

**Lances greased with pork fat**  
**imagining difference in Bali**

**In**

*Imagined differences:  
hatred and the construction of identity.*

**Ed. Günther Schlee**

**Hamburg & London: LIT Verlag**

**©2002 Mark Hobart**

In 1635 the ruler of Makassar ordered the king of Gélgél, the then effective ruler of Bali, to convert to Islam or face war. To which the Balinese answer was that they had an army of seventy thousand men ready and waiting 'with lances greased with pork fat' (Wessels 1923: 438-39). In the event this measure did not prove necessary. A massive fleet of Muslim forces from different parts of Indonesia had gathered in South Sulawesi to launch a *jihad* against Bali. The concentration of troops was too good an opportunity for the Dutch East India Company to ignore and they attacked and effectively destroyed the invasion force before it could set off. Bali was saved so that it could enjoy its fate as an iconic tourist paradise.

Thereafter Bali became part of the Republic of Indonesia when the latter declared Independence in 1948. And Balinese were among the active fighters for that independence. Economically, for years Bali has been the province with fastest rate of growth in the archipelago and Gianyar, the district where I worked, the most rapidly growing in Bali. This is partly due to increasing agricultural output, but mostly to the fact that Gianyar has been a driving force behind the 'cultural' end of the tourist economy of Bali. Apart from being the 'traditional' centre for dance and theatre, it has also become the centre of production of art objects, which are exported not just within Indonesia, but world-wide.

In spite of their new-found relative affluence, during the nineteen nineties Balinese privately expressed more serious worries about what was going on than I had heard them do before. Part of their concern was over the effects that tourism was having on the island, not least whether the continued building of hotels, golf courses and the other paraphernalia of tourism was sustainable. Part was over what they felt to be the decline of their way of life, language and culture, due not just to tourism, but to the sundry effects of development, and most especially the impact of television. Part was the fear that, despite the belated recognition of Hinduism as a religion according to the state constitution, they felt threatened by what they considered the incursion of Islam. To what extent though was religion the idiom for, say, ethnic difference? And to what extent are ethnic differences themselves idioms for talking about economic and political differences? In this chapter, I would like therefore to consider certain aspects of how, three hundred and fifty years after the threat from Sulawesi, Balinese represent themselves publicly and their relations with other Indonesian peoples.

It has become commonplace for anthropologists and sociologists to talk about society producing and reproducing itself (e.g. Giddens 1984: 16-37). It has become equally common for scholars of Bali to write about how Bali is the complex product of the western imagination (e.g. Boon 1977, 1990; Vickers 1989). It is far from clear though quite how a society sets about reproducing itself. As society is an abstract - indeed an impossible - object (Laclau 1990) it is still less clear in what sense can do so at all. There is a residual constitutive metaphor at work. If it is not through some mystical act of auto-copulation or phoenix-like regeneration, how does social reproduction happen? Apart from the sorts of structural processes much trumpeted in development studies, an important means, I suggest, is through the activities of people, often as 'complex agents' as part of public life.<sup>1</sup>

Social reproduction is not unmediated. Again there is a covert transcendentalist tendency in much writing about development, which assumes that the medium through which development is promulgated and argued over, are purely instrumental and so, analytically, incidental and therefore marginal. Against this, I

---

<sup>1</sup> By a complex agent I mean that decisions and responsibility for action involve more than one party in deliberation or action. These may be households, associations, corporate groups, courts, theatre troupes and so on. The term is from Collingwood 1942; see also Inden 1990; Hobart 1991.

shall argue that it is neither possible, nor desirable, to separate the medium and the message (cf. McLuhan 1964). How people imagine, talk about and rework their understanding of their and others' place in the world cannot be extrapolated from the ways in which, and circumstances under which, they do so without serious misrecognition of that understanding.

There are countless different kinds of occasion on which people are more or less continually reworking their worlds. Certain occasions are particularly important, because what happens is not only public, but may change what is going on in one way or another. In Bali, the frequent meetings of corporate groups are times when groups reconstitute themselves and change their institutional arrangements (see Hobart 1991). Other important occasions include inviting Divinity through spirit-mediums to pronounce on major proposed changes; and when individuals consult such mediums about personal or domestic difficulties. Far from being offered timeless formulae by which tradition is invented, the more popular mediums rework existing institutions in the light of their, and their public's, appreciation of how Bali is changing.

There is another set of activities, as overlooked by scholars of development as it is emphasized by Balinese themselves. This is when Balinese review what is going on around them and comment explicitly on it, namely theatre. I shall concentrate on some of the implications of theatre for the study of development here, both because the extent to which people do comment on their own lives and circumstances is often neglected, and because both actors and audiences consider theatre plays as privileged moments for critical reflection. In fact the leading actor in the extracts which follow talked to me afterwards about how crucial it was for actors to be commentators and critics of what was going on in Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> It was necessary, he said, because the intellectuals who should have been doing this through the media of newspapers and television and in schools through education were too timid to provide the necessary and appropriate critical commentary. So the burden fell on those actors who were still brave enough to speak up. This assessment is shared by at least the more mature members of theatre audiences I spoke to. If we are to move away from a vision of society as perduring imaginary essences towards a more situated analysis of the occasions when people rework their own social and cultural arrangements, then we need to pay closer attention than we have on the whole to what they are doing on such occasions.

In the vogue for self-absorption, which passes for 'reflexivity', scholars have primarily considered how that studiously vague entity 'the West' imagined Bali and have tended to overlook the questions of how Balinese imagined, and imagine, Bali and its differences with other places and peoples.<sup>3</sup> By this I understand not just how Balinese represent themselves on particular occasions, but the ways in which they talk about differences. An unfortunate legacy of Dutch structuralist analyses of Indonesia is that it is often assumed that Indonesians generally structure their thought in terms of

---

<sup>2</sup> He played the *Panasar*, the anchorman, see below.

