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978-0-521-29226-9 - The Anthropological Romance of Bali 1597-1972: Dynamic Perspectives in Marriage and Caste, Politics and Religion

James A. Boon

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The anthropological romance of Bali 1597–1972

Cambridge Studies in Cultural Systems

Clifford Geertz, editor

- 1 **The anthropological romance of Bali 1597–1972: Dynamic perspectives in marriage and caste, politics and religion**
James A. Boon
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Illustration of 'A King from the Island Bally or Galle' in the seventeenth-century German voyage literature edited by L. Hulsius (1620). See Chapter I. (Photographed by Division of Rare Books, Firestone Library, Princeton University).

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Dynamic perspectives in marriage and caste,
politics and religion

JAMES A. BOON

*Associate Professor of Anthropology
Cornell University*

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Thanks to Olivian

Della menatapnya sejenak, lalu tersenyum. Ada sesuatu yang ke-ibu2an dalam pandangan serta senyumnya itu. 'Apakah semua klient anda tidak bersalah?'

'Begitulah kata para juri. Dan memang merekalah yang bertugas mengadili.'

Della menghela napas panjang dan mengangkat bahu. 'Anda menang,' ujarnya . . .

(Ind. Gardner: 74)

'Mang, 'Dek, Balik, ajak Tili, 'Mang!

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Preface

Because of the special nature of anthropological-historical research, often more individuals and institutions deserve thanks for their assistance than the actual results seem to warrant. In light of this fact, I hesitate to confess that the following acknowledgements should in fairness be even more extensive.

An initial study-trip to Indonesia (May–July, 1971) was made as Ford Foundation Consultant to assist Clifford Geertz in a survey of social science work in Java and Bali. Thanks are due Jack Bresnan and everyone then in the Jakarta Ford office for their help, especially Ted Smith who provided generous aid with procedural matters on this and a later trip. Sol Tax and Sam Stanley at the time kindly arranged for my leave from the Center for the Study of Man, Smithsonian Institute.

The fieldwork proper was funded by an N.I.M.H. Combination Research Fellowship (1971–73) which enabled my wife and daughter and myself to reside in southwest Bali January–November, 1972. I express gratitude to Professor Koentjaraningrat for his recommendation of the research as suitable for Indonesian sponsorship by the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia.

Among the many informative Balinese who provided the living substance of this study, a special part was played by (*almarhum*) I Gde Ktut Buwana who tirelessly responded to my awkward queries. Bapak Alit Bajra and his wife and family opened their home to us, and I Gde Made Ardika brought pleasure to work with his lively powers of observation and much-needed sense of humor. Thanks also to I Gusti Ngurah Rai Mirsa and I Gde Astawa for their time and to I Gusti Ngurah Bagus of Bali Museum and I Made Widyana and others at the Fakultas Hukum, Universitas Udayana, Den Pasar for their cooperation.

That my wife and I were suffering a serious tropical disease that eventually precluded fieldwork in northern Bali explains (along with the island's demographic density) our occasional sense of identification with the bird in the haiku:

An exhausted sparrow
in the midst
Of a crowd of children

Yet the men within the masses – our friends and neighbors – received us warmly, a fact perhaps attributable more to our toddler's gregarious charms than to any pro-

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fessional skills of our own. Moreover, in 1957 Clifford and Hildred Geertz had left behind in southwest Bali something that augmented the pleasure (and, I like to hope, the scholarly value) of my family's subsequent stay in Tabanan: fond memories among informants, passed on to their children, of relating to anthropologists and, consequently, high hopes on confronting another one. A fieldworker could ask nothing more important of his predecessors.

At the University of Chicago David Schneider, Milton Singer, and Paul Friedrich provided advice in planning and executing fieldwork and in writing a doctoral dissertation based on its results. Portions of the present study that figured in that dissertation have benefited from the influence of these three teacher-scholars. In particular D. Schneider's insistence on cultural models and M. Singer's emphasis on traditional bases of innovation pervade this account.

The archival and historical sections were completed at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey. Here Carl Kaysen and many members and visitors in social sciences and historical studies facilitated interdisciplinary research. Continuous discussions with Clifford and Hildred Geertz enriched the time at Princeton. Also, a summer grant-in-aid from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and funding from Duke University for proofing the final manuscript are acknowledged with appreciation.

