Murder is fine

But argument is anathema

Conference Version

How Indonesians Argue

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The Balinese are shy to the point of obsessiveness of open conflict (Geertz 1973a: 446).

In the wake of an Indonesian military coup in October 1965, the island of Bali erupted in political violence in which an estimated 80,000 people, or roughly 5 percent of the population, died. In its intensity and in the proportion of the population killed, the violence on Bali probably exceeded that witnessed on Java in the same period. The populations of whole villages were executed, the victims either shot with automatic weapons or hacked to death with knives and machetes. Some of the killers were said to have drunk the blood of their victims or to have gloated over the numbers of people they had put to death (Robinson 1995: 1).

Sangut: That was Lord Suratma, the one who seals your fate. He kept shouting he wanted you, he really wanted to lay into you, jump up and down on you and smash your head in. He does it by writing you off with red ink. If he does it across your chest, you'll get lung trouble. If his pen goes right up to your head, your brain goes soft.

Dèlem: Oh! That Lord Suratma's not so smart. (*Shouting*) I just want to twist, twist, twist his neck until it's kite string, chop it off with a knife, tug it till it comes off, smash his teeth in with a rock, smash him up, smash him up till he yells out, kick him into hell, so that for once His Excellency Lord Suratma himself should go to hell. (*Then, hearing Détya Kawaca approach, he reverts to an obsequious tone*) I'm coming, my Lord (from wayang performance 18[th.] January 1989, *Sang Nata Kawaca attacks heaven*).

Discussing argument in Indonesia raises interesting questions. We are told that Indonesians rarely show anger, never disagree in public and avoid confrontation at all costs. However, a cursory glance shows Indonesian history to be strewn with epic massacres and semi-incessant mundane violence. *Prima facie* there would seem to be a contradiction. Is it possible to have savagery on such a scale untouched by conflict, disagreement or anger? Or is such politesse a veneer behind which people are free to get up to whatever skulduggery they like? And how do you address differences of opinion or interests, make decisions, persuade or question others without discussion and argumentation? Indeed, is the image of Indonesian social life as an elegant frozen tableau borne out by the evidence? Representing Indonesians as suffering cultural amfisbitophobia or allodoxaphobia poses more problems than it clarifies.

For simplicity, let me summarize what follows. To make the case that Indonesians are widely imagined as avoiding disagreement and conflict requires not just presenting evidence to this effect, but also explaining the underlying theoretical arguments involved. I briefly review popular and scholarly accounts, from which it emerges that the ideal type is Central Javanese aristocratic etiquette, to which a curious inflection is given by the neighbouring Balinese, whose character is reported to be strikingly alien. The question arises though: whose interpretations are these? The answers prove informative. Whereas cultural styles of handling confrontation are much discussed, far less has been written explicitly about what might seem to be a quite different topic, namely styles of argumentation. A review of ethnography is revealing, not least as whether something is argumentation or disagreement turns out to depend on the context and participants' understandings. I conclude by suggesting a quite different way of thinking about such representations of Indonesians.

Much ado about nothing?

Am I not fussing unnecessarily? Is there serious evidence, other than anecdotal, that Indonesians prefer indirectness and eschew disagreement or, if they do, that it has any significant implications?[1] I am not suggesting that many Indonesians do not appear as polite and reserved in public. Evidently they do. But so too do many Japanese, Thai and others. If inquiry is to be informative, what distinguishes Indonesians? Consider the advice given to diplomats and visiting businessmen.

> Indonesians rarely disagree in public. To succeed in negotiations with Indonesians, do not apply pressure or be confrontational (eDiplomat 2016).

> Indonesians avoid confrontation at all costs, as it is again considered ill mannered or uneducated to confront someone in public. In some cases, you will never ever know whether you have offended someone as she/he will remain polite and hide her/his feelings from you. The Javanese are very good at this.

> Showing your anger, raising your voice to anybody in the workplace in front of others will cause loss of face to both yourself and the person you are being angry at. If this happens, your Indonesian colleagues will lose their respect for you and the person you shouted at will not be able to bear the 'loss of face' you caused for him/her. Chances are she/he will resign immediately after this incident. Conflicts should therefore be dealt with in private (Centre for Intercultural Learning 2014).

The *Indonesia Handbook* however does not pull its punches.

> Indonesians rarely show anger, but when they do they run amok and stab someone (Dalton 1995: 71-2).

Finally, a guide to foreigners on Indonesian business etiquette and communication adds more.

> There is a strong preference in Indonesia toward the Javanese culture of separation of internal self from external self. When a person is upset, it is habitual for the Indonesian not to show negative emotion or anger externally. They will keep smiling and be polite, no matter how angry they are inside. This also means that maintaining work place and relationship harmony is very important in Indonesia, and no one wishes to be the transmitter of bad or negative news or feedback (Hofstede 2016).

'Losing face' is probably a nineteenth-century translation from the Chinese. Does it follow that, as Orientals, Chinese and Indonesians are interchangeable? Certainly, if a foreigner breaches etiquette, the results are supposedly draconian: either the unfortunate Indonesians risk losing their jobs or they go on a killing spree. We are also told that such indirectness stems from 'the Javanese culture of separation of internal self from external self'. So we may need to differentiate between Indonesians ethnically and establish what part culture plays in all this.

Note that 'Indonesians are indirect communicators'. Indirection or evasion necessarily involves communication. So what would direct communication look like? Presumably

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[1] This piece is a shortened version for the conference of a longer paper entitled *It's fine to pull his head off, just don't disagree with him in public*, available at http://www.criticalia.org/symposia--panels/how-indonesians-argue-2.html. The full paper offers extensive evidence for my critique of amfisbitophobia and allodoxaphobia, provides fuller ethnographic examples of argument and addresses potential objections. This is all part of a wider project entitled *How Indonesians Argue*, the focus of which is to examine culturally approved or recognized styles of argument. Surprisingly little has been written on the topic partly, I suspect, because argument raises question of rationality and so risks inferential racism. Below I outline how to obviate such concerns. What emerges is the startling range of styles of argument that Indonesians from different ethnic groups and classes use in different situations. The point of such a reorientation is to avoid being confined to the study and interpretation of existing representations and instead to inquire into the practices in context that gave rise to these by asking: who represented what *as* what to whom on what occasion for what purpose? In short, my interest is in developing a pragmatist approach.

receivers would understand the references and intentions of senders' messages unproblematically, fully and comprehensively. Such accounts presuppose a demonstrably defective 'transmission model', which reduces communication to how accurately a message corresponds to its referent. While lack of ambiguity is carefully engineered to be a feature of computing, it is notably absent in human communication, where inexactitude, equivocation and opacity—let alone plain muddle and confusion—are common conditions in social life. The claim that Indonesians differ from other peoples when they communicate indirectly presupposes and conflates an ideal or limiting possibility with actuality. Perhaps we should ask: what styles of indirection do which Indonesians recognize or prefer on what occasions?