<sup>3</sup> A problem with Ben Anderson's book, *Imagined communities*, which is in one sense the originary text behind this volume is that, whatever his sensibilities to the nation as 'an imagined political community' (1983: 15), both 'imagination' and 'community' are conceived of in very western terms. In fact his image is of the community as consisting in 'face-to-face contact', of common or shared interests, rather than, as Srinivas once remarked, as they actually are 'back-to-back'. Although Anderson writes that 'communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (1983: 15), the range of styles he allows is tightly circumscribed. Anderson also presupposes that one can talk of community and imagination prior to a consideration of whether other peoples imagine their social arrangements in commensurable ways.

dichotomies. Such an approach is not terribly helpful in understanding either how theatre works or how differences may be constituted.

At first sight theatre appears an unlikely means of commenting on, and revising ideas about, the present and near future, because it deals with the past. Theatre is used, however, to re-present the past, to comment on, and review, present practices. In other words, it is a 'scale of forms' in Collingwood's terms (1933: 54-91), in which the present is constituted of past acts, but is being continually revised in the light of subsequent acts of thinking and commentary.<sup>4</sup> The point of such a scale of forms is that differences are not conceived of as dichotomous (either/or), but as overlapping (both/and). The past (or the future) is both different from the present, and connected with it. One of the problems of writing about ethnicity is not just that it is situational (whether one is from a particular region, is a Balinese or an Indonesian in a particular situation), but that scholars tend to present ethnic differences as dichotomous: Javanese *versus* Balinese, Balinese *or* Indonesian, Hindu *or* Muslim. As we shall see, in the play I have selected (and much the same goes for other plays I have watched), differences are not represented so simply.

This is quite enough preamble. Let me turn to the play, which was performed in the village where I work, Tengahpadang in Northern Gianyar, on the night of 11-12th. March 1989. The occasion was a festival in one of the best known temples in the region. After the death of his son in a motorcycle accident, the local prince was left without an heir. He had then made a vow to the diety of the temple that, if he had a son, he would pay for a theatre performance, a *Prèmbon* (a variant on the better known genre of *Arja*, often called 'romantic operetta', in which some male characters wear masks). The actors were mostly from Gianyar, but worked during the day for Indonesian Radio (R.R.I.).

They took as the plot the promise made by the prince of Nusa Penida, an arid island off the south coast of Bali, to the effect that he would build a temple if he were able to beget a male heir. The play had four important characters, with the actors playing minor walk-on rôles as well. The key figures are the old retainer, *Panasar*, the root is 'base, foundation', ('anchorman' is the nearest English equivalent which comes to mind) and a young retainer, his younger brother, *Wijil*. There are two aristocratic figures: the prince of Nusa Penida, Sri Aji Palaka and his low caste wife, who plays the stock rôle of the *Liku*, a slightly mad and spoiled princess.<sup>5</sup> Of the minor rôles only a wise old villager is relevant here. The plot was simple. It is simply the events on the morning leading up to the completion of the inauguration of the new temple and discussion of how important it is that the prince fulfils his vow. This framework left much room for the characters to comment on current events, while ostensibly talking about events in Nusa Penida in the distant past. It might seem an odd choice of subject matter for a paper about development, ethnicity and imagined differences. We shall see.

---

<sup>4</sup> In a scale of forms 'each lower level or earlier stage is a necessary condition of the next, does not necessitate the emergence of the next level, but yet is seen from the standpoint of that level as leading to it and in fact incorporated in it' (Mink 1969: 134-35).

<sup>5</sup> My analysis of excerpts from the play is based on discussions with four different sources. These were the actress who played the prince; the actor who played the *panasar*; a group of elderly males, of whom two had themselves been actors; and a group of women, including a grandmother, mother and daughter. My interpretation of the dialogue and its significance is that of these Balinese. The theoretical comments are mine.

## The Prince's Promise

**Old Javanese (*kawi*) words are in bold.**

Words in the original *Balinese* are in italics. Also stage actions.

Indonesian words are underlined.

*English words are bold and italic.*

### 1. The introduction to the play:

*(The old retainer enters alone and sings to himself.)*

**Old Retainer** *(He suddenly notices that the audience is there.)* Oh! Good Heavens! May I offer my **apologies** to you all? And thank you for being kind enough to come here tonight. I trust that you will all enjoy good health and happiness. As a Hindu community,<sup>6</sup> we should pray as always that we shall all find peace. On this, the occasion of a religious ceremony, how should we achieve this? Come, let us offer our faithful service together to ask for God's grace. **All of us** living on this island cherish our artistic and cultural life. Oh! I urge you all to share in ensuring that whatever's needed is done when it is time for *barong* processions,<sup>7</sup> so that we can guarantee that our artistic life continues to flourish.

How do we do it? How do we bring it about? For example, Ladies and Gentlemen it's gracious of you to put on this play and to come and watch, **because** if we aren't going to appreciate and look after the arts, who else are we to tell to do so? That's the reason that guests now come, that tourists come from all over the world. What are they really looking for? Is it not **solely because of** your arts, your skill at crafts, your wisdom and knowledge of **all sorts of art objects**?

That's the reason then that tourists come -what's this? Two of them have turned up. *'Welcome, good afternoon, thank you. I hope you glad see here.'* I know a couple of words to use to start up a conversation. Well, now people from overseas enjoy watching, but we've all grown indifferent. Don't let it be like that. If it can be as it is here, I can feel happy and proud to address you, can't I? I hope that we can manage to treasure what we have for ever and make it still better than it is now.

