comment on the beauty of Bali). In the second, a man was condemned to death for insulting the community, *kereng marusak ring jagat*, 'causing serious damage in the world' (one might note that the world here is equated with the community). Despite a formal police warning, he was promptly killed. The whole ward was found guilty of manslaughter in court and took turns in going to the small district gaol. Honour seemed satisfied on both sides.

The people of Tengahpadang are subject in different ways to courts, governments and gods. There is no necessary contradiction between such assertions of autonomy and dependence. Not only are the occasions often different but, as the review of overlapping classes might suggest, they may at once be agents and instruments in carrying out their own or others' decisions, and the patients of others' actions.

This is perhaps the moment to stress again that effective agency is established in no small part *ex post facto*. In a more Balinese idiom, actions *laksana* are judged by their outcome (*pikolih*). Precisely what the outcome signifies however is still always open to contestation. For example, the post-colonial period in Tengahpadang in retrospect has been marked by the confrontation of the two courts of Cokordas with leading members of a small local kin group who

here, it is partly because they overlap in the ethnography, partly because this article is intended as exploratory.

humiliated them both with impeccable timing and panache (for details, see Hobart 1979: 379-85 and 434-47). The deaths of several of the leaders during the abortive Communist coup of 1965, ensured a measure of revenge for what the Cokordas regard as the effrontery (*tulah* is significantly both the cause - being too brave, or forward - and the effect - a punishment or curse). Since these events the Cokordas have failed to obtain office as *bendésa* or administrative village head and have descended to become mere ward members.¹² As against this, their membership is partly honorary, they are often included in important meetings; and their family connexions may make them powerful patrons or brokers. The events are more or less clear. Whether they indicate the rise of upstarts, evidence of deep-seated caste or class resentment, a step towards 'modernization' or merely the decline of already debilitated aristocrats depends on the situation of their airing. Matters in Bali are rarely entirely clear cut.

Hildred Geertz draws a nice distinction between the dramatic and dramatized (or dramaturgical) workings of complex agents in Batuan, which involved the court, Brahmanas and peasants (in press). If the confrontations I mentioned with the police were dramatic and uncertain in outcome, there seems often to have been a flavour of the dramaturgical in particular challenges to local courts. The earliest recollected encounter occurred during the Japanese occupation when many villagers felt that the Cokordas were hogging, instead of redistributing, the meagre allowance of cloth. Feelings were given ironic expression when one man staged a grand procession through the village past the court trailing fifteen yards of material, which he had managed to obtain, in the dust behind him.

There are, however, other occasions when such eristics are widely considered inappropriate, namely in dealing with gods, or Divinity. Despite the frequency with which reference is made to religion and the role of the gods in Bali, outsiders seem to have great difficulty in appreciating the extent to which Divinity in some aspect is treated either as an extraordinarily powerful agent or as the ultimate source of all agency. The subject is of course too vast to encompass here. Anyway, in keeping with my attempt to outline the possible relevance of a model of agency, rather than plumb texts or reconstruct the essential features of Divinity from far-from-passive memories, let me sketch the bare outline of a series of events which took place in Tengahpadang at Pura Duur Bingin in 1979 and 1980 and which illustrates how gods, courts and villagers combine in the workings of a complex agent.

Pura Duur Bingin is probably Tengahpadang's most widely known temple partly because it has two Barong Landung, captured in war from Negara in South Gianyar, which are famous for curing human infertility. (These are two giant puppets of a man and woman, sometimes associated with Jèro Gedé Macaling, a source of pestilence from the nearby island of Nusa Penida.) The temple unusually has shrines to four different major deities. The main healers in the settlement work there through two of these deities who often enter and speak through people in the temple or even outside.

12. There are 65 households of Pradéwa in Tengahpadang compared with 9 Cokorda (17 if one includes the related, but lower status Anak Agung) but the former have been ordinary ward members for as long as anyone can recall, and have been primarily successful as ward and administrative village heads. The last head of the sub-district to come from Tengahpadang was a Pradéwa from 1940-43. Since that time no local Satriya has achieved higher office.

According to various sources of information, two or three years earlier an event which was regarded as curious or worse occurred in the temple. Water was seen coming out of a fissure in the tiles of one of the shrines (to Batara Ratu Teruna Gedé). After a meeting officials from Tengahpadang sought the advice of the priest of the temple of Tirta Arum, whom they often consulted as a medium on serious matters. They were told that the water was a gift for the devotion of the deity's followers (the term was *panjak*, literally 'slaves', a forceful statement of patency) and they should perform *kakaryanan aci pengenteg*, a not-insubstantial rite. This was duly done. A year or so later during the temple ceremony a ruby was discovered in the shrine: those who slept overnight there heard a voice calling, were unable to sleep and felt inexplicably hot. The temple priest had a dream in which a small child dressed in white came into the temple. After discussion it was felt that the rite should be repeated. The matter rested there for the time being.

Just before Eka Dasa Rudra, the great ceremony held at rare intervals at the island's foremost temple in Besakih (see Bagus 1974), the priest's wife fell very ill and *désa* officials decided to inquire from a medium in a nearby village, who said that she would die but, if she prayed (*nunas ica*) in Pura Duur Bingin, her death would be delayed till after the ceremony. Unfortunately she died only ten days later. (On instructions from Besakih, she was not cremated till after Eka Dasa Rudra.) Following this there was a long period of discussion over what to do, as it was thought some major action was needed. A meeting of leading figures decided to ask the priest from Tirta Arum to come to the temple again for the appropriate deity to speak through him (*nadi*). He refused however, saying he was not brave enough. The villagers by this stage were taking the matter increasingly seriously, so a deputation also went to ask the family of Cokordas in Ubud if they would permit a reading of their family chronicle, the Babad Dalem Sukawati, in Pura Duur Bingin because it was thought that parts of it related to the founding of Tengahpadang and to the building of the temple. (It did: one purpose of preliminary discussions is to try to ensure potentially embarrassing situations do not arise.) So a further meeting of the *désa* decided to await the reading of the chronicle.