So is it all about culture?

Making generalizations about 200 million people is a fraught business. However, as the quotations above indicate, what seems to be at issue is culture. That begs the question of what we mean by culture, as culture 'is one of two or three most complicated words in the English language (Williams 1983: 87). Not coincidentally, two of the most celebrated, Gregory Bateson and Clifford Geertz, drew upon their field research on Balinese and Javanese character to underwrite their case for the pervasive grip of culture.

In what follows, I shall draw primarily on Geertz's work for two reasons. For Indonesia, he is probably the most eloquent and reflective commentator on cultural styles of dealing with conflict and argument. His observations are also articulated through a well-developed theory of symbols and culture, which is central to understanding his interpretation of both Javanese and Balinese society.[2]

> The concept of culture I espouse...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz 1973b: 5).

Culture is a system of symbols, which are the essence of human thought, are models for and models of cultural action which serve 'to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men' (Geertz 1973c: 94).

So how does invoking culture work? It makes it possible to comment meaningfully, or even encapsulate, an entire people's attitude to such general concerns as disagreement and conflict. Consider Geertz on Java.

> For the Javanese, evil results from unregulated passion and is resisted by detachment and self-control (1973d: 131).

> The whole momentum of the Javanese ritual system is supposed to carry one through grief without severe emotional disturbance (1973e: 153).

In a similar vein Benedict Anderson could write generally of 'the Javanese theory of politics', 'the Javanese idea of power, and 'the Javanese conception of power' (1990: 19; 21 & 41; 72 & 74). So powerful is this theoretical armature that not only anthropologists, but political scientists, can effortlessly to generalize about vast populations.

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[2] A third reason is that, when presenting a counter-case, it is the more cogent if it addresses the strongest and best thought out version of the argument with which it engages. Although there are many commentaries and refinements on the general argument, my concern is not with the latest state of play, but with its theoretical implications, which are clearly laid out by the key figures cited.
On Laclau's development of Gramsci's idea of articulation as a central concept in Cultural Studies, see Slack 1996.

> In summary, then, the Javanese see power as something concrete, homogeneous, constant in total quantity, and without inherent moral implications as such (Anderson 1990: 23).

The enabling concepts are 'tradition' (as in 'the Javanese tradition of political thought' or 'the Javanese traditional conception of Power' (1990: 28, 38)) and 'culture', the title of Anderson's essay being 'The idea of power in Javanese culture'.

Reliance on terms like culture and tradition however are problematic.

> Culture, inasmuch as it served as anthropology's guiding concept, has always been an idea *post factum*, a notion oriented towards the past (to 'custom' and 'tradition'), descriptive of a state of affairs (and often of a status quo), a nostalgic idea at best (when it mixed the study of exotic societies with regret) and a reactionary ideologeme at worst (when it was used optimistically to explain away as 'variation' what in many cases was the result of discrimination and violence) (Fabian 1991: 193; for a detailed discussion, see Hobart 2000).

It seems we must look more closely at culture, because a curious feature of such definitions that they presuppose order and also tend to circularity. As culture is defined as semiotic (namely, about signs, symbols or meanings which comprise ordered systems), the argument in the first sentence of Geertz's definition of culture above is both circular and covertly introduces presuppositions of culture being ordered and systematic.

There are good grounds at least in the history of anthropological argument for concepts like society and culture. Culture has long been a means of marshalling ostensibly disparate and unrelated customs, beliefs and actions to show their inner consistency and structure. If culture has this embracing coherence, then violence presumably must be part: containable, explicable, perhaps even culturally celebrated. Such a claim ignores the possibility that society might not comprise a coherent whole, but have ruptures, incoherencies, aporia—that some aspects or institutions run counter to this ideal vision, and may well not be subsumable, easily or at all. That is the point of the juxtaposition of my opening quotations.[3]

Analyses which depend on cultural interpretation are intriguing for what they omit. They are obliged largely to finesse, reinterpret, sideline or ignore social divisions of class, ethnicity, gender and so on to stress harmony or to transform antagonisms into symbolic differences. Because interpretive approaches are in search of order and coherence, their proponents tend to select ethnographic evidence that supports their assumptions rather than start from what people actually say and do, which is almost always messy, confused and open to different protagonists articulating what happens in contradictory ways. This latter approach is central to British Cultural Studies. Of one of its founders, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall noted he

> insisted on the historical specificity of culture, on its plural, not singular, definition— 'cultures', not 'Culture': above all, on the necessary struggle, tension and conflict between

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[3] Let me be clear about what I am arguing. It is not that the cultural stress on avoiding disagreement, conflict or physical violence is incompatible with, or denies, its existence. Indeed, the counter thesis is more obvious: the more conflict is around, the more necessary are the cultural means of containing, framing and domesticating it. The question is rather: how do ideals of social harmony square with recognizing—or abjuring—violence and its motivations? If public representations concede—or even celebrate—violence then an account that evades addressing these fully is at best lacking, at worst disingenuous. Now Javanese and Balinese literature is replete with narratives that expatiate on aristocratic ideals and are packed with gory details of anger, aggression, conflict and dispute.

It seems that we are dealing with selective reportage, whether in the colonial period by the powers-that-be or subsequently by media and other censorship. With the lifting of media censorship, it became clear how widespread social, political and religious, let alone common or garden criminal, violence has been all along (Hüsken & de Jonge 2002; Schulte Nordholt 2007). Social harmony was a meticulously engineered spectacle. So it is not so much conflict as the appearance of calm and order that needs critical interrogation.

cultures and their links to class cultures, class formations and class struggles—the struggles between 'ways of life' rather than the evolution of 'a way of life'. These were seminal qualifications (Hall 1980: 20).

Between these approaches there is so little in common that there appears to be a stand-off or stalemate.

