

Metaphors and metaphysics in Balinese development
the story of an old whore and lost intentions

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Development tends to be thought of, despite the most cautionary sensibilities of anthropologists, as something showered, urged, brought, laboriously taught, imposed or otherwise encouraged from outside upon an unwilling, ignorant or technologically backward people whose turpitude is commonly compounded by a corruption as much profoundly moral as political obvious. In short, development is the continuation of the White Man's Burden by other means, a view that conceals some dangerous metaphors and equally dangerous metaphysical assumptions.

So, in this paper I wish to consider briefly how indigenous development processes come to be decentred and what role metaphors and metaphysics might play in policy transformation and implementation. First, however, I must confess to a shortcoming. My knowledge of actual development programmes is about as limited as is most developers' knowledge about the societies they presume to improve. My starting point is therefore my acquaintance with Balinese society and the images of it which are prevalent in various accounts about the island.

The best laid plans of mice and men

Between 1970 and 1972 when I did my first fieldwork in the sub-district of Tengahpadang in Northern Gianyar, in Bali, economic and political change was very much in the air. It was the period of the national elections following the abortive communist coup in 1965 and the downfall of Sukarno. Electoral success for the military government (non-political) party GOLKAR was considered important in legitimizing new policies of economic expansion and de-emphasis on political party conflict. If viewed from the Olympian heights of provincial and national government, both aims succeeded but neither for reasons which were intended, nor for causes which were understood.

Funds from the national five year plans, *Uang Répélita*, to the village of Tengahpadang itself (with about 5,000 inhabitants) were about £1,000 a year. During this time a rice-milling machine and several local stores were set up profitably; bridges were built over small ravines and trucks started to multiply thereby improving foot and motor travel respectively and so local trade. In agriculture, concrete started to be used to shore up weak sections of local aqueducts, which generally helped rice yields; and peasant farmers began to make use of urea and new strains of rice (especially PB5). These economic changes were accompanied by the decline of the previously powerful Nationalist Party (the P.N.I.) and a massive swing towards the official government party.

This idyllic picture of national policy working effectively at local level was not, however, quite what it seemed. No one ever found out quite what happened to the development funds, although the village head's house became much smarter, the nationalist-dominated wards' meeting pavilions were rebuilt and several people started buying rice land. The rice milling machine and shops were private initiatives, the trucks were owned by local Chinese not Balinese, the bridges and other local improvements were carried out by the wards without any outside aid or encouragement. Agricultural changes were also due to the energy of local farmers and took place despite, or in defiance of, the Ministry of Agriculture. The ostensible cessation of political party conflict came about because ex-Communists flocked to

join the government party and used their new-found respectability to settle scores with the Nationalists who were now out of official favour. The latter converted nominally to the government party and ensured that their previous friends benefitted from whatever favours were going. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

The successful implementation of policy owed more to chance than planning. Or rather the relation of plan and implementation was reversed. The changes were brought about by villagers, individually and in groups, taking advantage of the greater availability of raw materials; and affirmation of planned change came largely afterwards in local newspapers and public speeches. If there is a moral to the story, it is that we may need to reconsider the relationship between intentions and causes on the one hand, and the function of plans, words and power on the other.

To understand what was happening, it is useful to reverse some habitual assumptions. Instead of presupposing that official statements are intended to communicate policy to the recipients, one might equally argue that these serve to miscommunicate. The primary constituency of Balinese local officials is their superiors, not villagers. In so far as the aims of the Javanese dominated government are incompatible with Balinese ideas, success—however judged—depends largely on misrepresenting the situation to villagers. In fact one of the most potent instruments of change has been television, one set being available in each ward and watched each evening by a large crowd of people, if through rather jaundiced eyes. The success of 'Javanization' through television seems not so much due to a rational argument for the superiority of the new order of things, as to the dissemination of new discursive possibilities, which simultaneously creates new needs and offers to satisfy them. One need hardly add that the message grossly misrepresents the aims of government and what Balinese villagers may expect from the future.

It may also be worth questioning whether the communication of government policies is intended to bring about the stated aims. Instead one might consider these as ends in themselves. While I was there, the district officer (*bupati*) and the regional head of the agricultural service both gave exhortatory speeches to the assembled villagers about government plans for progress. Both were too vague to permit implementation and bore no relation to local conditions. Parkin has analyzed the dynamics of the relation between public speeches, audience composition and the feasibility of implementation (1975). Briefly, speakers tend towards realizable 'plans' where consensus on goals and the possibility of achieving them is likely, and veer towards 'ideology' where the speech is more designed to cover up divisions or the impossibility of achieving stated ends. This bears partly on the style of addresses to the locals of Tengahpadang but the matter may be more complicated. To the extent that these officials were acting with reference to the Indonesian hierarchy, they were primarily concerned about their own constituencies (see Quarles van Ufford 1985). To the extent they were acting within the frame of Balinese culture, the speeches arguably constitute ends in themselves. (The same goes, I suspect, for official plans far more than has been realized.) It is partly a celebration of the power of the word and partly a spectacle of instantiated power, not unlike tooth-filings, cremations and other rites of re-presentation (Hobart 1986). It is partly to do with perpetuating the miscommunication which every successful regime claims to diminish, but must actually foster (Wallace 1969). It is also part of a war, waged

with metaphors, and fought in the mire of metaphysics. The rest of the paper is about elucidating this odd remark, which might seem to have little to do with the stern realities of development.