On 16th. December 1979, several thousand people gathered in and around Pura Duur Bingin for the reading. A local man was asked to read the original in Old Javanese (*ngawacèn*) and the Cokordas chose I Ktut Rinda from Belahbatuh to the South to interpret in Balinese (*masaan*). The Cokorda, who had to be present as a witness, had gone fishing, so everyone waited for several hours. I heard someone remark that he was probably using a short rod in a very small pond - an allusion to his reputation, deserved or otherwise, for sexual dalliances. Eventually he turned up with a large entourage and proceedings began.

Much of the reading was taken up with adumbrating the historical progress of the Cokorda family after a quarrel over succession, until a certain Cokorda Ktut Segara settled in (or was sent to) Tengahpadang to be joined by his elder brother (Ida Déwa Agung Madé) during a military campaign against Sukawati.¹³ The reading then described how a series of strange portents began which were taken to indicate that the deity of the Pura Dalem Kangin wished the Cokordas to order a

¹³ Henk Schulte Nordholt estimates the date to be around 1790-1800 (personal communication).

new temple, Pura Duur Bingin, to be built with shrines to the Goddess of Lake Batur (Ida Batari Danu), the Goddess of rice (Ida Batari Sri) and the deities of the nine directions (Batara Nawa Sanga). The Cokordas also decided who should be responsible for supporting the temple. Some years later, the text went on, famine and pestilence struck the area and the Cokordas took this a sign of neglect of their ancestors and so built a different temple to them (a Pura Penataran Agung). After brief consultation with the Cokorda the reading then stopped abruptly as the narrative moved away from Tengahpadang. The meeting broke up and nothing further was said, nor done, about the extraordinary events as far as I could tell during the remaining seven months of fieldwork. Most of those I spoke to, however, said the outcome had been good and they felt *suksema*.

The contrast was striking between the deep and widespread concern expressed over the proper steps to ensure that the wishes of the deities in Pura Duur Bingin were carried out and then the dismissal of the whole question after the reading. There seems to have been no further discussion between the Cokordas, village officials or anyone else. Nor, perhaps in keeping with local tradition, was there any attempt to consult a high priest during the entire time, except to ask the authorities in Besakih on the required procedure when a death occurred at a most inauspicious time. For a day or so different accounts of what the reading had actually said about local history circulated in the coffee stalls rapidly to be replaced by other topics.¹⁴

It may simply be that reading a *babad* is not dramatic enough to sustain Balinese attention, or that I exaggerated peoples' seriousness to myself. I doubt either would be an adequate explanation of so intricate a pattern of events. As I was walking away from the temple afterwards, I overheard some remarks, the significance of which I did not appreciate at the time. They were that the priest from Tirta Arum was not brave enough to come to Pura Duur Bingin but the Cokorda was. Behind this we may trace a tangled tale which sheds some light on how local people construed Divinity, priests, princes and their own involvement as agents on this occasion.

By way of background to the events related here, some twenty years earlier a woman who was passing the temple of Duur Bingin claimed she was possessed and told that the god (unspecified) wished Malik Sumpah, a large rite of purification, to be performed. As the group which had supported the temple was unable alone to meet the costs, after a series of meetings five wards agreed to take charge and also took over the benefits from the temple lands. Although the original worship group had been temporarily dispersed and ineffective, its members continued to be among the most active in supporting the temple. (Their role was however complicated in organizing the meetings in 1979 and 1980 and the reading of the *babad*, the text of which partly confirmed their early links to the temple.) Some years later, another deity in Pura Duur Bingin is thought to have intervened on behalf of its worshippers. A serious row had blown up with villagers higher up the mountains who had been siphoning off water from the streams on which many farmers from Tengahpadang relied. The Barong Landung were marched up there in procession to confront the purported offenders after

¹⁴ A full account of events in Pura Duur Bingin and the reading from the Babad Dalem Sukawati would take a monograph to discuss properly.

which, it is said, the water supply returned to normal. The reference to the devotion of the followers in the priest of Tirta Arum's first trance was taken as confirmation that this step had met with divine approval.

Through dreams, voices, mysterious objects and death, Divinity demonstrated its capacity for action at Pura Duur Bingin on a scale which it would be foolhardy to have ignored. When powerful agents irrupt into human affairs in this way, what response to make requires some finesse. In this instance it took years of innumerable meetings, consultations with mediums, several sets of offerings, the authorities at Besakih and the refusal of at least one priest to go near the temple before the reading of the *babad* may have brought some resolution, even if temporary.

One way to settle matters is through inviting a medium to indicate what course of action the deity demands. Mediumship is a dramatic exemplification of a human becoming (*nadi* is literally 'to become') the instrument of a higher agent, in this case Divinity. Brahmana and Satriya are lothe to assume this role (one of the mediums consulted during this sequence was Wèsiya though). So direct a patency seems inappropriate to their general assertion of effective agency. The priest from Tirta Arum declared himself *sing bani*, not brave enough to undertake the task. As with *tulah*, bravery and excess are finely honed differences. The offence of the Kepuh tree is that it was *tulah* in openly questioning the sage about what he was up to.