The realm of Nusa has been different ever since the reign of His Royal Majesty, who was crowned Sri Aji Palaka. (May I be pardoned for my boldness in mentioning His name!) Well, the land of Nusa is well known, it's famous for being dry. But ever since He came it's changed and the country is different. Before you couldn't get anything to grow, now the landscape in Nusa is

---

<sup>6</sup> Significantly he used the word umat, which is of Arabic origin and usually used by Muslims to refer to the congregation of the faithful. The significance of this usage will be discussed later.

<sup>7</sup> *Barong* are the large puppets, often compared to Chinese lions, which are danced by two people on special religious occasions. They also used to process through the countryside during one months during the year at the Balinese New Year. This is now rare because people prefer to spend the time making money. Balinese often cite this as an example of how 'development' affects religious activity.

green.<sup>8</sup> Apart from that people have developed and have all been enthusiastically pursuing knowledge, which is the reason that schools have sprung up all over Nusa in the villages. That's why now everyone is equally clever. It fills my heart with pride and happiness to be a retainer in the court here....

## 2. On following one's own religion

(An exchange between the two court retainers about one's religious duties.)

**Old Retainer** This is the reason that now...

**Young Retainer** That it's (fitting to harmonize)...

**Old Retainer** **One's own religious duties with one's personal obligations to the state.**<sup>9</sup>

**Young Retainer** Everyone who is ruled by the king in the land of Nusa is free to follow their own religion?<sup>10</sup>

**Old Retainer** What is right should be taught and broadcast to the whole of society.

**Young Retainer** The basis of the religion we share is in philosophy. Having a philosophy doesn't produce results by itself. There should be a moral code to bring implement that philosophy in practice.

**Old Retainer** But not even that's enough.

**Young Retainer** That's not yet all that's appropriate. There needs to be art and there's something else, which we call 'rites'.

**Old Retainer** Indeed so.

**Young Retainer** (*He starts a folk etymological analysis of the word 'upacara', rites.*<sup>11</sup>) What's the significance of 'upa'?

**Old Retainer** What does it mean?

**Young Retainer** 'Upa' is like what we call 'energy', 'cara' means 'each in his own way'. The ways we achieve it are different, but the aim for all of us is to serve Almighty God.<sup>12</sup>

**Prince** So the world will be prosperous.

**Young Retainer** Good Lord, yes!

<sup>8</sup> This was clearly an indirect praise of the then President, Soeharto, who has laid great emphasis upon technological development. In Bali village society, this is reflected in improvements in agriculture and irrigation. The opening flattery runs directly counter to the *Panasar*'s, and the other actors', drift.

<sup>9</sup> It is left open which religion is being discussed. The commentators said they understood this as signifying that in every region people should be free to worship according to individual proclivity or local cultural usage.

<sup>10</sup> This is a rhetorical question: 'Is it right or is it not right?' The implication is that it should be so.

<sup>11</sup> Significantly, in *kawi* the primary sense is 'requisites, accessories, paraphernalia, the proper adornments,, insignia' and so 'the proper conduct, rites, etiquette' (Zoetmulder 1982: 2128). We misunderstand Balinese ideas about religious action if we impose our own heavily loaded term, 'ritual'. That said, Balinese are adapting their exegesis of their own religious practices to fit other people's ideas of what religion is supposed to be about.

<sup>12</sup> The point is the one recognized in Pancasila, the principles of the Indonesian state, which was elaborated into an extraordinary ideology of the New Order régime. The first principle is that there are different, but equally acceptable, ways of worshipping God according to different religious traditions. Mutual religious recognition slides easily into mutual ethnic recognition, especially where certain ethnic groups become closely associated with religious affiliation. Of nowhere is this more striking than Bali, where to the majority to be Balinese is to be Hindu(-Buddhist). For a different account from the small community of Muslim Balinese, see Barth 1993.

- Old Retainer** That is why good actions in this world and in the other depend, of course, on **the proper conduct of the one in command of the country.**
- Young Retainer** Of course.
- Old Retainer** That's the proper way to keep things in order, so that the world experiences peace.
- Young Retainer** This is of course what we should strive for.
- Old Retainer** If you're talking about nowadays, it's how leaders should **exert themselves** so that one can have a society which is just and wealthy.

### 3. On modern fashion

(Joking between the princess [who is always played as slightly crazy] and the two retainers. The princess has just done a mad-cap dance round the floor and fallen over.)

- Princess** Do you know the latest dance?
- Old Retainer** No. What is it?
- Princess** The one where you jump about, do you know that one?
- Old Retainer** Oh! An earthquake dance.
- Princess** Yes. It is 'break dance'.
- Young Retainer** Uh! Is this the one they've now call '*berek dén*'?
- Old Retainer** No one here knows about it except for the gentleman. (*She points at me and then at my companion.*) He knows too. The two of them, Madam too.
- Young Retainer** Oh! It's true. (Only foreigners know about that dance.)
- Old Retainer** The '**Break dance**'.
- Princess** That's it, but you say '*break dance*' not '*berek dén*'.
- Old Retainer** What did I say?
- Princess** '*Berek dance*'.<sup>13</sup>
- Old Retainer** Huh!
- Princess** (*Switching to speak like a garage mechanic looking at a vehicle in need of repair.*) How come your mouth's so clumsy? Hey! Tomorrow bring your mouth back here. It needs massaging to make it supple.
- Old Retainer** Take your mouth in for repair tomorrow.

### 4. On Indonesian bureaucracy

(The princess has been talking about why the prince married her although she was ugly, and expatiates on what is required of a good wife. She speaks in the officialese beloved of the more self-important Indonesian bureaucrats.)

- Princess** If I did not fulfil the specifications, no one would have wanted to take me. I wouldn't have looked for a man. Do you know what the first requirement is?
- Young Retainer** Indeed, what?
- Princess** Submit a letter of request!<sup>14</sup>
- Young Retainer** Huh!
- Princess** Second be prepared to submit to a trial period of three months.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Berek* is Balinese for rotten – so 'rotten dance', which is what many more elderly people felt.