The situation may not be so dire though. First, both schools assume that their respective analyses are so powerful and all-encompassing that, except as 'raw material', they can safely omit their subjects' judgements and commentaries on how they variously apprehend their own societies. If you include people's own understandings, things change radically. Second, if we treat cultural statements not as fixed but as articulations made by particular people or groups under particular circumstances that are always in principle open to counter-articulation, the scope of inquiry expands greatly. Third, such a recognition invites us to consider what happens in practice. What are the articulatory practices through which people unite or differentiate themselves by culture, ethnicity, class, gender and so forth on different occasions? Drawing on Foucault and the English-speaking philosophical pragmatists, matters look very different if we rephrase the issue as the practices through which people assert, discuss, evaluate, muse on, question or challenge what is going on. Instead of translating carefully selected instances of what people do and say into abstract totalizing categories in a quite different, and at least partly incommensurate, academic discourse, we are invited to inquire instead into who gets to articulate, enunciate, query or disagree with such articulations under what circumstances. Instead of imagining culture in the abstract as a coherent, relatively stable, meaningful totality or necessarily as the site of perpetual conflict, we can broaden inquiry by asking what people actually say and do under different circumstances, including how they attempt to preempt discussion by declaring it 'our culture'.

Why argument?

The foregoing discussion is necessary background to answering two questions. With so much to research in Indonesia, why choose something as abstract and seemingly irrelevant as argument? Also why use an English term, which has no easy equivalents in other European languages, let alone Indonesian?

If we question culture as a coherent totality, semiotics as the way to understand it and agency displaced onto meaning, the question of who represented culture or society as ordered wholes to whom on what occasions for what purposes with what outcomes emerges as crucial. It enables us to consider how disagreements come to be articulated, developed, dismissed or silenced in different situations in any society. At this point argument, whether as argumentation or dispute, becomes relevant. If we start with conflict, short of motiveless violence or completely irrational coercion, different protagonists usually frame what they do by appealing to reasons—be these thought out reflectively, rationalizations, justifications or whatever. If we start with argumentation, whether it takes the form of a coherent explication, narrative or rhetorical exposition, even logical games, they are almost always trying to achieve something. It may be to convince an opponent, persuade an audience, supplicate those in authority, grind someone into submission and much else besides. Significantly, there is little point in trying to produce a general classification of types of argument, because different people are often busy proposing different ways of explaining or interpreting what something is all about. Indeed, as I shall suggest, whether people are thought to disagree or not depends in large part upon how they and others present and interpret what is happening.

While logicians like to treat argument as about the relationship between abstract entities they call 'propositions' independent of the contexts of their use, such a definition effectively presupposes minds to be brains in jars reflecting detachedly on possible truth-conditions. Such an account is of limited relevance if you are interested in the contextual nature of social practice. Bakhtin rejected existing approaches to languages in favour of a pragmatist account of language as fundamentally dialogic, comprising situated utterances offers a useful way to start with events, shorn of presuppositions about system or structure, because

> we cannot break out into the world of events from *within* the theoretical world. One must start with the act itself, and not with its theoretical transcription (Bakhtin 1986a: 91).

On this account of dialogue, neither individuals nor social entities, with all the presuppositions entailed, are primary, but chains of utterances which are always open and unfinalizable.

> Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth (Bakhtin 1984: 293).

Out of all the kinds of utterances, those that concern me here are the assemblage of practices that I find it convenient to sum up in the English word 'argument'.[4] That there are neither easy equivalents in other European, let alone Indonesian, languages, far from being a drawback is an advantage because, provided the term is used reflectively and critically, it destabilizes familiar usage and highlights the problems of imposing Western academic categories on events and requires us to consider how people themselves variously understand what they are doing.

As it happens, although they did not always frame it this way, scholars have written quite often about different Indonesian styles of argumentation. For instance there are studies of how Javanese and Balinese write history (e.g. Ali 1965; Berg 1965; Errington 1979; Sweeney 1987; Zoetmulder 1965) or structure theatrical narrative (Becker 1979; Keeler 1987). What has remained relatively unstudied critically are registers of religious discussion and political rhetoric, modes of academic reasoning and much else besides. Overshadowing discussion is the issue of what comprises proper and acceptable reasoning, which raises the spectre of the notorious earlier debates about primitive thought: that is whether non-European peoples such as Indonesians suffer from defective rationality (e.g. Lévy-Bruhl 1926, 1975; Evans-Pritchard 1934; Hallpike 1979; Wilson 1970; Overing 1985; Hollis & Lukes 1982). A consequence of the belated recognition of the profoundly racist assumptions is that inquiry into differences in styles of reasoning has been rendered largely unmentionable, which is unfortunate and unnecessary. A simple move dispels the racism and turns the issue on its head. It is to treat European canons of reasoning as themselves cultural and their hegemonic imposition upon the rest of the world as subject to critical interrogation. So doing enables us to inquire into the social conditions under which Indonesians—or, for that matter, Europeans—deploy different cultural styles of reasoning.[5]

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[4] Many of the relevant senses are summed up in the OED's definition of 'argue'. Perhaps most relevant are:

> To bring forward reasons concerning a matter in debate; to make statements or adduce facts for the purpose of establishing or refuting a proposition; to discuss; to reason… To reason in opposition, raise objections, contend, dispute… To bring forward the reasons for or against (a proposition, etc.); to discuss the pros and cons of; to treat by reasoning, examine controversially.

It would be most convenient were the senses of argument and argumentation clearly different. However, as a brief inspection of the OED shows, they overlap significantly for reasons that will become clear.

[5] This paper seeks to air, rather than answer, questions that I think need addressing. I skirt round several issues such as the intellectual history of how Indonesians—or, perhaps, more precisely, Javanese and even Balinese— came to be attributed with a horror of disagreement or argument. My aim is to suggest that assertions that Indonesians do not argue, be it engaging in argumentation or disagreement, is ideological and often counter-factual. At least three important topics remain unconsidered. One would be the history of Dutch colonial

Javanese *versus* **Balinese**

The accounts above rarely distinguish between different Indonesian peoples. However, it is generally the Javanese who exemplify these representations; and Geertz's *The Religion of Java* (1960) often seems to be the direct, or indirect, source. Geertz was at his most eloquent when expounding upon the white-collar or aristocratic, *priyayi*, worldview.

> Emotional equanimity, a certain flatness of affect, is, then, the prized psychological state, the mark of the truly *alus* character. As the forms which life takes vary from the disordered grossness of animal existence up through the only slightly more refined peasant to the hyper-genteel high-*prijaji,* and, finally, through the divine king to the invisible, intangible, insensible (except mystically), self-sufficient Being of God, so the forms of feeling vary from the vulgar actuality of base passion, through the spiritualized placidity of the true *prijaji* to the ultimate *rasa,* where feeling is but meaning only…
>
> Etiquette is the transfer to the level of interpersonal behavior of the calm and muted feeling tone of the inner life (1960: 240-2).