Apart from the awkward moment during Eka Dasa Rudra when the priest's wife died, it is interesting that no attempt seems to have been made to consult high priests.¹⁵ The *désa* turned to the local rulers instead. This exemplifies two earlier remarks. The first is the potential overlap of the functions of Brahmana and Satriya. The second is that, when help was needed, people in Tengahpadang preferred to turn to temple priests, so giving further substance to their supposed long-standing avoidance of Brahmanas. The villagers' choice was also interesting because, although Pradéwas outnumber Cokordas and are closely related to the ruling house of Gianyar, most people thought the Cokorda was more likely to be efficacious. Several reasons for the choice were mentioned informally. The prince who was approached to be the witness was a leading member of the closest powerful court, which owned a manuscript thought to have details on the circumstances of the building of temples in Tengahpadang. He was establishing a name for being knowledgeable in matters of this kind and his father had been a textual expert and healer (*balian usada*). Furthermore, he used to make barong (at one stage he had repainted the masks of the temple's Barong Landung) which requires one to be able to handle potentially dangerous forces, or *sakti*, and in fact he subsequently became a *balian usada* himself. Out of such partly contingent factors, reputations for efficacy are built.

This reference to *sakti* is relevant because when I asked why the priest was not brave enough to come, everyone seemed to agree that it was because he was

¹⁵ In fact only one occasion comes to mind when villagers referred a problem to a high priest and then on the suggestion of the court in Ubud. This was ten years earlier during a terrible thunder storm when part of a giant Waringin tree in the graveyard was struck by lightning and broke off. People sheltering nearby said that they saw a giant snake (a *naga*, in other versions it was two snakes fighting) in the tree. The high priest advised that this was a sign that the Batara Dalem Kangin wished daily offerings to be performed for forty-two days, which was duly done.

not *sakti* enough to dare encounter the deities at Pura Duur Bingin. *Sakti* is often glossed as ‘mystical power’ but, as this is established by results, (*pikolih*, it indicates above all effectiveness. The Cokorda specialized not just in carving the masks for barong but in carrying out the offerings, invocations and other acts which make them efficacious (*ngapasupatinin barong*). *Ngapasupatinin* (from *pasupati* which is both a name for Siwa and the arrow used by Arjuna in the Mahab(h)arata) is to make something an effective instrument for its appropriate future use. All important tools used by humans, from manuscripts and orchestras to vehicles and houses, require this before they are put to work. There is a connexion, as we shall see, with Mpu Kuturan and medicinal plants.

This introduces an important problem about how attributions of agency are derived, displaced or transferred. Such attributions include *sakti* which is the power to act effectively. At times people in Tengahpadang speak as if the temple itself were an agent. And what was the role of the *babad* in the reading? *Babad* are often called dynastic chronicles although the expression ‘dynastic’ presumes what these documents attempt to claim; and it is questionable whether they are read as chronological accounts. *Babad* (or *amabad* in Old Javanese) is clearing of forest and settling land, an assertion of original agency. The manuscript is itself initially the product of a complex agent of a court, the prima facie agent of the writer and the Divinity whose activities are recorded in it.¹⁶ It may also become an instrument of the family and of Divinity whose actions it records. What is more, lontar may attain efficacy, as it were, in their own right. They may be used to cure and, injudiciously handled, can drive one insane. In another sense, they are not so much eternal truths captured on lontar leaf as brought to life through reading. They are made effective through their use. So I avoided rendering *masaan* as ‘translate’ as it implies the translator is passive, which ill fits the seriousness of the task. Yet again, *Ktut Rinda* was also the instrument, however respected, of whatever agent brought about the reading. From different points of view Balinese may, for example, refer to temples, lontar, witnesses or the performance itself as the effective agents.

Are we then in a position usefully to speak of a single clearly evident agent in the affairs of Pura Duur Bingin? The answer, I think, is that there was a series of complex and changing agents in response to the original signs attributed subsequently to temple deities. As before, it consisted of those who engaged in the endless meetings. It embraced at one point the priest from Tirta Arum when he did go into trance. He subsequently excluded himself and the Cokorda stepped in. By his presence, and in agreeing to witness the reading, agency and the responsibility for what transpired in the future was, in a sense, shifted from the *désa* onto him. This, I submit, offers a better account than most for the sudden cessation of action for the time being. It seemed as if responsibility for dealing with divine agency had been deferred onto someone willing and, from the success

¹⁶ Writing of the *Visnudharmottara*, a work justifying the Pancaratra Vaisnava vision of kingship in eighth-century India, Inden has suggested it

was produced by and for a complex agency consisting of Pancaratra adepts and of an imperial king and his court...The formal agent of the text was a Pancaratra adept and his acolytes...But they did not act alone. They compiled the text in a dialectical relationship with an imaginary Agent, the god Visnu...At the same time, however, they were engaged in a series of dialectical relations with a king and the persons of his court... (n.d.: 53).

of the reading, able to accept it. Now the reputation of the Cokorda in question did not exist in the abstract. It has been gradually built up through occasions of this and other kinds. In inviting him to preside over the reading, the people of Tengahpadang were contributing, however humbly, to re-creating and maintaining the Cokorda dynasty and the prince's reputation. At the same time the reading both confirmed what locals maintained, namely that Tengahpadang was in an area of strong potential divine agency which it could handle without needing to call on Brahmana; and restructured the details of that knowledge. More than that, the truth of that history existed in the confirmation. Without such events, history, gods and princes would pass away.