Metaphors of development

It is now commonplace that scientific theories—let alone political and economic models—should be viewed as the working out of a given ‘paradigm’ (Kuhn 1970). Despite Kuhn’s later attempt to redefine this elusive term as an ‘ideal problem solution’ (1977), paradigms may usefully be considered as root metaphors behind models (Masterman 1969; cf. Pepper 1942), each of which, in claiming to describe the world, *de facto* asserts a metaphysics. Might we understand more about our relation to other peoples if we looked more carefully at the constitutive metaphors of Western discourse on ‘development’? What images of the nature of society, economy and their change, are implied in how academics, developers, local officials and the unfortunate ‘to-be-developed’ speak of what is going on? For instance, is the economy the machine that drives society? Is it a substrate, the foundation upon which society is built? Or is it the ‘language’ of claims to status? A similar range of metaphors can be plucked out easily from almost any newspaper, history book or—dare I say it—academic account, for society and the notion of development itself.

Apart from the rather pleasurable, and often informative, game of spotting someone else’s implicit images, recourse to metaphor is a useful entrée to our growing awareness of how far the presuppositions of our own discourse affects what we study. If development plans are often descriptions, our descriptions often become plans, not just because they may become self-fulfilling prophecies, but also because they set up the currently fashionable criteria of explanation. So, in this section I shall consider the metaphors currently in circulation about the fate of the island of Bali. In the final part, I turn to how these lead to problems in the politics of explanation.

Bali is currently subject to two different kinds of development. There are government and foreign agency schemes for agricultural, industrial and general economic development; and there is tourism. Each has several different interest groups involved and rather distinctive ways of articulating what they take to be pertinent actuality, which make extensive use of different metaphors.

About the economic developers’ language I know little. Significantly, however, there is an interesting difference between the formal vocabulary of development, the terms employed in public speeches and villagers’ understanding of what is going on. ‘Development’ in Bahasa Indonesia is often glossed as *perkembangan*, from the root *kembang*, flower, bloom, expand, flourish, rise or swell. It has certain connotations of coming to fruition, a sort of natural entelechy. The word widely used in public speeches, however, was *pembangunan*, from *bangun*, to wake, awaken, structure, build (up) or shape. Peasants had to be awakened (from their lethargic slumbers, or traditional ways), they had to start building (or required shaping by the powers-that-be). A significant shift from the first to the second term is that, in place of development being a natural attribute or potential of Balinese peasants, they require structure, to be moulded by a power that is placed outside and superior to them.

They are converted from agents to patients, from participants to raw materials at best, doltish obstructions at worst. So it is perhaps not surprising that villagers responded by viewing such exhortations as a new form of an old domination, and one which lacked the virtues of embodying Balinese cultural values.

It is the metaphors of tourist development, however, which provide a particularly rich semantic field. In the leading local newspaper *The Bali Post* and in popular and academic writing about Bali, a furious battle goes on as to whether tourism is destroying or subverting Balinese culture or is a means of protecting and fostering it. Rival views see Balinese culture being opened up and enriched in the process of sharing as against being adulterated, polluted and turned into a commodity. The images and resultant prognoses are so different one wonders if both sides are talking about the same island.

Michel Picard has singled out three genres of explanatory metaphors in widespread use in Bali.¹ These are the ideas of natural violence, sexuality and disease. The first is conducted in the language of war: Bali is being destroyed by foreign invasion. The problem is whether this is a natural process by which the weaker succumbs to the stronger (the economy or tourism as 'natural') or whether it is in the nature of the Balinese to want new ideas and things. The imagery of prognosis, and whether this change is desirable, inevitable or controllable, is equally naturalistic. The second metaphor is of Bali as a beautiful virgin rapidly degenerating through abuse into a raddled old whore. The Balinese as patients (like the Western image of the passive woman) in this process are possessed, raped, enjoyed by superior aggressive Western agents, typically male. The prognosis here is pessimistic: the more Bali's charms are exploited the less they are worth. Old tarts have few admirers and must grab what trade they can. The last is the language of disease. (The three metaphors link in interesting chains.) We are witnessing an invasive parasite in tourism, which threatens the health of the body social and cultural. The organic harmony that was there is now disrupted, the body is polluted with a moral and social illness, from which it may not recover.