It is left slightly open how far such concerns are exclusive to the *priyayi* and how far others seek to imitate them.

> Geertz then spelled out how the cultural values behind such a world view.
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> Four major principles animate *prijaji* etiquette: the proper form for the proper rank, indirection, dissimulation, and the avoidance of any act suggesting disorder or lack of self-control. Under the proper form for the proper rank comes the all-important matter of the correct choice of linguistic form… One must always be careful in speaking to lower people, one woman said, because they are very easily insulted and once insulted they become uncontrollably angry (1960: 243).

We are offered a tightly coherent world view that links rank, concern over maintaining order, self-control and anticipating others' feelings, which are achieved through being so indirect that truth is avoided even, it seems, when there is little, or nothing, at stake in being transparent. Should we accept the links that Geertz says *priyayi* make into a necessarily indissoluble whole and also accept this as a basis for a critical anthropological interrogation of such claims? To some that might seem like making the accused, judge, jury, counsel for the prosecution and for the defense at their own trial. Be that as it may, ontologically quite distinct kinds of entities are brought together to forge an unquestionable totality. That, its proponents claim, is the never-ending wonder of culture. While such a system may be plausible as an ideological construct, it is deeply problematic as a critical analysis on both general ethnographic and theoretical grounds.

Geertz's exegesis on Javanese etiquette excludes as much as it includes. His account is largely of a timeless, unchanging world (the apotheosis of which would be his depiction in later writings of the Balinese theatre state). A perennial problem of such heavily interpretive accounts is that they suffocate any serious analysis of power, class and social hierarchy. Instead we are offered free-floating intricate strategies of deference, avoidance and maintenance of a ranked order without reference to what these are in aid of.

Painting with a broad brush is necessary to avoid the widening cracks in the imaginary from being evident. What do such accounts obviate? Crucially, we are not dealing just with representations of ethnicity, class and gender, but with articulations that prioritize and

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representations. A second would involve an analysis of accounts, past and present, scholarly and popular, about how Indonesians have represented issues around argument and disagreement among different classes in different ethnic groups. A third would consider how changes in how such issues are portrayed and discussed in different mass media.

hierarchize certain combinations of subject positions over others. An obvious example is the remarkable extent to which ideal representations of women have been engineered whether, say, under Dutch colonialism or Suharto's New Order (Sears 1996). Drawing upon the recognition in Cultural Studies that representations are always articulated, Tiwon delineates how such ideals work.

> What we may perceive in this seeming sequestration of the female from the general role of laborer is the cumulative effects of the various articulations over time of what it means to be a woman in Javanese / Indonesian culture. As a laborer, the writer finds herself trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and disenfranchisement until she is thrown out of it by the actions of the company for which she works. Only then does she gradually learn that what she had previously accepted as foreordained fate [*nasib*] is largely the result of a history of human manipulation. While it does not bring her journey to a happy haven, it does open up a new horizon through a vision of class empowerment. As a woman, however, she remains trapped. Although she breaks away from the literal and figurative confinement of an imprudent marriage, she is unable to accept herself as a complete person without the comfortable, if restrictive, bonds of family. She is, in a sense, still incarcerated within culturally determined conventions of what constitutes the "fate" of womankind—*nasib kaum wanita*—the fate inextricably enmeshed in the Indonesian concept of *kodrat wanita* [intrinsic nature of woman], in spite of her activities as a laborer, for, as a woman, she continues to accept the terms that have been articulated for her rather than attempting to articulate her own (1996: 48).

Similar arguments can be made for other social categories and classes, which are spoken for. Instead of admiring beautifully burnished imaginaries, perhaps we should ask who disarticulates and objectivizes whom as subjects, or even objects, through what kind of 'dividing practices' (Foucault 1982: 208ff.). Far more is omitted from the model than is included. And whose accounts are these? Although such an account privileges a now-vestigial aristocracy, it is in effect the middle classes, a bourgeoisie which includes civil servants, teachers and media producers, which replicate, disseminate and may try to embody such ideals.

The next-door Balinese present a curious comparison, because it is drawn so variously. Some Indonesian stereotypes contrast hyper-reserved Javanese with boisterous Balinese.[6] One can have endless fun with mutual caricatures, which is not an entirely fatuous exercise. The mass media offer audiences a remarkable range of images of themselves and other peoples. Javanese especially seem to enjoy parodying themselves. Meanwhile the barrage of foreign representations of Balinese, notably since the 1920s or so, has been so unrelenting, but largely flattering, that it often serves local interests to reimagine themselves in line with such depictions.[7]

Researchers have the advantage that Balinese seem to name, formalize and have explicit rules for aspects of social life that others have not thought of. So Geertz was able subsequently to flesh out his analysis of cultural styles of conflict avoidance. Now

> many of Clifford Geertz's most important works on Bali, his studies of the nineteenth-century Balinese state, of the Balinese cockfight, or of Balinese ideas of personality, took the best of

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[6] If these stereotypes have any substance, it may be because the Balinese aristocracy kept extensive political power well into the late twentieth century.

[7] Vickers analyses what drove the changing images of Bali, including Walter Spies's role in romanticizing the island to foreigners including Mead and Bateson, who was 'was concerned with locating an unchanging Balinese ethos, as he called it' (2012: 205). Vickers is also informative on how Balinese, trained as artists by Westerners, set out to depict Balinese society as harmonious, which is neither was in pre-colonial nor colonial times. How Balinese have retrojected relatively modern images of themselves into an ancient genealogy, see Hobart 2007.

Mead and Bateson's writings as their starting point' (Vickers 2012: 260).

Bateson's analysis was permeated by the stark contrast between Balinese and the quarrelsome and violent Melanesian Iatmul, whom he had studied before. Balinese character on this account was marked by the avoidance of intensive interaction and climax in favour of the steady state of an emotional plateau.

> In general the lack of climax is characteristic for Balinese music, drama, and other art forms… Balinese culture includes definite techniques for dealing with quarrels. Two men who have quarrelled will go formally to the office of the local representative of the Rajah and will there register their quarrel, agreeing that whichever speaks to the other shall pay a fine or make an offering to the gods. Later, if the quarrel terminates, this contract may be formally nullified. Smaller—but similar—avoidances *(pwik)* are practiced, even by small children in their quarrels… If this interpretation is correct, this method of dealing with quarrels would correspond to the substitution of a plateau for a climax. In regard to warfare, contemporary comment on the old wars between the Rajahs indicates that in the period when the comments were collected (1936–39) war was thought of as containing large elements of mutual avoidance (1973: 86).