One cannot quite say, however, that the prince himself was the simple agent of what transpired. The issue was discussed earlier at length among senior members of the courts in Ubud; and he turned up with an entourage of family, followers, textual experts, local politicians and others. My language of 'complex agents' may sound a little forced but, once one watches the process of deliberation and action in a palace for a few days, the term takes on a new significance. What is perhaps more interesting is the way in which, in largely assuming the role of patients by deferring responsibility, the populace of Tengahpadang played an important part in shaping the pattern of action which was to come. Patients are not just helpless objects but are directly involved in determining the nature and working of agency. For, the suitability of agents to the matter in hand is always open to contestation. The mutterings about the Cokorda's sexual peccancies (a not-unfamiliar charge in villagers' relations with courts) are part of the continual testing, probing and reconsidering the appropriateness, and so the efficacy, of agency.¹⁷ Like the mosquito in the proverb, villagers help to determine the manner in which they encounter superior power.

Introducing agency offers a possible explanation of various rather perplexing features, including the otherwise curiously abrupt ending, of proceedings in Pura Duur Bingin. It still leaves us with the question of why the reading should provide a resolution of events, however temporary. Reading the *babad* provided public recognition of the ultimate nature of agency behind the temple's history.¹⁸ In establishing who founded the temple and, more important, what deity commanded this, the reading seems to have achieved its purpose. Yet, is there not some

¹⁷ Despite persistent questioning I could find no link of *sakti* and sexuality, as Anderson suggests for Java (1972). Assertions of sexual potency are perhaps better seen as part of the language of the claim and denial of agentive abilities in which princes may stress the extent of their command over all and sundry, while villagers are more likely to attribute what they interpret as sexual excesses to an imbalance of desire (*kama*) over a sense of propriety (*darma*).

My title is, among other things, a reference to Anderson's work, *Mythology and the tolerance of the Javanese*, 1965, and the possible parallels between Javanese tolerance and the patience of which Balinese are capable in so many situations. The connexion, I suspect, may lie not only in historical experiences (at times different) of being the patients of others' actions, but also in a similar ironic cultural recognition of the intricacies of agency and the elaboration of strategies of patency.

¹⁸ The narrative, incidentally, wound together the central role of the deity of the Pura Dalem Kangin with the recognition of the Cokorda family as appropriate people to carry out the required actions, thereby doubly confirming the choice of Cokorda. (Dalem, or 'inside(r)', connotes elevated status and here is a euphemism for Durga, who is so powerful that it is unwise to mention her by name.) In this the *babad* was also serving as a *prasasti*, a eulogy of the deities of the temple. *Prasasti* may also be read on such occasions, if they exist.

incongruity between representing Divinity as tamely satisfied when Its presence or agency was identified and acknowledged, but also as an all-powerful, and indeed the ultimate, agent in Bali?

Demureness, deferment and deference

Nasak durèn, nasak manggis.

A ripe durian, a ripe mangosteen.

(A man's desire for a woman is quickly obvious;

A woman's desire for a man is usually hidden.)

By way of response to discrepant visions of Divinity, can one adumbrate a model of agency for Bali which will, if possible, encompass representations of the State, priesthood and God? Creating such models - whether these are heuristic, explanatory, purportedly indigenous or whatever; and whether they are about the political systems of Highland Burma or the nineteenth-century Balinese State - remains a goal of much anthropological writing. At least three variant models can easily be teased out of the available material and articulated with different titles of Divinity.

The first is a model of ordered hierarchy of the kind portrayed in *babad* like the *Babad Bulèlèng* and articulated around Divinity, here Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, as at once transcendent (*niskala*) and immanent (*sakala*, Worsley 1972: 79). In Old Javanese usage *widhi* connotes 'rule, law, ordering, regulation'; *kawidhi* 'to command, order'; *was* 'power, force, dominion'; and *widhiwasa* 'the power of fate or destiny' (Zoetmulder 1982: 2262-3, 2213-4). So Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa is Divinity as order, what orders, the power of order(s) or of fate; kings being the patients, instruments and agents of order and orders. As orders it is experienced by the populace as royal power; as order, or *d(h)arma* ('the rule of life and conduct, as established by divine disposition' Zoetmulder 1982: 367), it is expressed as morality or good conduct (*susila*, see Worsley 1972: 43-44). Divinity as transcendent has an immanent presence by which It thinks and acts. So priests are, however imperfectly, Its intelligence; and princes Its Will on earth. Its workings are not held always to be understandable through reason alone, but to be enshrined and partly revealed in texts. To the extent that Divinity is transcendent, priestly knowledge is necessarily inadequate; whereas the king as immanent agent has powers which are less constrained and their possible extension is limited largely by manifest failure (Worsley 1972: 43). The drawback is the possibility of endless replication with local princes aping kings.

An advantage of this model is that it makes sense of otherwise puzzling features of the portrayal of that most active of rulers, Panji Sakti, in the *Babad Bulèlèng*. For, as Worsley notes,

the power latent within him appears representative of a legitimating authority which has pervaded his being from outside himself (1972: 37).

Indeed the king appears at moments as the instrument or patient of his sword (*keris*) in the act which removes his innocent rival.

It is upon the initiative of the kris and by means of its power that Panji Sakti murders Pungakan Gendis. Indeed, the kris instructs Panji Sakti that all he has

to do is to point the kris in the direction of Pungakan Gendis and that the kris will see to his death (1972: 24).

Is it the *keris*, or Divinity in the *keris*, which is the agent though?