<sup>14</sup> This is a delicious send up of the Indonesian bureaucracy. Her remark refers both to the formal protocols, which government officials love. It also suggests a love letter to woo her.

<sup>15</sup> 1. It has become practice in some organizations to engage staff on a trial basis in the first instance.

- Old Retainer** It's very tough to apply for a job on the condition that one must submit to a trial period of three months!
- Princess** Be prepared to take up any possible position.<sup>16</sup>
- Old Retainer** Carry on.
- Princess** Do you know what 'be prepared to take up any possible position' means? Did you think it was in the whole of the archipelago?
- Old Retainer** Isn't it 'in the whole of the archipelago'?
- Princess** No!
- Old Retainer** What is it then?
- Princess** 'Be prepared to take up any possible position' means 'on the right, on the left, on top or underneath'!
- Old Retainer** Oh dear! I thought it was to agree to go wherever one was posted.

### 5. On peaceful co-existence

(A discussion of the importance of the thumb in Bali, between the two retainers and the princess.)

- Young Retainer** I remember when our parents used to give us advice in the past. 'My dear, in the future, when you learn about (Balinese) custom, it is like a symbol.'

**Old Retainer** Yes.

- Young Retainer** Like a symbol of our religious feeling, our wish to have genuinely good relations with other people. This. (*He holds up his right thumb.*) It's true. Is it not used to greet guests? 'Please, go ahead.' It's true. This is what you use.<sup>17</sup>

(*The princess starts to walk backwards across the stage with arms outstretched, farting intermittently. The young retainer, who is facing the other way, does not see her at first.*)

**Old Retainer** Danger!

**Young Retainer** Oh! What's the danger?

**Old Retainer** This is fine behaviour, walking backwards. Only in a tourist area would an arse go 'please'!<sup>18</sup>

### 6. On fulfilling your promises

(The prince had been granted an heir after going to many temples on the island to pray for an heir. He must now fulfil the terms of the promise, which were to build a temple, if his wish was granted.)

---

2. This also refers to the increasingly common practice, especially in towns of a couple sleeping together fairly openly before marriage.

<sup>16</sup> 1. Be prepared to go on a posting anywhere within Indonesia. This is a standard requirement of official postings.

2. Be prepared to have to adopt unusual sexual positions.

<sup>17</sup> When indicating something to guests or superiors, or simply as a gesture of respect in Bali, it is proper to point with the thumb of the right hand, the remaining fingers being closed as in making a fist. One may even nest the right hand in the left, or support the right wrist with the open left hand, to be politer still.

<sup>18</sup> The Old Retainer treats the sound of farting as the English word 'please', pronounced '*plis*'. The usual onomatopoeia for farting is *prut* or *priit*. In High Balinese, or when needing to refer to the sound of a person of high birth farting, it is *priit*.



**Village Elder** (He had) exhausted the temples in Nusa, including Sakénan, including Pulaki. He had prayed everywhere, as far as all the temples of the *Dang Kahyangan*.<sup>19</sup>

### Analysis

The play works by setting up a complex interplay between the present and past. The present is not simply represented as a decline from a golden past (cf. Geertz 1980). The old retainer noted how much better life is now, not just materially, but in terms of people's opportunities, educational and otherwise. Rather the imagined differences create open up extensive possibilities for commentary.<sup>20</sup> Quite what kind of commentaries depends largely upon the circumstances of the performance, what has happened recently, who the audience are, whether government officials are present who can serve as targets and so forth. Also actors can run greater risks in live performances than, say, on television, which, being recorded, provides evidence which can be produced against them more easily.

In other words, the play involves a fairly intricate 'double-voiced discourse'. That is the author makes use

of someone else's discourse for his own purposes by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own (Bakhtin 1984: 189).

The ostensible world of events in the distant past in Nusa Penida is infused with quite different significance by virtue of the juxtaposition of the activities of two different sets of ruling élites. And different members of the audience may choose to appreciate the parallels in different ways. To this the actors each add their own spin.

In this sense then the play appears to work within the two rival hegemonic articulations of Balinese society. That is ways in which cultural elements are brought together, so as to appear necessary, essential, even absolute, but which are in fact the result of practices of mediation.<sup>21</sup> The first is the New Order discourse of development. The second is a discourse of 'traditional' cultural, religious and moral values – note the reiteration of the centrality of art and culture, the significance of religious practice and the moral obligations on leaders. It is of course a tradition which is being constantly revised and updated. However the play also situates itself *between* these two articulations. By contrasting the worlds which they present and, while seeming to pay deference to both, they point to crucial differences and defer the possibility of neat resolution. In so doing, they create a barely discernible counter-articulation, but one which inquiry shows the older members of the audience, at least, are quite clear about.

Let us see what is at issue in closer detail.

---

<sup>19</sup> The *Pura Dang Kahyangan* are temples which have a special history of importance to the most important kinds of religious functionary in Bali. Which precisely are the temples sufficiently important to be listed differs somewhat from kingdom to kingdom.

<sup>20</sup> The actors were elaborating a widely-held view that, while under the New Order régime people were on the whole significantly more prosperous than before, among the downsides though were the encouragement of unbridled greed, the failure of political leaders to act morally, to attend to the needs of their subjects, or even to set a good example personally. The corruption of the President Soeharto's children was pretty widely recognized even in rural parts of Bali by the late 1980s.

<sup>21</sup> On the use of the notion of articulation in cultural studies, see Hall 1986; Slack 1996. For a theoretical exposition, which was adapted in cultural studies, see Laclau & Mouffe 1985. For the relevance of articulation to the study of Indonesian media, see Hobart 1999.