As a consequence, the patterns

> which define correct and permissible behavior are exceedingly complex (especially the rules of language) and that the individual Balinese (even to some degree inside his own family) has continual anxiety lest he make an error. Moreover, the rules are not of such a kind that they can be summarized either in a simple recipe or an emotional attitude. Etiquette cannot be deduced from some comprehensive statement about the other person's feelings or from respect for superiors. The details are too complex and too various for this, and so the individual Balinese is forever picking his way, like a tightrope walker, afraid at any moment lest he make some misstep (1973: 92).[8]

Geertz expatiated on this vision of Balinese applied to ideas of personhood, time and conduct, exemplified most dramatically in Balinese cockfights as exercises in 'deep play' (1973f, 1973a). Aware that he was reading an entire culture from small fragments, Geertz qualified himself.

> The cockfight is not the master key to Balinese life, any more than bullfighting is to Spanish. What it says about that life is not unqualified nor even unchallenged by what other equally eloquent cultural statements say about it. But there is nothing more surprising in this than in the fact that Racine and Molière were contemporaries, or that the same people who arrange chrysanthemums cast swords (1973a: 452).

Having just spent over 40 pages waxing eloquent on the cockfight as an interpretive key to Bali, what are we make of this? The murderous conflict that has beset much of Balinese history has been neatly transformed via the cliché of chrysanthemums and swords into the differences between Racine and Molière. What happened to what wicked—or naïve—Europeans might think of as issues of class and power?

> When it came to politics, Geertz's depicted Bali as

> a theatre state in which the kings and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, and the peasants the supporting cast, stage crew, and audience. The stupendous cremations, tooth filings, temple dedications, pilgrimages, and blood sacrifices, mobilizing hundreds and even thousands of people and great quantities of wealth, were not means to political ends: they were the ends themselves, they were what the state was for. Court ceremonialism was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state, but

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[8] As Geertz had read this work and completed his field research on Bali before writing *The religion of Java*, was this how the slightly quaint word 'etiquette' came to play so prominent an articulatory role in the latter?

rather the state, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power (1980: 13).

As Schulte Nordholt asked: 'Whose image of the state is described by Geertz?' (1981: 476). His answer was: 'it is Geertz' over-fertile imagination which has created the "classical" Balinese state to which he applies his theatre metaphor, and not the Balinese' (1981: 473). I might add that Geertz has imported a relatively modern European metaphor of theatre, which has little, if anything, to do with how Balinese variously imagine what theatre is about and does. Rather than put the crowning touches on a remarkable cultural style of ritualizing disagreement and conflict, Geertz may have slipped into anachronism, because

> From 1920 onwards the [Dutch] preference was to let traditional popular rulers control society. The ultimate result of this was that 'restored' old dynasties put a Balinese face on colonial rule. If the term 'theatre state' is to be applied to Bali, then the 'restored kings' of the 1930s fit the bill (Schulte Nordholt 1996: 334, my parentheses).

Insofar as Bali served to refine and develop Geertz's depiction of Java, we are offered two recensions on how Javanese and Balinese handle disagreement and conflict. It is, in effect, an ideal to which people strive, precisely because they realize it is absent for the most part. That does not make it irrelevant at all. It suggests however that we are being offered something closer to an imaginary, one of a number of ways that people might wish to imagine their social existence.

How did Indonesians—be they Javanese, Balinese or whoever—come to be imagined as pre-occupied with the appearance and, if possible, the actuality—of balance and harmony? And what is the provenance of these singularly Pythagorean metaphors? Sceptically I would suggest that such notions are European judgements imposed upon—even if now adopted enthusiastically by—Indonesians. Let me contrast two accounts.

> Balinese regard the exact maintenance of spatial orientation ('not to know where north is' is to be crazy), balance, decorum, status relationships and so forth, as fundamental to ordered life (*krama*) and *paling*, sort of whirling confusion of position the scrambling cocks [of the Balinese cockfight] exemplify as its profoundest enemy and contradiction (C. Geertz 1973a: 446-7, my parentheses).

> War, in this view, not serene order, is the normal state of the cosmos, and the human world. Conflict is not evidence of chaotic breakdown of the cosmos, but the fundamental characteristic of life. The Balinese world is one in which the many elements are never harmoniously united, in which there is no single encompassing principle, no way of comprehending the whole (H. Geertz 1994: 95).

Whereas the first deftly imposes Western imagery onto Balinese, the latter account is drawn from a later careful study of Balinese ideas about how they understand the world works. We are offered two quite different social imaginaries: one how Balinese may seem to Westerners, the other how Balinese imagine themselves.

According to whom?

On the amfisbitophobic account, there are no confusions, misconceptions, rival accounts, differing understandings, dialogue or argument (in any sense) that tends to distinguish how humans rub along with one another. The world is monologic, inscribed authoritatively but without authors, which leaves it effectively beyond challenge, disagreement and disputation, and so—which is the point—beyond argument. Geertz's description imitates—rather than engages critically with—the *priyayi* vision of how the world ought to be, replete with aristocratic disinterest as to how the world with its many *longueurs* actually is. It invites the reader to ignore much of what is going on, like quotidian actuality, which *inter alia* is broadcast

daily on national terrestrial television channels to mass audiences. It takes a certain amount of effort and ingenuity not to be overwhelmed by representations of a quite different Indonesia going on all around. Just to take television, apart from news which includes coverage of demonstrations and riots, programming offers a riot of genres. These have varied from crime reportage (*Kriminal*) or pseudo-investigations into the supernatural (*Mistik*) to investigative inquiry into the doings of the élite (see Hobart 2006). Yet others delight in lampooning the *priyayi* head on, such as *Ketoprak Humor* in the early 2000s and subsequently *Opera Van Java*.