Several Indonesianists and scholars of social theory provided forums for discussing material with colleagues and students. Conferences organized by Alton Becker and Aram Yengoyan at the University of Michigan, by Benedict R. O'G. Anderson at the Indonesian Literature Conference, University of Wisconsin, and by Bruce Lawrence and Richard Fox at Duke University were very important for my own work, and they evidenced the exciting current state of Indonesian and Southeast Asian studies and of cross-cultural work on Asian religions. Clifford Geertz at the Institute for Advanced Study, James Siegel at Cornell University, and Milton Singer at the University of Chicago arranged for me to test ideas on various discerning audiences. Other colleagues and students who have been helpful either through extensive conversations or in passing comments include in particular James Peacock, and also Mahadev Apte, Ed Boer, Robert Conkling, James Fox, Ernestine Friedl, Steve Lansing, Mark Leone, Harry Levy, Philip McKean, Mark and Angela Hobart, Sherry Ortner, Lawrence Rosen, Jean Taylor, W.O. Wolters, and Hervé Varenne.

Thanks also to Walter Lippincott and to Jennifer Stevens, Kathy Barnes, Amy Jackson, Dina Smith and to my wife's and my own parents for invaluable practical help.

All research was conducted in Indonesian supplemented with Balinese; no interpreters were used. The area of investigation (principally Tabanan District) is heavily bilingual, and virtually any male least analytically inclined is fluent in Indonesian – the language of the schools – as well as commoner Balinese. Some are adept in courtly, Sanskritized Balinese as well. All translations from sources listed with Dutch or Indonesian titles in the bibliography are my own. In accordance with N.I.M.H. pro-

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visions I have altered the names of actual persons who appear in this and other publications based on fieldwork.

Spelling of Balinese terms follows that used in the excellent Dutch-English translation series listed in the bibliography under *Bali Studies* . . . (1960, 1969) except that 'Ksatriya' is spelled 'Satria' and 'Wesya' is 'Wesia'; for simplicity's sake diacritical marks are omitted. Indonesian terms are spelled according to the 1972 orthographic reform. For both Balinese and Indonesian, letters are pronounced approximately as in English; however, Balinese final vowels are lengthened and stressed, and in Indonesian words English 'ch' is spelled 'c.' We indicate Indonesian as opposed to Balinese by 'Ind; Dutch terms should be self-evident. The complex matter of low, middle, and high levels in Balinese is discussed briefly in Kersten's introductory grammar (1948: 7–14); yet the sociolinguistics of the island has barely begun. The persistent confusion of spelling standards for Balinese, Kawi, and Archipelago Sanskrit remains a handicap in philological studies of Bali's many-languaged textual materials (cf. Hooykaas 1964c: 13–14). In investigations of living social systems, however, this particular problem is less crippling, since articulate informants are often as amused by a misspelled term as a mispronounced one; and they consider neither an insurmountable obstacle to communication.

The different parts of this study have been organized integrally. The playful chapter titles of Part I are meant to suggest the development from casual curiosity to sophisticated analysis in the history of cross-cultural encounters in Bali. I feel this analytic review of dated source materials is crucial in understanding current developments in Balinese religion and politics or lasting patterns in marriage and caste. Nevertheless, for the reader interested solely in the 'ethnographic crunch', who doubts the relevance of any history of ideas, I have begun Part II with a summary recapitulation of basic Balinese society and culture. The interrelation of our 'temporal perspective' with modern social and cultural processes is particularly clear in Chapter 4, in which I try to show how an indigenous Balinese sense of history supports options in social organization, and in Chapter 9, in which enduring literary and religious images are related to the ebb and flow of time in society. The significance of the latter discussion would be lost, I think, to the artistic or philological enthusiast who refused to traverse the sociological and political thicket of Chapters 7 and 8 beforehand.

This study risks alienating several parties. In a sense it asks questions of social customs that philologists and historians often ask of texts and documents, and it asks questions of texts that anthropologists often ask of social customs. Put most argumentatively, we are concerned with the ritual of subsistence and politics and the needs of status and belief. We hope to show how Balinese rules and values of imaginative expressions mesh with rules and values of strict behavior, and more generally how ideas and actions interpenetrate.

Two portions of this study have appeared in somewhat different form as journal articles: much of Chapter 4 as 'The Progress of the Ancestors in a Balinese Temple

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Group, pre-1906–1972,’ reproduced from *The Journal of Asian Studies* XXXIV: 7–25, 1974; part of Chapter 6 as ‘The Balinese Marriage Predicament – Individual, Strategical, Cultural,’ reproduced from the *American Ethnologist* 3: 191–214, 1976.

One might think of ‘Bali’ as anthropology’s ‘Shakespeare.’ An author might do so somewhat defensively to justify yet another book about Bali. Look how far we must go, he can muse, to overtake publications on the ‘Bali’ of world literature. Such musings are not to imply that Bali is worthier than other tidy islands with two-million-plus inhabitants. But for particular reasons to be discussed, the corpus of its Indo-Pacific social and cultural forms was richly textured by native authors, has been concordanced and interpreted by a distinguished line of cross-cultural readers, and provides continuing challenges to understanding. In the massive library of world ethnography, Bali, both comic and tragic, would seem to represent something analogous to a few all-encompassing folios of varying patterns of meaning.

J.A.B.

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