There is another model of agency, however, about which much has been written but rarely as a coherent vision - a neglect, I suspect, due partly to Western academics' moral and epistemological difficulties in coping with it, although it has interesting parallels in our societies with what we call 'the market', 'market forces' and so on. It is a world not of ordered hierarchy, but of unstable competition which passes under the label of 'magic', 'witchcraft' or 'mystical power' (*sakti*) in which chance, contingency and fate are central. There are many occasions, especially at night, when people in Tengahpadang consider themselves in danger of being caught in a world of war and perpetual struggle among princes, (*balian*) and others who lay claim to *sakti*, over whom Divinity presides, perhaps most commonly as Siwa, or his aspect Durga. In this vision, (esoteric) knowledge is power and humans may use it in part according to their wills. Divinity, in the form of particular gods, may also become immanent and communicate with humans when supplicated (*nakti*) or may reveal themselves unexpectedly (*wahyu*) and offer gifts. The two models are, of course, related because they are overlapping classes, if heuristic opposites, and entail one another (cf. Vickers 1986: 19-20 on the related overlap of *kakawin* and *kidung* literature). They may also be combined in different ways. In the *Babad Bulèlèng*, for instance, any tension between the unwarranted killing of a rival and the insistence on the moral foundation of the realm is narratively resolved by appealing to the king's duty to be good and generous to his people (Worsley 1972: 43-45), while extolling the unleashing of his destructive power against enemies (1972: 40-42).

To these two one might add a third contrasting model, found in some popular Balinese accounts of cosmology, of Divinity as detached from material concerns. Here the cosmos, *bhuwana agung*, and the self, *bhuwana alit*, are related in diverse ways, while the intelligence and will of Divinity are perhaps most obviously instantiated in holy men (*sadhu*) or monks (bhiksu, wiku, upon whom the king is advised to model himself in the *Babad Bulèlèng*, 1972: 43-44). Divinity here may be represented as Ida Sang Hyang Sepi. *Sepi* is silence, stillness, absence (also *sunya*, another mode of referring to this aspect of the Absolute) and the precondition of action.

Unfortunately no sooner are such models laid out than their inadequacies become evident. For a start they involve the quite unacceptable oversimplification of a very rich corpus of texts and local practices. Not only do they amalgamate different genres (see Vickers 1986: 187-96) on the differences in emphasis between *babad*, the Malat tales and the more priestly *kakawin*), but they also presuppose a unitary view of the world in any genre, say *babad*. Apart from largely assuming that we understand how to read different kinds of Balinese texts (or interpret practice), it is further taken for granted that there is, in any instance, one correct reading. This is to presume rather a lot.

These difficulties pale beside what the existence of such models presupposes. They commit one to transcendent agents - Divinity, kingship, peasantry - whose

contingent instantiation is held to account for variation,¹⁹ rather than to actual agents working in different situations. There is much (not always so) innocent pleasure to be derived from creating system. Whenever I did so, to my chagrin, the Balinese to whom I proudly revealed the fruits of my labours at best agreed that there were situations when one could look at it that way. The issue is not simply that folk and analytical categories differ, but that most anthropological explanation, from functionalism and structuralism to hermeneutics, anticipates, and may effectively impose, system of certain kinds. A great problem with mapping abstract essentials is that it overlooks the extent to which facts are under-determined by any theory and so omits all the uncertainty, discussion and openness which we saw characterizes many activities in Bali. By ignoring this anthropologists condemn themselves to roll up, like the U.S. cavalry, in the last reel when most of the action is over.²⁰

Essentialism in some form is a perennial problem in academic analysis. Consider the assertion that kings were gods to their subjects or themselves: is it one of predication, identity or analogy? Was divinity a property of kings? Were kings in the class of gods (and so presumably shared their essence)? Or were kings merely treated analogously to gods, in which case by Balinese criteria the connexion is false (Hobart 1982: 15). Much of the confusion over divine kingship depends on an imported notion of essence and properties. Not all such essentialism should be attributed to outsiders however. The models I outlined do have a certain reality, not because they constitute the absolute presuppositions of Balinese culture or its 'inter-text', but because Balinese on occasion do enunciate what they hold to be definitive. In other words, essentializing is a strategy, or style, to which Balinese resort in various circumstances.

If under-determination makes gentle mockery of cravings for system, it also allows for the irony of contrasted perspectives. An example should suffice. Writers on Bali tend to talk of *sakti* as something possessed (sometimes literally) by the movers and shakers of the earth. Now in Tengahpadang, it happens to be local temples which have a reputation for enabling people to become *sakti*. A well known story relates how a poor village Pradéwa, Déwa Ktut Belog (so called because although he was diligent, he was stupid, *belog*, and illiterate), was walking home past Pura Bolo in tears because people had been making fun of him at a wake by making him try to read a palm leaf manuscript. A voice asked why he was crying. He went close to see two giant men, one of whom inscribed something three times on his tongue. When he returned the villagers teased him as before, but he astonished everyone by now reading *kawi* fluently. Such gifts (*pica*), I was told, may be granted if one is *utama-sor*, in a particularly good or bad condition, like being wretchedly miserable *sebet pisan*, *sor pisan*. The reason given was that all things or states are inclined over time to transform (*matemahan*) into their opposite (*tungkalik*), a process precipitated when a state is

¹⁹ Postulating several models, which between them account for observable variation, is merely a subtler form of the Platonism of which Gellner (1973: 93, 98-9) accused Leach in his work on the Kachin (1954).

²⁰ The sheer volume on the literature on Bali makes it a relatively favoured case. Sweeping generalizations are increasingly liable to founder on the rocks of research which shows up regional differences, alternative texts and practices and so forth. I shudder to think what happens in those societies where there has been only one, and hence omniscient, anthropologist.

excessive (*bes*, cf. Hobart 1987: 30-31). This view of life is replete with ironic possibilities.²¹ So, while Déwa Ktut Belog was rescued from his plight, princes who assert their *sakti* run the risk that lesser mortals can do the same and claim to have defeated them. The greater one is, the greater the risk of being humbled. Ethnography confutes most model-building.