Dogs are often said to be stupid because, if you point at something, dogs usually look at your finger not at the object indicated. We might learn from them. Academic descriptions of other peoples often airbrush out the subject position of the author. Of Javanese dissimulation, Geertz wrote: 'we usually have to find some sort of reason for telling a lie'. But who are the 'we'? Such deictics are inherently ambiguous. At once they exonminate the speaker (Barthes 1973: 138-49); and situate the addressees as being similar thinking subjects, as having similar kinds of understanding and values to the speaker. In so doing, they naturalize an enunciative position that obscures the many ways that interlocutors might differ. Geertz was however following in famous footsteps: 'Balinese culture is in many ways less like our own than any other which has yet been recorded' (Bateson & Mead 1942: xvi). The reader is offered a 'we' that unproblematically embraces (all?) the inhabitants of Britain and the United States as representing some kind of unitary subject position, the natural and normal stance from which to evaluate others as different.

To say Javanese or Balinese differ in how they deal with conflict or disagreement begs the question of whom they differ from. There is all the difference in the world between the latter being, say, American or Australian politicians, American trailer trash caricatured on the Jerry Springer Show, upper class English or Japanese. Perhaps it is less that these Indonesians are weird, but that aristocrats or those with pretensions, may seek to distinguish themselves from the *hoi polloi* by distinctive etiquette.[9] And what of the implicit political positions that any such description involves?

When is argument?

Between the lines, it is evident that different social groups or classes have quite different ways of understanding the world. But what is it that *priyayi* wrap up argument in language, dissimulate and flatten into ineffectuality? What matters are Balinese imagined to symbolize, ritualize and structure—and so defang—into picturesque, yet curiously voiceless, spectacle? While etiquette has been much mulled over, what people are actually arguing about remains largely unexamined. So it is perhaps best approached through examples, for which I draw upon my own ethnography in Bali between 1972 and 1999. One question for such a discussion is how, and if, it is possible in practice to distinguish between argumentation and debate on the one hand and discussion as against disagreement or conflict on the other.

Bribing a God

As part of an annual festival at the temple of the aristocratic lineage of Cokorda Sukawati in Tengahpadang, a shadow play (*wayang*) was performed by a *dalang*, Anak Agung Petemon, himself from a cadet line of the Cokordas, known for being brave enough to voice social and

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[9] Anecdotally, having had the dubious privilege of undergoing the full rites of the English class system from Public School to Oxbridge, far from finding élite Javanese or Balinese reserved, I find them relatively open and accessible compared to my English peers.

political criticism publicly. The play was from a minor episode of the Mahabharata about Aswageni, a son whom Arjuna rejected and who, transforming himself into a demon, Sang Nata Kawaca, threatens heaven itself. The extract below is from an intermezzo, when one of Aswageni's servants, the smart, if unscrupulous, Sangut, bumps into Sang Suratma, the Record Keeper of Souls, who determines humans' deaths (either by writing a letter or in his record book, according to different accounts). He is a figure who inspires fear in most people. This exchange occurs shortly before the arrival of Sangut's bombastic elder brother Dèlem cited in the opening quotation.

Sangut:	Ooh! I beg your pardon, but is this the king of the *pemedi* or a God?[10] I have never seen anything like it, is it a *pemedi* or a sea slug?
Sang Suratma:	Hey! Who's calling me a sea slug? Don't insult me like that. You are in the Presence of none other than Lord Suratma.
Sangut:	Oh. Are you Lord Suratma?
Sang Suratma:	That is right. I write the letters which seal the fate of human souls. If you do wrong, I cross you off. If I cross you off with red ink, you're dead.
Sangut:	Oh. So that's it. Now, if I offered you money, you wouldn't cross me off?
Sang Suratma:	Ah! If it's a lot of money, I'll cancel it (the crossing-off). If it's only a little, say enough to buy root crops, you'll still be struck off. If it's half, I'll half cross you off. You'll be very ill indeed.
Sangut:	If it's lots and lots and lots of money. I mean as much as I have got?
Sang Suratma:	Ah! If it's really a lot, then I cancel the crossing-off totally. You can live to be two hundred and ninety years old. That's how it is.
Sangut:	Bah! That's wicked of you to be calculating like that. You shouldn't do that, even if you are in charge of the letters. Only if someone's done wrong should you cross them off. Don't mix money up in it, you should be ashamed of yourself.
Sang Suratma:	Why not? If I don't, my children will have nothing to eat.
Sangut:	Worse still! You shouldn't do it. You shouldn't do it. Don't try and talk your way out of it.

The exchange is humorous. Sangut feigns ignorance of someone who expects to be instantly recognized and to inspire terror. Instead of succumbing, Sangut first deliberately insults Sang Suratma, then teases out how corrupt the latter is behind his formidable veneer. Having exposed Sang Suratma's venality, Sangut promptly berates him for being corrupt. (The implication is that humans should be ashamed of behaving like that: still more a deity.) Sang Suratma's response is cringing self-exculpation, as if he were poor.

It does not take much imagination for a reader to treat this exchange as an allegory, in the sense of the description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance. The target in this instance would be powerful and potentially dangerous public figures who use their positions to intimidate and extract bribes from ordinary people—something of which most Balinese have experience whenever they have to deal with government officials. Sangut's questioning reveals a certain logic. Those in authority, *a fortiori* deities, occupy positions, the criteria for which is that they are impartial, honest and even-handed. In this instance, Sang Suratma has failed lamentably. What is more, his justification does not hold water. (The rich—far less gods—do not need to worry about feeding their children. It is those from whom they extract bribes who do.)

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[10] *Pemedi* are a kind of malignant spirit. They are usually invisible to humans, but by report they are horrifyingly ugly and misshapen. Sangut is being deliberately insulting about a figure whom he knows to be divine.

That is fine so far as it goes, but it leaves open the question of how Balinese understand such exchanges. A striking blind spot of much interpretation, as it is of judgements about what constitutes proper use of reasoning, is that they concentrate almost exclusively on the utterances to the exclusion of how these are understood by interlocutors in context. We are back to brains in jars. Needless to say, in actuality matters are slightly more complicated. Now there is a Balinese term *praimba*, from the Sanskrit and *Kawi pratiwimba*, image, model; shadow, which is perhaps best glossed as analogy. *Praimba* do not exist in the world: they are made by humans from the potentialities of things and depend for their success on being recognized as such. An analogy works insofar as listeners or spectators get the point; even more so if they realize that they are the target and reflect on their actions.