*Excerpt 1* The old retainer started by describing the gathering with the Arabic word umat, rather than with one of the Balinese words which are available. He followed it with a reference to the desirability of praying for peace. His prayer was directed towards Divinity in Its Hindu form of Paramawisesa, 'Most Excellent', a common way of designating the supreme deity, Ida Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa (Divinity as the power of fate, **widhiwasa**). He linked this reference by juxtaposition to Bali's artistic and cultural life, using Indonesian. The unstated, but obvious, reference was to the threat of violence. As there were no strong grounds at the time for violence between Balinese, the implicit referent (alluded to in umat) was religious and, at the same time ethnic, because Balinese widely feared they were the object of envy, and sometimes hatred, by their Muslim neighbours in Java and Lombok. Significantly though the actor avoided the sort of closure implied in notions of ethnic identity at several points. The stress was on whoever was living in Bali, whoever was listening to the performance, whoever cherished a rich artistic and cultural life. There were non-Balinese policemen and traders listening to the play (even if the latter from the street where they were doing business) and they were part of the sizeable non-Balinese population living on the island.

When the old retainer turned to religious *barong* processions, he was making an implicit criticism. In the past, for a month in the New Year, Balinese used to travel from village to village with *barongs*. The practice was dying out, because villagers were too concerned nowadays with making money and were not prepared to take the time off. He then moved onto the theme of our presence in the audience to indicate that it is the excellence of Balinese arts, which attracts visitors. He broke into English to address us direct, before using us as a way of commenting on the failure of Balinese to support their own cultural activities, such as theatre. He then started to introduce the background to the plot and neatly wove in what more experienced and interested members of the audience took as praise of the President for his successful development policies in bringing prosperity and education to what was a very dry and impoverished island.

Some of the themes should be fairly self-evident. I wish to comment on four. First, the choice of umat as the term for congregation has the effect of identifying Hinduism as a recognized and approved religion in the language of the dominant religious group in Indonesia, namely Muslims. The old retainer was implicitly appealing to the first article in the constitution, which recognizes that different accepted faiths as paths towards God. Second, he was identifying Bali with its artistic and cultural life, based (here implicitly) on religion (on the articulation of culture, tradition and religion, see Picard 1996a). Significantly he used Indonesian here. In part this may have been because the words for culture and art are loan words from Indonesian anyway. It was also that the problem of identity, and its representation as to do with culture, were more part of contemporary Indonesian discourse, than Balinese. Third, his praise (albeit indirect) of the President's policies set the stage for criticism later of how those policies have been implemented locally. Finally, in a plot ostensibly set in the remote past, he incorporated the presence of tourists in Bali (which he took us for at the time). He did so not as disruptive, nor even just as a source of money, but as highlighting what was uniquely valuable to Bali and which even foreigners could appreciate.

He thereby treated Balinese culture as something which was sufficiently commensurable with other peoples' cultures (or at least their acquired tastes) that they could enjoy - if not understand - it. The tone throughout was to treat differences, not as a source of antagonism or antipathy, but as overlapping. Followers of different

religions each have their own way to Divinity, appropriate to their social and cultural circumstances. Balinese culture, which was presented as a highly self-conscious notion, could be and is appreciated by others, without detracting from them being Javanese, Minangkabau or English.

*Excerpt 2* The retainers later took up the theme of religious observance and the relation of one's personal religious duties (**swadharmaning agama**) with one's duties to the state (**swadharmaning nagara**). It was not initially clear what the old retainer was referring to, but his younger brother specified it as the obligation - and the right - to follow whatever religion one pleased. He went on to identify each religion as based on its own philosophy. The implication is to shift the stress away from credos, beliefs and non-believers, to the variety and profundity of human thought with the consequent entitlement to mutual respect.

What followed was a common Balinese argument: thought without action however is not enough. It must be given form. And the young retainer gave a folk etymology of the root for rite or ceremony (*upacara*), which ended in a more or less explicit reference to the right to religious worship in the constitution. With the growing overlap in public discourse of religion and ethnicity in Bali, the actors were simultaneously producing an implicit parallel reading of the constitution as underpinning the right to ethnic distinctiveness. Such difference is quite distinct from the simulacra paraded by the New Order, where difference is reduced to iconic, and toothless, variations in dress and material culture, an example being the theme park in Jakarta, *Beautiful Indonesia*, inspired by Madame Soeharto's visit to Disneyland (for a somewhat condescending account, see Pemberton 1994). The possibility of ethnic or religious violence is never stated. The possibility and the danger are however the constitutive condition of the play as a whole.

Human prosperity and peace (the avoidance of conflict and war) was then linked to the activities of a good ruler. The reference was neatly double-edged. It both praised the then rulers of Indonesia and warned them of the need to 'exert themselves' in order to maintain this state of affairs among the populace. It did so by representing the order in Nusa Penida as that of a just king whose subjects were happy, prosperous and free to follow their religious inclinations. At a time when President Soeharto was widely thought in Bali to be leaning increasingly heavily towards Islam, the rebuke was evident.

*Excerpt 3* The rôle of the mad princess in Arja includes making fun of Balinese good manners. The *Liku* had just been rolling around on the floor, slightly extreme even by the standards of the part. Then again, this was not a usual *Liku*. Refined male rôles like the prince have long been conventionally played by women. Unusually the princess, however, was played by a strapping male who had previously had a great reputation as a comic character in another genre, *Drama Gong* (see deBoer 1996; Picard 1996). The effect was to add a further twist and irony to what was already a complex double-voiced discourse.