Balinese responses to tourism are obviously complex, as it affects so many people in such different ways. Whatever the differences, however, they neither adopt the Western metaphors (however much their lives are actually affected by them), nor do they place the same emphasis on metaphor altogether. Instead it is common to speak in terms of the relative material or social advantages and costs compared with previous times. New dance forms, such as *Kreasi Baru* (new creations), are often regarded with interest to the horror of Western perfectionists and romantic anthropologists; just as the vogue for concrete ancestor shrines is considered a fittingly expensive tribute to one's forbears despite widespread Western disgust at the loss of photogenic brick and elaborately carved pumice. The trend in perhaps summed up by a discussion between two priests in *Tengahpadang* who used the classical imagery of the Hindu system of *yuga*. It is generally held we are living in the *Kali Yuga*, the world in its final decline into immorality, anomie

¹ For more detail, see Picard 1996. I am grateful to him for this formulation, which formed part of the discussions of his paper to the *Workshop on Balinese State and Society*, organized by the KITLV in Leiden.

and chaos. Things were improving so much in Bali, the priests decided, that they were clearly moving into the Kerta Yuga, a new Golden Age.

The metaphysics of development

Behind the play of metaphor lurk serious issues. Neither society nor the economy are things: they are abstractions to which peculiar substance is given by the manner of their representation. Metaphors, in short, easily become part of an explanatory metaphysics. And, being abstractions, precisely what is happening to a society or economy is open to rival interpretations which are, in Quine's famous phrase, 'underdetermined by fact'. Different people read the same facts different ways. So the analysis of the metaphors of development is not a trivial academic pursuit but central to the politics of representation of reality.

Here, however, I want to take up just one aspect of the complex meta-systems by which development, like its predecessor colonialism, exercises its will to power. This bears directly on policy transformation and implementation. In now-familiar terms, the formulation, discussion and changes of policy statements, being linguistic, cultural and social acts, are part of the domain of meaning and reasoned argument (in Dilthey's expression, they require study by the *Geisteswissenschaften*). Implementation, the effects of prior causal acts on the part of developers or their agents, by contrast, is classically a matter of objectively understood facts and causes (to be studied by the methods of the *Naturwissenschaften*?). In other words, the theme of the workshop cuts in interesting ways across the great divide in Western thinking between cause and meaning, action and reason, body and mind, which require traditionally quite distinct kinds of explanation.

Having set up this (unworkable) dichotomy, attempts are of course promptly made to try to mediate it in all sorts of ways. The one which concerns me here is 'intention', a term which is as important as its reference is obscure. The debate about the nature of intentionality has barely begun to receive the attention it deserves. Briefly, everyday academic usage rests upon a theory of mind, or consciousness,² of the 'knowing subject' in Foucault's trenchant phrase, which rests upon what Derrida has called 'the metaphysics of presence'. Put practically, how does one determine what was the real intention behind an action? Is this knowable through words or through self-reflection? Or should it be inferred strictly from action? At this point developers and Balinese part company sharply.

The Balinese, legally and popularly, infer intention *ex post facto* from action. It is not that they deny the existence of inner states. On the contrary, they have and use a rich vocabulary of moods and motivations. It is just that they are more sceptical about the deceptive power of words than we. Rather as the great Greek philosophers grew wary of the rhetorical techniques of orators, the Balinese fear what lies behind sweet words (*munyiné manis*). The result is extreme caution about one's actions—

² Perhaps we might call it the 'capitalist theory of mind', where conscious intention plays the role of managing director ruling over the unpleasant, if vital, libido of the working classes in the economy of the body.

something almost everyone has noted about the Balinese—because one will be judged by them.

All this might seem to be straying far from development policies and their implementation. It is not. When development projects go wrong, as we saw they did, to villagers this is not because of mistakes, inadequate preparation, insufficient consultation, improper management or definition of means and goals, poor personnel and implementation—in other words, the thousand shocks that flesh is heir to—it is intentional, by which I mean in some sense deliberate. If cockfights are ‘deep play’, in Bali cock-ups are deeply revealing.

At first sight all this may seem grossly unfair. Things, after all, do go wrong and even the most concerned and far-sighted person cannot anticipate everything etc. etc. To which the Balinese are wont to reply that those who adopt the privileges of position, status and power over others also run the risks. Carelessness, stupidity and negligence are not treated as leniently as do we. On reflection, not only do I think the Balinese are not crassly callow, but the metaphysics by which they argue as they do is probably rather better grounded than our own. In the notions of chance (latterly ‘the unconscious’ as *deus ex machina*), we have perfected a potentially deeply deceitful explanation of action. Where we might just say ‘it just went wrong’, ‘I couldn’t have foreseen’, ‘it was chance (or circumstance)’, ‘if it hadn’t have been for’, the Balinese allow no such petty innocence of those in authority. Responsibility for actions is claimed through the notion of intention and denied through the notion of chance. How many developers are prepared to take full responsibility for their mistakes and the misfortune they may have caused to others? Just as the anthropologist never sees things from the ‘native point of view’ because he or she can get out, so the morality of development is dubious.

Let me end with an unpleasant thought. What if there were some truth in the Balinese view of intentionality? We have all heard unsavoury stories of multi-nationals who develop strains of crop that encourage dependence on their fertilizers, pesticides and so on. If many development projects go wrong, what if they were, in a sense, intended to? The reasons might be legion. If war is the continuation of politics, is development the continuation of colonialism by other means? Or are the reasons less palatable still? After all as that distinguished aristocrat, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux once remarked *L'enfer est plein de bonnes volontés et désirs*.

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