Irony may also be relevant in a slightly different sense. Agents may also turn out to be patients, while patients do not just accept or suffer the actions of others, they help to create a setting in which action is implied, anticipated, invited or demanded. For example, the Cokordas' neglect made them inevitable victims of the punitive actions of their ancestral deity. When the problem in Pura Duur Bingin became too hot to handle, the *désa* chose to become relatively passive by deferring responsibility onto another agent which it pinpointed with some precision.

Partly distinct from this problem is the issue of Balinese ways of assessing activity and passivity which may be briefly outlined by considering the popular proverb cited above. When a durian is ripe it can be smelled from far off, but one only knows if a mangosteen is ripe when one opens it. The proverb generally refers to the difference between the obviousness of male sexual interest in a woman, and the covertness of female interest. But females are not passive merely because their feelings and actions may be disguised from public view. Being active need not imply rushing about, but being liable or prone to action, not unlike Balinese volcanoes and gods. Likewise being passive is not plain submissiveness or sitting still, but being liable or agreeing to accept or receive, for better or for worse, the decisions and actions of others. Different kinds of being, however, have different kinds of action, *laksana*, through which they exhibit their nature or predispositions. Etymologically *laksana* connotes 'a sign' and so implies 'a distinctive way of being or acting' by which it is known. The *laksana* of durians and mangosteens is quite different.

This view helps to make sense of some unexamined aspects of the two cases described earlier. The Cokorda was invited to Pura Duur Bingin as a witness, as were the administrative village head and the *bendésa* to the meeting. It would be misleading to think of witnessing as passive. During temple festivals, a shrine is erected to Batara Surya, as witness; but Surya is also the sun who gives light and so makes the festival possible. (The connexion of light and knowledge in Bali in fact implies a more epistemologically active role.) More generally, I suspect, we may misunderstand Balinese if we confuse action with noisy activity, rather than with calm efficiency. Noise is perhaps more often linked to what is *nguda*, youthful, callow, immature as opposed to *wayah*, old, mature, reflective but still effective. Painters and writers may make play with the difference between the raw energy of the labouring peasantry expressed in hubbub, ram, and the quiet command of princes (see Worsley 1984: 73-75, 84-94; and Vickers in press respectively). The Cokorda who calmly witnessed the reading of the *Babad Dalem Sukawati* was in command of the situation, just as the immobile kings on battlefields were, often by careful foreplanning. To assume, as has been done,

²¹ Double excess, however, is extremely dangerous and seeking *kasaktian* too uncontrolledly leads easily to madness.

that, if kings appeared still they were therefore ineffectual, is profoundly to misunderstand Bali and what action is about.²²

A hierarchy of command is created by agents deferring to superiors and superiors delegating to inferiors. As my concern here is with how people in Tengahpadang come to terms with more powerful agents, not how the position appears to the royal courts or high priests, a word should be said about deferment. We have already noted during the *désa* meeting, how responsibility was placed on the policeman and the priest, as it was on the Cokorda at Pura Duur Bingin. My remark that, in a sense, all agency stems from Divinity now needs modifying because it is unsituated. Early on, the *désa* was prepared to act as an agent in dealing with the deities of Duur Bingin; only later did this change. Abrogation and derivation of agency are not the essential bases of relations with courts and gods so much as strategies or styles of assuming and deferring responsibility for action.

Deferment is a means peasants use on many occasions to cope with difficulties. Many rituals include prayers (mantra) to exculpate the officiant and congregation from errors and inadequacies. During fieldwork it became obvious that different temple priests gave contrary advice on propitious dates, appropriate ceremonies and so on. When I asked villagers if this mattered, the reply was invariably that, had they inquired in the proper manner, then the blame (and consequent punishment, karma pala) fell exclusively on the priest, so the divergences in advice were their problem! Before animals are killed, especially to make offerings, a short prayer (a sasepan) should be said to apologize to the animal and exonerate the butcher, otherwise the victim will take revenge in due course. (Other scenes in the Kertagosa depict hunters and butchers as the patients of their previous victims.) Something similar is done for instance with plants when one cuts down a big tree or lops off a bunch of bananas.²³

There is an interesting connexion between deferment and deference. Balinese usually express deference (ngasor) and passivity before those onto whom they unload responsibility for agency. One should not assume that outer behaviour entails inner submissiveness. I have heard Balinese excoriate their superiors (out

²² Little in Bali is straightforward. Guernonprez has suggested that kings are of two kinds: *dalem* and *patih*, the former reflect the tranquil idiom, the latter are energetic and interventionist (1985). One might note that the ancestor of the Cokordas of Ubud gained his fame by prowess on the field of battle, while the king was absent. Such activity is perhaps most fitting for young princes or subordinates: Panji as a young man, after all, leapt into the thick of the fray while the kings left him to it.

²³ On one day in the Javanese-Balinese calendar of 210 days, trees have their *oton*, commemorative day. A short prayer is said to fruit-bearing trees which rests on a simple pun.

'I Kaki dija, Dadong?'

'I Kaki 'nak jumah.'

'Nak ngudiang?'

'I Kaki 'nak nyakitang bangkiang!'

'Nged! Nged! Nged!'

'Grandmother, where is grandfather?'

'Grandfather is staying at home.'

'Why is he staying at home?'

'Your grandfather is at home because he has a bad back.'