The extract is from the *Liku*'s warming up her audience with various routines – many of which, as far as I know, were original and subsequently widely copied. Here she asked her servants whether they were up on the latest international fashion, break-dancing. While the resorts and big hotels in Bali may be part of the international circuit, things still take a little time to reach the further away Balinese villages. Once again we, as tourists, were woven into the narrative, as the princess turned to us to confirm what break-dancing was. She then castigated her servants for their ignorance

(they could not pronounce the English properly) and wove in another idiom, that of the garage or repair shop, when she talked about their clumsy speech. Once again the effect was to situate Bali firmly as part of the modern world. The issue of modernity in Bali is an important and complex theme (see the contributors to Vickers 1996). Here the references seemed to be several. Bali, its art, culture and religion, are objects of appreciation to a metropolitan Indonesian and international élite. In contrast perhaps to most other parts of Indonesia, Bali can no longer be assigned the inferior status of ‘underdeveloped country’. On the contrary, Balinese are active, autonomous and creative participants in processes of globalization, choosing and adapting new ideas and practices to their own ends. The twin criteria of the élite connoisseurship and vulgar marketability of Bali are neatly brought to bear to underwrite the case for allowing, even encouraging, Balinese ethnic and religious – aka ‘cultural’ – difference.

*Excerpt 4* This exchange is from a long scene in which the princess had earlier run through a whole series of government development programmes, simultaneously explaining them and making fun of them. Having launched herself on debunking government and officialdom, she then turned to how one should set about finding a husband. This was followed by an account of a wife’s duties in contemporary Bali, which brought the house down. Several spectators confessed afterwards that they had wet themselves laughing.

The excerpt rests upon a sustained use of *double entendre* between applying for a job, later specified as in the Indonesian civil service, and satisfying a sexual partner. First she treated love letters as like letters of application for a post. She then played on a trial period of employment to highlight the practice of young people sleeping together before marriage. While this has been common in Bali for a long time, semi-formal cohabitation was a relatively new phenomenon of town life. The rest of the excerpt consisted of the two senses of ‘be prepared to take up any possible position’. The result was to poke fun at what villagers considered the officious self-importance of bureaucrats’ presentation of self in public. While Balinese have to submit to the dictates of these officials in everyday life, the absurdity of the imagery was not so much, I would suggest, about, say, relieving anxiety through laughter over what one cannot confront, but was a more radical caricature of those in high office. It is difficult to take too seriously – at least for the moment – officials, however intimidating they may be in public life, when they are revealed by the demands placed upon their mistresses to be venal creatures engaged in sexual (and by inference, numismatic) athletics.

The other obvious venality, the notorious corruption of such officials, was left nicely implicit. It was there though, as the actors and spectators I spoke to made clear. Here the mockery of language is double edged. Everyone knows that officials often speak the supposedly impartial and high-flown (or overblown) language of bureaucracy as a cover for illicit demands. There is a more direct attack. This kind of officialese, at least among the Balinese I know, is considered a hallmark of the New Order régime, and indeed of the former president, Soeharto, himself. Indeed at one time imitating the President’s speech mannerisms was treated as a criminal offence.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> In this exchange, the actor playing the *Liku*, plays elegantly with an unstated theme: class. The play, to a village audience, contrasts their position, as ordinary people with much in common with other people throughout Indonesia, with senior officialdom, the bosses. Certainly the people I spoke to afterwards saw him as speaking for the masses everywhere, not for Balinese in particular. If it is a favourite ploy of élites to foster conflicts on lines of ethnicity or religion as a means of diverting

*Excerpt 5* This excerpt is taken from a long scene in which the princess compared the five principles of the Indonesian state with the functions of the five digits of the hand. Needless to say, each of the functions had a further and obscene reference. She had just been talking about the use of the thumb (to put money into, or get it out of, banks, by validating the transaction with one's thumbprint). The young retainer took up another use of the thumb, namely as a polite way to indicate something to someone. (It is vulgar to point with the forefinger.) He also introduced the idea that the thumb was a symbol- using the Indonesian loan word from the Dutch simbol.<sup>23</sup> He was making at least two points. First there are proper ways of addressing people, which are distinctively Balinese, inherited from their forefathers and to be retained. (The unspoken alternative, considered inappropriate by most village Balinese, is the two hands brought together on the chest in a prayer-like gesture, which was in fashion among Indonesians and townspeople.) Second he was showing how imported concepts like 'symbol' could be used to illuminate traditional Balinese practice.

The princess broke into his exposition by farting, which the old retainer turned neatly into a reference on the use of English in Bali. With the advent of mass tourism, there has been great demand among Balinese to learn English. Development in Bali has now reached such a pitch that in tourist areas of the island Balinese even fart in English!

*Excerpt 6* This brief passage was the fourth time in the play that the cast referred to the prince having exhausted the temples in Bali. The sentence was ambiguous in each case. The word used, *telah*, may mean just a completed action 'he had been to all the temples', or to have finished something. However *telah* often carries the strong connotation of 'finishing off, exhausting, running down'. Members of the audience with whom I spoke agreed that either, or both, were possible and that the repetition of the formula several times did not look coincidental. When I had a long discussion about various parts of the play with the actor who played the old retainer, I asked whether the second sense was intended. He said it most certainly was, even though it was not he who had said the words. Behind this lies an interesting story.

A few weeks before the play was performed, a large decennial festival had been held at what has come to be known as the central temple of Bali, Besakih. Central government is notionally committed, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to provide funds for all religions towards the upkeep of religious shrines and towards major ceremonies. According to what was being said at the time, and from what I had been able to gather, very little money indeed was forthcoming for Hindu shrines. Certainly much of the cost of upkeep of the major temples on Bali, let alone the costs of ceremonies, has come from Balinese grouping together to pay from their own pockets, which was particularly evident as the costs of the decennial festival had to be met. What seemed to heighten awareness of differential treatment was the amount of money, which Balinese said was being put into building mosques for the minority of Muslims in Bali, as well as the right being given them to use loudspeakers to broadcast the calls to prayer. These echo across Balinese compounds each day and, more seriously, across temples during festivals.