As much of the village had turned out to watch this shadow play, I asked two young men in their twenties what they thought of this passage. They both laughed and said that they liked it. The idea of a servant trying to bribe a god was funny. When I asked if that was all, they looked puzzled. Others chatting with me at a coffee stall appreciated vaguely that it was about corruption, but seemed unable, rather than unwilling, do think further. By contrast, older men, including two actors, with whom I discussed the play (shadow theatre is conventionally more popular with males), immediately pointed to the exchange as a *praimba* and said that they hoped that any civil servants in the audience got the point. Later I had a long discussion with the *dalang*, who was forthright about his aims, which were to confront those who abused their power and to galvanize spectators out of their resignation at injustices. So, it would seem that some members of the audience treated a verbal exchange as playing with an amusing incongruity, others had a sense it was something to do with corruption, while yet others understood more or less precisely what the *dalang* intended and appreciated the logic of the argument and the point in saying it. By what criteria are we to conclude whether we are dealing with classical Indonesian indirectness (or even obsession with avoiding open conflict), with skillfully expounded argument or with deliberate confrontation designed to disturb the *status quo* and stir people to action?

The problems outlined transform if we question the presuppositions of the approaches criticized. Should we not avoid imposing alien rhetorical terms on peoples who have their own and pay due respect in any analysis to how thinking subjects set about commenting on, judging and criticizing these? And why carelessly adopt an unreflective, commonsense model of communication as transmission? Perhaps we might start by inquiring into how people themselves evaluate communication.[11] Arguably Balinese use a pragmatist approach to communication, be it linguistic or visual, which fits the dialogic model laid out by Vološinov:

> Orientation of the word toward the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by w*hose* word it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee.* Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other.' I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong (Vološinov 1973: 86).

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[11] For an account of terms to do with meaning, see Hobart 1999; on styles of speaking and how to evaluate them, see Hobart 2015. Balinese adopt such a pragmatist model. In speech act terms, if what you say does not yield a result or outcome for the listener, then the utterance was fruitless and empty (Hobart 2015: 11ff.). Balinese use a rather delightful image for recognizing you are the butt of a thrust or remark. It is *sakadi negakin gedebong*: like sitting on a banana stem. They are comfortable to sit on for a few minutes, then the weight of the body starts to crush the plant's cells and you end up with a very wet behind, at which point you realize what you have done.

Put simply, unless you declare spectators effectively passive and irrelevant, in a sense there is no argument if they do not engage with what is said as argument, as something that qualifies, comments on, possibly criticizes a state of affairs or confronts those responsible.

Have I not made life unnecessarily complicated? Are not Javanese indirectness and Balinese formalism just different cultural codes? Attractive as it sounds, this solution is merely another iteration of a mindless model of communication. Such a loose sense of semiotics fails to consider the minimal conditions for a code. So Geertz sweepingly writes of his approach to symbolism as semiotic, as a code that he promises to decipher and interpret for the reader. There are problems however.

> The one single condition that would permit the consideration of symbolism as a code is not fulfilled: no list gives, no rule generates, a set of pairs (symbol, interpretation) such that each occurrence of a symbol finds in it its prefigured treatment (Sperber 1975: 16).

Even where symbolic codes are explicated to an extraordinary degree, such as the '*code de politesse*' in France, they remain ambiguous, Sperber 1975: 21). In a side-swipe against one of Geertz's competitors, Lévi-Strauss, which works equally against Geertz, Sperber noted:

> Semiologists Saussurian semiologists have completely left aside the what-question, and have studied not at all 'How do symbols mean?', but rather 'How do symbols work?' In this study they have established, all unknowing, that symbols work without meaning. Modern semiology, and this is at once its weakness and its merit, has refuted the principles on which it is founded (1975: 51-52).

Then, crucially:

> Symbols are not signs. They are not paired with their interpretations in a code structure. Their interpretations are not meanings (Sperber 1975: 85).

And, from a quite different intellectual background, Bakhtin elaborated.

> Semiotics deals primarily with the transmission of ready-made communication using a ready-made code. But in live speech, strictly speaking, communication is first created in the process of transmission, and there is, in essence, no code… A context is potentially unfinalized; a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information; it does not have cognitive, creative significance. A code is a deliberately established, killed context (1986b: 147).

The charm of cultural codes which the privileged expert can unlock however is totalitarian in assuming it can 'explain the totality of things; it is semiotic (or cryptographic) in its approach to all apparent accidents as signs of an underlying order to which the given system has the key (Morson & Emerson 1990: 28).

Geertz's explication of what animates '*priyayi* etiquette: the proper form for the proper rank, indirection, dissimulation, and the avoidance of any act suggesting disorder or lack of self-control' (1960: 243) now takes on a new significance. Each is a strategy for avoiding discussion and dialogue by imposing closure. They foreclose the possibility of airing issues and arguing them through to some conclusion that has not already been anticipated and pre-empted. In short, they aim to avoid open discussion by monologizing the rough and tumble of social life. When Koentjaraningrat noted (1985: 459) that Indonesian civil servants exemplify *priyayi* ways of acting, he touched on the far wider—and little investigated—issue of techniques that politicians, civil servants and those in power in most societies use to evade debate and argument, with the risk that it will show them wanting.

Argument as myth

So far, I have tried to show what many popular and scholarly representations of Javanese and Balinese are not about. So how might we understand what is going on? I would suggest the sorts of representations are social imaginaries: that is 'ways people imagine their social existence' (Taylor 2004: 50). As such, by definition they are selective and, being ideal, may well be counter-factual. Drawing on Barthes's intriguing epidemiology of myth today, what happens if we treat such imaginaries as mythical? It does not of course follow though that people do not strive to live by, or according to what they imagine, such myths as promulgating.

Barthes made it clear that he was interested in the 'rhetorical figures' of bourgeois myth.

One must understand here by *rhetoric* a set of fixed, regulated, insistent figures, according to which the varied forms of the mythical signifier arrange themselves (1973: 150).

Treating representations of Indonesians as myth adds a degree of complexity to Barthes' original idea, because it requires other peoples to fit 'the dream of the contemporary bourgeois world', which here is authored by Euro-Americans. The point is that the actual referents are *not* Indonesians, but Westerners. With this in mind, let us turn to the principal figures of such myth.

The first feature is *inoculation* by which

one immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalized subversion (1973: 150).

Showing anger or raising your voice are then acknowledged weaknesses to which Westerners may succumb. However, the alternative is that your interlocutor might well feel compelled to resign or run amok. Indonesians live in so constrained a world that such extreme steps serve to exculpate the excesses of the West, which pale by comparison.[12]

The second figure is *the privation of History*.

Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History… This miraculous evaporation of history is another form of a concept common to most bourgeois myths: the irresponsibility of man (1973: 151).