'Nged! Nged! Nged!' (see below)

The homonymic play is on *nged* 'to be hunched over' and 'packed, or thick, with fruit'. The latter is an injunction to produce results.

of earshot!) while sitting in postures of abject humility. An appropriate appearance of deference is often judged necessary if one is not to seem *tulah*: unlike the *Kepuh*, the *Waringin* asked politely in what way it could be of use. Hughes-Freeland has argued that Javanese dance should be understood as less to do with realizing ideals than with a metaphysics of possibility and an ironic play on deferral (1986: 320-382). Were Balinese to use irony in similar ways, it would raise awkward questions about the kind of interpretation we tend to impose on them. Our ‘metaphysics of presence’ with its focus on finding the essence of things does rather predispose us again recognizing the degree to which deferral might happen.

It is possible that a contrary process also goes on by which peasants vicariously experience more powerful agents through re-enacting them in theatre and dance. When theatre troupes draw upon previous performances, oral accounts and popular representations to re-create a narrative of past royal doings for a village audience, they create a new complex agent with the participation of an audience which is now a willing patient. (This is not just a manner of speaking: it is common for prominent orators and other leading locals to sit down with the troupe beforehand and explain the preferences of the audience.) Kings and courts, which might otherwise have been seen as rather awesome, if not sometimes alien, become part of village life in a way they were not before.²⁴ Something similar may hold in ritual where Divinity in various aspects is recreated as an agent by patient villagers.

On other day-to-day occasions Divinity may, however, be represented as passive, in the sense of choosing not to take action. In the form of their images (*pratima*), temple gods are taken out during festivals, washed, fed and entertained before being invited to return until the next festival. Sometimes they may express themselves more actively through mediums, through signs or direct action, such as striking people with lightning, pestilence and so forth. On the occasions when humans make vows (*masangi*) if their requests of dieties are met, the latter are treated as accessible agents, more or less able at will to arrange affairs in the world. Are gods on such occasions as temple ceremonies quiescent then because they are passive or because they are so much in command that they need do nothing? Or is it that gods, like kings, tend to intercede only when things go wrong?

Phrased this way, there is no simple answer because the question assumes that both classes are exclusive and Divinity has an essential nature separate from the particular situations in which It is constituted and reconstituted by immanent agents. The question may be misphrased however. The language of divine manifestation is fraught with difficulty for the Balinese who are appropriately careful in what they asseverate about the transcendent (*niskala*).²⁵ Anthropologists

²⁴ Sometimes I wonder whether the vitality of Balinese theatrical re-creation of a long-gone royal era is adequately explained by such functional explanations as being a response to perceived threats to their identity (whatever that might be). We need to understand more clearly the ways in, and conditions under, which events are re-presented to, and by, audiences.

²⁵ Extreme care is needed in glossing words for the workings of Divinity. To take just three common terms, *nyakalang*, *ngahyangin* and *nulurin*, they may imply anything from ‘manifesting oneself’, ‘becoming visible or tangible’ to ‘inspiring’, ‘entering into’ or ‘participating in’.

should not rush in where Balinese fear to tread. So it would be premature to pronounce at this stage upon whether, say, the *pratima* is, embodies, betokens a deity, or represents it as something, given Balinese caution and the limits of anthropological knowledge. To understand more about the relation of Divinity, effigies and temples as agents, we would need to consider rites like the inauguration of a new temple and the installation of *pratima*, just as we may learn something from the consecration (*abiséka*) of a ruler, as these are the moments that first claims to agentive capacities are established.²⁶ Introducing agency does not then miraculously solve the problems of Balinese culture but it does, I think, help to ask more coherent and pertinent questions.

Passion and patiency

Curiously, the question of the ‘passivity’ of Divinity brings us full circle back to plants. For, when people in Tengahpadang recount the popular stories of Siwa’s descent to earth, disguised as a cowherd, in order to seduce his consort, they would often stress how the goddess, in various forms, then dies and plants spring from her body. Death brings out the ways in which Balinese may play upon the overlap of agency and patiency. The passion of the goddess, transformed in death, converts her into the source of important crops. Among humans, initially a corpse is the ultimate patient, which is dependent on the living for its successful conversion through mortuary ritual, until it becomes a potentially powerful deified being. At the same time, in the Kertagosa the dead are depicted as suffering in hell at the hands of their previous victims who become the agents, or instruments, of their own revenge. For example, aborted babies push their erstwhile mothers off a swaying bridge (*titi gonggang*) into fire below, while animals gore their hunters and rip open their butchers. In hell the Kepuh is identified with Kutuh Rangdu, the tree on which evildoers are hung above a raging fire (according to van der Tuuk, 1899: 288-89; see also de Clercq 1909: 183-4, on the Kepuh’s synonyms). The Kepuh, which is useless to the welfare of the living, is instrumental in the misfortune of the dead.

These reversals of fortune in hell, which Balinese speak of as another aspect of inevitable transformation (see *tungkalik* above) seem to be linked with broader ideas of suffering and agency among plants and animals. From various incidents in which villagers in Tengahpadang refrained from killing poisonous snakes and insects unless they were actually being attacked, I gathered that one should always avoid unnecessarily mutilating or killing animals and plants, if nothing else for fear of their exacting retribution later. Occasionally villagers gave reasons: some insects may be emissaries (*utusan*) of the deified dead which bring signs to those who understand. People do, of course, kill animals and plants for offerings or to eat. Death for the former reason is usually said to be highly desirable. In either case one should say a *sasepan* first (as indeed people thought that executioners did in the past for their victims). This does not exculpate butchers though.

²⁶ Swellengrebel’s (1947) synthesis of Schwartz’s material and van der Meij’s reworking (n.d.) of one of Swellengrebel’s sources both tantalizingly suggest some kind of identification of the king with Iswara during consecration. Pending further research however, it would be premature to draw inferences.