The sub-text, as it were, of the play is that the ruler should keep his promises to his populace and that this had not been done. 'The temples are run down' - the village

---

attention from the common class, or structural, position of most people, then the actors were being sociologically acute in taking issue with such strategies.

<sup>23</sup> As he specified it, it might to be considered closer to a sign (Sperber 1975; Todorov 1982).

elder started to list some of the great temples of Bali in a state of disrepair - because of the ruler's neglect of his people and the breach of his promise to them. If a ruler breaks his promises and neglects his subjects, does he deserve to stay in power? How long can, or will, officials and cronies prop him up?

### Conclusion

In a play seemingly about events sometime in the distant past on a small offshore island of Bali are themes about how Balinese are to deal with events in the contemporary world and how they constitute themselves in the prevailing circumstances. The opening speech in most forms of theatre is important, because it sets the frame for subsequent events. The old retainer starts by setting out what it is to be Balinese in religious terms, but ones which are not confrontational or based on a dichotomy between Balinese-as-Hindus and other Indonesians-as-Muslims. Instead he describes the relationship as one of overlapping categories between the different paths to Divinity, and actually incorporating Hindu congregations as one kind of *umat*.

This should not necessarily be interpreted as a strategy born simply of the vulnerability of a religious minority surrounded by ethnically different and preponderant Muslim peoples. Balinese embrace actively the view that different ways of life are appropriate to different circumstances and histories, not just between Balinese and others, but between people from different parts of Bali. If a Muslim woman marries a Hindu Balinese man, she is expected to become Hindu for the duration of the marriage and *vice versa* if a Hindu woman marries a Muslim. One follows one's husband's customary way of worship. Nor is this view necessarily new. Vickers points out that the Dutch had long hoped that the Balinese would prove allies against the Muslims in Indonesia. And 'a Dutch embassy of 1633 seeking allies against the Javanese kingdom of Mataram floundered on the fact that the Balinese did not shape their political enmity solely on the basis of religion' (1989: 14).

If the notion of identity as we usually understand it has any applicability to Indonesia, it would seem that, for a long time, it has not been simply along lines of ethnicity, religion or culture. Nor was an appeal to identity as a closed construct a feature of the play. To the extent that the play was about what it is to be Balinese, it was about how you do things and what you appreciate. And these are as rapidly changing behind the labels as is 'tradition' (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). This relates to a logical problem in the notion of identity as used in the social sciences. The only thing identical with something is precisely that thing itself in the same place at the same moment. Representing that thing, giving it an identity, by definition defers and imposes a difference. As with the broader process of representing, identifying requires exclusion, transformation and closure. You cannot represent or identify something as it is, in its fullness, but only as what it is not. There is a double displacement. You have to strip and simplify, to dispose of the accidental to reveal the essential, which effectively requires prejudging what you consider essential. Anyway identity depends upon what it is not, upon a 'constitutive outside', which is the subject of denial and erasure (Staten 1986; Laclau 1990). The only case for using the term at all is when it has become part of the discourse of the object of study. As an analytical notion it is vapid.

What then are Balinese attitudes to tourists, as expressed in the play? Well over a million foreigners and a similar number of Indonesian visitors a year visit this small island of some three million people. How this impact was represented in the play was interesting. Balinese culture was portrayed as something which has self-consciously to be maintained, as if it were no longer a set of practices which people did and which

inevitably changed as it went along. Culture is valued in itself and is therefore labile. It is something, though, which Balinese are presented as having uniquely and defined in terms of their art and religion. Europeans are constituted as interested in this culture, which in turn is evidence of its unique value. Why else do they come to Bali?

Balinese culture, now a distinct entity or set of practices, is the source of attraction to others; but Balinese can be equally interested in these other cultural practices like break-dancing. The fun poked at the Indonesian bureaucracy and development projects both recognizes their power and, at times, efficacy; but it seems to me not to be escapist fantasies of a successfully pacified proletariat. The actors were indeed themselves members of this bureaucracy, by virtue of working for the national radio station. It might seem to an anthropologist that Bali is being overwhelmed and its culture in danger of disappearing, except as a Baudrillardian simulation of itself, as it is turned into Indonesia's premier theme park. However, in the play at least, Balinese were still able to represent themselves as agents, who had truck with outsiders and new ideas on an equal basis. Ten years on, my impression from more recent Balinese theatre and television is that this optimism has lost its edge.

The ostensibly clear-cut differences of ethnic and religious difference obscure both the complex ties between people and how such differences are construed. Balinese see their aristocracy, after all, as mostly coming from Java. And Balinese have ruled over parts of Java, as Javanese have at times over parts of Bali. We are dealing here in part with the difference between two quite distinct conceptions of the polity. One is the nation state with unambiguous boundaries, prescriptions of citizenship, organized as a system of control over political subjects. The other is what Inden has characterized as the nature of an imperial formation in India, as

a complex agent consisting of overlapping and contending polities. These more or less successfully relate themselves to each other in what they consider, or at least concede as constituting, a single way of life... Following a universalizing strategy, it may claim to involve local and relatively isolated communities within 'its' imperial formation', while they themselves, opting for what I refer to as peripheralizing or localizing strategies, may attempt to deny or resist inclusion (Inden 1990: 29).

On a smaller scale, Inden's description of polities in India seems much better to describe the complex overlapping links which comprised, as far as we can tell, Balinese polities before conquest.

What Balinese expressed fear about, although not expressed in these terms, was a change in how differences were being construed. Is a dialectical relationship between different groups and polities being gradually replaced by an 'eristical' one, aimed at eliminating, or destroying, all others? At this point difference threatens to engender a kind of categorical hatred, which denies any coevalness or shared humanity between the parties concerned. I am not suggesting people have not disliked, sought to subjugate and kill others; but the mode of dealing with difference is different. It is the distinction between the challenge to an enemy of lances greased with pork fat and the promise of annihilation of whosoever is perceived as different, which has become so depressing and regular a concomitant of that wonderful invention, the nation state.