A precondition for depicting a society as effectively argument-free is that history has to be wiped out. Instead the Western subject is free to condemn, appreciate and comment. 'All that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from' (1973: 151).

Next Barthes turns to the process of *identification*.

The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. In the petit-bourgeois universe, all the experiences of confrontation are reverberating, any otherness is reduced to sameness. The spectacle or the tribunal, which are both places where the Other threatens to appear in full view, become mirrors. This is because the Other is a scandal which threatens his essence (1973: 151).

While the stereotypes in diplomatic, business and tourist guides might seem to fit nicely, at first sight, professional anthropological work, such as Geertz's writings on Java, would appear to give the lie to this mythical possibility. However, Barthes continues:

Sometimes—rarely—the Other is revealed as irreducible: not because of a sudden scruple,

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[12] These, of course, include what took place under colonialism, two world wars, the routine subversion of properly elected governments by the CIA and mass surveillance by the NSA and GCHQ.

> but because *common sense* rebels… There is here a figure for emergencies: exoticism. The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown. Relegated to the confines of humanity, he no longer threatens the security of the home (1973: 152).

It would, I think, be a rather odd reader who did not find Geertz's portrayal of *priyayi* as exotic.

> The fourth figure is *tautology*.

> One takes refuge in tautology as one does in fear, or anger, or sadness, when one is at a loss for an explanation: the accidental failure of language is magically identified with what one decides is a natural resistance of the object… Tautology creates a dead, a motionless world (1973: 152-3).

Language can only hint at the weird and wonderful world of the *priyayi*, which resists explanation in terms of rational argument and only makes sense through recourse to mysticism. I noted earlier that this world is timeless, suspended, moribund.

> The final relevant figure is *the statement of fact*.

> Popular, ancestral proverbs still partake of an instrumental grasp of the world as object. A rural statement of fact, such as '*the weather is fine*' keeps a real link with the usefulness of fine weather. It is an implicitly technological statement; the word, here, in spite of its general, abstract form, paves the way for actions, it inserts itself into a fabricating order: the farmer does not speak *about* the weather, he 'acts it', he draws it into his labour. All our popular proverbs thus represent active speech which has gradually solidified into reflexive speech… Bourgeois aphorisms, on the other hand, belong to metalanguage; they are a second-order language which bears on objects already prepared. Their classical form is the maxim. Here the statement is no longer directed towards a world to be made; it must overlay one which is already made, bury the traces of this production under a self-evident appearance of eternity: it is a counter-explanation, the decorous equivalent of a tautology (1973: 154-5).

From received accounts, we have scant idea how Balinese styles of addressing conflict dealt with day-to-day problems. Subsequent detailed ethnographic studies have suggested that Geertz's broad depiction is a caricature. Although his study of *priyayi* offers examples, these are mostly as reported to Geertz by his informants. Both the guides' and Geertz's accounts are in meta-language in Barthes' sense. The traces of the circumstances under which styles of self-presentation in public have been neatly buried in favour of facts in a timeless, contextless world. It is interesting to think of such accounts as 'counter-explanation'.

For example, an alternative starting point might have been to consider when people—Indonesians or others—find it advisable to avoid argument and disagreement. An obvious circumstance is when a kind of hierarchy of authority or power prevails, such that disagreeing with those senior to oneself is likely to lead to unpleasant consequences. This strategy is encapsulated in the expression popular under the paternalistic New Order: *Asal Bapak senang*, 'So long as the boss is happy'. Arguably this is about survival as much, or more, than some deep, even unconscious, cultural imperative.

May I now complicate my own argument? There are no simple definitive characteristics that distinguish argumentation from disagreement because argument is ultimately an abstract notion. It is subject to being articulated and imagined in different ways, which may involve metaphor. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson proposed that 'we' commonly use conceptual metaphors 'to structure everyday activity', exemplified by 'ARGUMENT IS WAR' (1980: 4). Alternative obvious possible metaphors include argument as dance. As the uncritical reference to 'we' above indicates, as it stands this exposition is Eurocentric. Whether, when and under what circumstances Europeans and Americans employ metaphors when such connotations are pertinent remains a matter for examination. To assume people in other societies treat ideas of

argument, discussion or debate, insofar as there are comparable terms, is unjustifiably hegemonic. In short, a first step is to inquire into how different classes and categories of people in any society variously evaluate practices of arguing. That is no small project.

What now?

A lengthy conclusion would be out of place. The purpose of this piece was to question a range of popular and academic representations of Indonesians—which usually meant an idealized version of Central Javanese court society—as going to extremes to avoid the appearance of argument or disagreement and to emphasize calm, a distinctly hierarchical, but secure and unquestioned, order, underwritten by a hegemony exercised through art, theatre and mysticism. As a critical analytical account it only works by adopting the same rigid closure and negation of what is actually going on as does the object of study.[13] However, it is evident that, far from an elegant monologue appreciated by a vast cast of uncritical, gullible political subjects, there is lively—even ferocious—argument going on, which exponents of the *priyayi* model have to downplay, deny or obliviate.

In short, the accounts we considered earlier are representations by a particular class aimed at the rest of society with the purpose of maintaining their previous, 'feudal' privileges under changed social conditions. In order to carry conviction, these articulations have to aspire to be hegemonic and so to silence, or at least marginalize, counter-articulations. It is instances of these latter that abound in the mass media since Suharto's resignation. Earlier I raised the question of the epistemological status of etiquette, as a shorthand for a way of life that of necessity seeks to eliminate even the possibility of argument. Argument as argumentation implies the possibility of an alternative account. Argument as disagreement shows its actuality. If instead of regarding this deadening of discussion as a statement of fact, but as a performance, it makes rethinking argument not only possible, but fairly urgent.[14] Otherwise we are left with the absurdity of being authoritatively informed the one hand that Balinese obsessively avoid open conflict, on the other watching the same Balinese enjoying Dèlem threatening to pull Sang Suratma's head off.

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[13] Koentjaraningrat once remarked to me that one should not underestimate the epistemological role of *wayang* (shadow theatre) in Java for the Dutch as a synecdoche that gave them a way of totalizing, and so comprehending, Javanese society, which was not comfortingly coherent. He added that he had conducted a large survey, which included trying to establish what proportion of Javanese watched *wayang*. He discovered that only a minority of Javanese questioned had ever actually seen a *wayang* performance.

[14] If performance is to become a concept doing serious work, it requires us to develop a way of thinking about, judging and criticizing performance. Otherwise we have merely replaced etiquette or its synonyms with performance.

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