This raises questions about sacrifice. As we have seen, in matters of complex agency, especially where Divinity is involved the outcome is always potentially fraught with risk or uncertainty, as Vickers argues in his discussion of the ritual sacrifice of a rhinoceros at the *maligiya* for the ruler of Klungkung. Is the rhinoceros the patient who suffers the death marked out for him at the hands of the officiants? Or is it the instrument in returning agency to the dead? In a sense, it determines its own fate, like the albatross in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ‘its nature when introduced is something to be murdered...’ (Burke 1969: 509, emphasis in the original). For death seems to bring out the gerundive. The rhinoceros may be viewed as fulfilling any, or all, of these possibilities. Its size, unfamiliarity and the unpredictable outcome highlight the ironies of sacrifice.

To think of Balinese attitudes to animals and plants as ‘moral’ may be only part of the point. According to another popular story in Tengahpadang, humans had to plough and harrow rice fields by hand until one day Bantèng (the light breed of cattle found in Java and Bali) was astonished to see people slave away in this fashion. Moved by sympathy, Bantèng offered to take on this onerous chore which it has performed ever since and which is why they should never be driven too hard. We can choose to dismiss this, like plants walking and possessing knowledge, as absurd Just So stories. To do so may, however, be to abrogate agency so grossly as to reduce Balinese to mute objects in the ethnographer’s maw.

One might better argue that we are dealing with a highly developed account of agency and its transformations, in which different kinds of beings may exist simultaneously in different times, places and ways as complex agents and patients.²⁷ This is captured in the image of an encounter between plants and Mpu Kuturan, where not even plants are passive objects or empty receptacles, but are mobile and articulate. Mpu Kuturan did not give them either their medicinal properties or their knowledge: they told him what they could do. The tale is partly about achieving efficacy, as in the process of *ngapasupatinin* mentioned earlier, but the process is not *sub specie aeternitatis* so much as one which must be recreated, or remembered, on appropriate occasions. The reader will recall how important it seemed to establish the name of the deities connected with the founding of Pura Duur Bingin. The Taru Pramana also suggests that naming is a significant act - and an act of signification - in its own right. If I am correct that *laksana* is both action and sign, this conjunction need not appear so surprising.

It would seem that the knowledge granted to Mpu Kuturan is that the combined attributes of various plants could form a pharmacopoeia, a knowledge which can be codified, transmitted and used by humans.²⁸ The vision is quite

²⁷ The theme is found elsewhere in maritime South East Asia. Karim has described how the Ma’ Betisk in Malaya classify plants and animals as edible because the latter’s ancestors were said to have taken to pouncing on and eating humans and were condemned to be eaten for their effrontery (*tulah*). At the same time when humans inflict injury, and worse death, they must suffer the victims’ revenge for wrongdoing (*kemali*’, Karim 1981; cf. Needham 1964 on mocking animals).

²⁸ Mpu Kuturan’s act, as an agent, was to frame a mass of relationships as belonging, or being viewable as, a single coherent order. One is reminded here of C. S. Peirce’s notion of ‘Thirdness’, namely that relationships (‘seconds’) do not possess inherent, or essential, properties which define a single, exclusive frame of reference. Rather, when we apply labels like ‘symbolism’, ‘causality’, ‘medicine’ and so forth, we are categorizing under-determined relations in one particular way in which they may be understood.

different from scientific pharmacology where plants are, at best, raw materials from which essences are extracted and modified at will and whose efficacy is constituted by the pharmacist's knowledge. Efficacy in the Balinese instance emerges as the result of the working of a complex agent in which plants are the willing patients of the sage's superior knowledge and which ends with plants adopting the role of instruments. In contemporary Western medicine, efficacy is much closer to being the product of scientists' increasing knowledge and control over objects in the world.

The contrast between these two paradigms may shed some light on the difference between Balinese political organization system which stresses cooperation and command between independent, if ranked, agents and contemporary Western states which, to over-simplify, incline perhaps more to ordered systems of control in which citizens are objects to be watched over, taxed, exhorted to convenient ends and gulled with illusions of a free choice which has been progressively and pre-emptively curtailed (see Foucault 1977, 1979). To the extent that Indonesians seek to emulate a model of 'the Western State', the change which may be paralleled by a gradual shift from Balinese being active participants in ever-changing patterns of complex agency to becoming a submissive proletariat, the *rakyat*, who must be controlled.

Finally, perhaps we should also reconsider how we speak of the natural world in Bali. By calling plants and animals 'natural' we circumscribe sharply their capacity to act as agents, most certainly as agents apart from instinctual drives or bio-rhythmic growth patterns. Agency is displaced onto yet another transcendental or substantial agent, 'Nature'. The traditional rationale of studying natural classifications in anthropology is that it provided a way of judging how culture orders nature. That study remains profoundly scientific in tone and interest. The species are given as objects: the question is merely how they are typologized. The tale of plants describing their own medical uses points to the possibility of beings not being objects to be manipulated or disposed of according to whim. It is a world where, whatever the suffering and injustice, alienation has not, or not yet, occurred, in which its many occupants are faced with the need to recognize their complementarity and mutual dependence, where times and places are not points on a homogeneous space-time matrix but products of past agents. If Eliot saw 'fear in a handful of dust', what might we see if we looked carefully at a bunch of plants?

It would be wrong to end on a elegiac note for a Bali which has long been partly a patient of foreign armies, bureaucracies and, ironically, the scholars who have changed it in trying to represent it, of which my present exercise runs the risk of being an example. Not only have I so far barely explored Balinese uses of ideas of action and agency but, as I understand it, any account of agency is underdetermined and ex post facto. So it is possible that this discussion may prove enlightening, it may also be

Laksana bunga dadap

Like the *dadap* flower, beautiful but useless.

That is a matter I must leave the reader to decide.

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