### Postscript

Since May 1998 Indonesia is been in a state of turmoil. This followed riots, which led to the resignation of President Soeharto. Since then it has become clear that there has been a long history of military brutality against imagined enemies of the régime, in many cases where ethnicity is arguably an issue. The most publicized example is East Timor, with Aceh and Irian Jaya following closely behind. There are also reports of attacks by Dayaks and Malays on Madurese in Kalimantan, and of bloody clashes between Christians and Muslims in various parts of Indonesia, including Ambon. The difficulty is deciding in any instance how to determine when, and for whom, ethnicity, religion, class, economic or other motives is the 'real' cause and when the idiom or something else. Beyond a certain point though I suspect that it becomes impossible to pin down unambiguous causation in processes, which are evidently underdetermined and open to rival interpretation.

Such conflicts do not occur in a vacuum, but in a world where traditional and modern mass media are far-reaching and extremely important. Pretending, as do most scholars of development, that you can ignore the impact of such representations seems naïve to me. A review of Indonesian mass media in the last year suggests that much of the informed commentary in the print media and television have argued a similar case to the actors in the play discussed above. These commentators are, it seems to me, arguing against the simplistic use of categorical distinctions, which make for easy - and inflammatory - assertions about 'us' *versus* 'them', good and bad, and so forth.<sup>24</sup> At the time of writing, with a Muslim President and nationalist Vice-President just elected, there is hope that the recognition of, and a degree of respect for, difference may prevail. One can only hope.

---

<sup>24</sup> Like a number of Indonesian commentators in the mass media, I have been struck by how forbearing, sensible and reasonable the supposedly volatile Indonesian 'masses' have been. The problem seems to have been far more with the political élite, many of which appear still trapped in the strange world of the New Order.



## Bibliography

- Anderson, B.R.O'G. 1983. *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Bakhtin, M.M. 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Trans. C. Emerson, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Barth, F. 1993. *Balinese worlds*. London: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Boon, J.A. 1977. *The anthropological romance of Bali 1597-1972: dynamic perspectives in marriage and caste, politics and religion*. Cambridge: Univ. Press.
- 1990. *Affinities and extremities: crisscrossing the bittersweet ethnology of East Indies history, Hindu-Balinese culture, and Indo-European allure*. London: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Collingwood, R.G. 1933. *An essay on philosophical method*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- 1942. *The new Leviathan or man, society, civilization and barbarism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- deBoer, F. 1996. Two modern Balinese theatre genres: *Sendratari* and *Drama Gong*. In *Being modern in Bali*. ed. A. Vickers, New Haven: Yale University South East Asia series, No 43.
- Geertz, C. 1980. *Negara: the theatre state in nineteenth-century Bali*. Princeton, N.J.: Univ. Press.
- Giddens, A. 1984. *The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hall, S. 1986. On postmodernism and articulation: an interview with Stuart Hall. *Journal of communicative inquiry* 10, 2: 45-60.
- Hobart 1991. The patience of plants: a note on agency in Bali. *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian affairs*. 24, 2: 90-135.
- Hobart, M. 1999. The end of the world news: articulating television in Bali. In *Staying local in the global village: Bali in the twentieth century*. eds. R. Rubinstein & L. Connor, Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. & Ranger, T. eds. 1983. *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Univ. Press.
- Inden, R. 1990. *Imagining India*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kemp, J. 1989. Peasants and cities: the cultural and social image of the Thai peasant village community. *Sojourn*. 4, 1: 6-19.
- 1991. The dialectics of village and state in modern Thailand. *Journal of Southeast Asian studies*. 22, 2: 312-26.
- Laclau, E. 1990. The impossibility of society. In *New reflections on the revolution of our time*. London: Verso.
- 1996. Universalism, particularism, and the question of identity. In *The politics of difference: ethnic premises in a world of power*. eds. E.N. Wilmsen & P. McAllister, London: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- & Mouffe, C. 1985. *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*. trans. W. Moore & P. Cammack, London: Verso.
- McLuhan, M. 1964. The medium is the message. In *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. London: Routledge.
- Mink, L.O. 1969. *Mind, history, and dialectic: the philosophy of R.G. Collingwood*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press.
- Pemberton, J. 1994. Recollections from 'Beautiful Indonesia': somewhere beyond the postmodern. *Public culture* 13: 241-262
- Picard, M. 1996a. Bali: cultural tourism and touristic culture. trans. D. Darling, Singapore: Archipelago Press.

- Picard, M. 1996b. Dance and drama in Bali: the making of an Indonesian art form. In *Being modern in Bali: image and change*. ed. A. Vickers, New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies No 43.
- Slack, J.D. 1996. The theory and method of articulation in cultural studies. In *Stuart Hall: critical dialogues in cultural studies*. eds. D. Morley & K-H. Chen, London: Routledge.
- Sperber, D. 1975. *Rethinking symbolism*. Cambridge: Univ. Press.
- Staten, H. 1986. *Wittgenstein and Derrida*. London: Univ. of Nebraska Press.
- Todorov, T. 1982. *Theories of the symbol*. trans. C. Porter, Oxford: Blackwell
- Vickers, A. 1989. *Bali: a paradise created*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin.
- ed. 1996. *Being modern in Bali: image and change*. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies No 43.
- Wessels, C. 1923. Ein Portugese missiepoging op Bali in 1635. *Studien* 99: 433-443.
- Zoetmulder, P.J. 1982. *Old Javanese-English Dictionary*. 2 Vols (with S. Robson), The Hague: Nijhoff.