

# **Black umbrellas**

**labelling and articulating development in the Indonesian  
mass media**

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**Labelling people:  
how and why our categories matter**

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The relevance of the mass media to development studies is often couched in instrumental terms. For example, how can the media be directed more effectively to explain the purposes and benefits of development to the populaces which are its targets? While this might make sense to those involved in development and its study, it depends on a dated, discredited and indeed incoherent theory of how the mass media works. Granted the prevalence and popularity of the mass media throughout much of the world, some recognition of how it works – as against how government and aid agency officials might like to imagine it works – would seem a fairly pressing priority.

To address these issues, I outline briefly some difficulties with conventional transmission models of the mass media against a background of the role of the media in development in Indonesia, with special reference to television. A comprehensive review of how mass media work is an impossibility. So I confine myself to two themes. The first is how media articulate reality. Out of the myriad differing ways that people can represent what is going on, some groups and representations tend to predominate, or even become hegemonic, the corollary of which is that other groups and other ways of representing events and relationships are disarticulated. And the imperatives of development are widely used as such an articulatory device, through which people are framed and labelled.

The second theme is less obvious, but perhaps even more important. What we take to be the ‘meanings’ that the mass media disseminate have effectively to be established at the point of production. It is impossible to know what millions of people understand by what they read, hear and watch, or how they engage with the media and relate them to their daily practices. Faced with so complex, contingent and partly unknowable a congeries of issues, politicians, developers and scholars have, perhaps understandably, concentrated on attempts to fix meaning at the moment of production or transmission. So doing avoids awkward questions about how the media are actually used.

Unfortunately the few studies there are suggest that people engage with the mass media in extraordinarily diverse, unexpected and unpredictable ways,<sup>1</sup> which remain unnoticed by various élites attempting to survey, know, regulate and develop mass populations. As a result, development experts and development studies scholars interested in the impact of the mass media find themselves effectively trapped in a closed world of meanings remote from the populations they are concerned to understand. The difficulties of knowing how readers and audiences relate to the mass media underwrite existing hegemonies and further contribute to the disarticulation of the vast majority of the populace. To obviate some of these difficulties, I consider an alternative theoretical account of the media and exemplify what is at issue by considering an Indonesian television film about development and the commentaries of viewers. I write as an anthropologist working in critical media and cultural studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the few studies are Caldarola ; Hobart e.g. 2000, 2001; Spitulnik, 1993; and the collections by Ginsburg, L. Abu-Lughod, L. & Larkin, B. 2002; Rothenbuhler, E. & Coman, M. 2005.

Because it takes some twists and turns, let me briefly outline my argument. Transmission models of media and communication remain popular with politicians and developers alike because, although they are theoretically naïve and empirically falsifiable, they create the impression, in a complex world, that the élite are agents with visions and policies that work in a coherent manner upon the masses, as the willing subjects of development. A review of theories of agency however reveals a more complex picture. It raises questions about the compatibility of models of development communication with empowerment. It also problematizes those approaches of hegemony which fail to consider how hegemony actually works on the supposedly hegemonized. An analysis of the articulatory practices which constitute hegemony is revealing. To a significant degree, agency (in the sense used here) lies in the ability to determine how events are represented and *as* what. For instance, labelling presupposes prior articulations of what it is to label, what labels are possible, who is empowered to label and how, and to whom they are notionally applicable. Here the mass media play a crucial role in articulating how politicians, recipients and the general public imagine the whole issue of development. More generally a critical consideration of the theories of representation used in development shows two incompatible models at work with inevitably confused consequences. However, such critical analysis remains fatally flawed until it can address the ways in which the subjects of development engage with how they are actually articulated and interpellated. In the instance examined, the results are surprising and have potential implications for how we conceive of both development and its critical study.

### **The problem**

The default position adopted by governments and broadcasters in many developing countries is that the mass media's job is to convey the message and goals of development to their populations as part of the development process.<sup>2</sup> In so doing they commit themselves to a model of the media working by transmitting messages, which, in Gramscian terms, may be commonsense, but is not good sense. Proponents of transmission models also commit themselves to a theory of meaning and communication which rests upon a singular conception – the 'conduit' metaphor, which presupposes words and images to be containers which convey a stable and unchanging essence from senders to receivers (Reddy 1979). The model also constitutes the recipients as passive subjects. That is they are capable, in principle, of understanding and acting upon messages received, but are not presumed capable of more than that. Were they to be otherwise, a quite different and more dialogic, model would be required.<sup>3</sup> In other words, an innocent-looking model of the media pre-labels audiences as the subjects of agency, not agents.

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<sup>2</sup> The media in many developing countries emphasize the following goals: the primacy of the national development task (economic, social, cultural and political); the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy; support for democracy; and solidarity with other developing countries (McQuail 1994: 131).

<sup>3</sup> On dialogic models, see Morson & Emerson 1990.

Is my dismissal not too hasty? Surely transmission models may have their limitations, but are they not fundamental to social communication? Interestingly, Shannon and Weaver, the founders of the mathematical model of communication, which is the reference for much subsequent usage are quite explicit that the accounts of communication used for theoretical models and in, say, computer design are unsuited to the analysis of human discourse. Writing about the semantic problems of communication (i.e. the relation of how senders interpret messages as against receivers), Shannon noted that even the simplest acts of communication through speech are ‘a very deep and involved situation’ (Shannon and Weaver, 1949: 4). Further, they note that social communication assumes pre-understandings between the parties which cannot in principle be achieved through repeated communication. As development studies scholars know, communication also involves complex situational, contextual and cultural considerations. Quite apart from that, most functions of language are non-referential (Jakobson 1960). Indeed a founding text of media studies, Stuart Hall’s *Encoding/Decoding* (1980), criticizes the transmission model by noting its failure to address the social relations of production and reception.<sup>4</sup>

An example from the mid-1990s in the research village in Bali where I worked makes the point. To disseminate awareness of fast-growing varieties of irrigated rice, which permitted annual triple cropping, the Regency head, a distinguished lawyer, personally headed a team of government agricultural development staff to explain the possibilities. The recommended scheme was two crops of irrigated rice followed by nitrogen fixing dry crops. Unlike most such addresses, which consist of monologues primarily aimed at fellow officials not farmers, the Regent explained clearly and carefully what was involved, then genuinely invited feedback. Apart from a couple of routine polite responses, there was no reaction, despite the Regent’s urging open discussion. So what was going on?

The problem was contextual – historical, social and epistemological. After generations of being labelled stupid peasants and being lectured at in Indonesian (a language that, up to the 1980s, many farmers spoke poorly) experience suggested the wisest – indeed only – course was silence. What was to be gained by speaking? Class is relevant too. Whatever their social backgrounds, agricultural development officials are civil servants. A primary purpose of development speeches was the reaffirmation of class superiority by the use of specific language registers,<sup>5</sup> a point of which the farmers were quite aware. It was a rite of labelling. Finally, what the Regent, as a lawyer, did not know and had not been informed by his subordinates, was that irrigated rice terraces have to be kept continuously moist, otherwise they

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<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately Hall however merely supplements, not replaces, transmission models. For a fuller discussion, see Hobart 2005.

<sup>5</sup> In Jakobson’s terms (1960), the function of such speeches is ‘conative’ – that is the effect of the message on the receivers. They are also ‘emotional’, in that they refer to how senders relate to their own messages. Jakobson distinguishes six functions of language, appreciation of which would help refine critical analysis of development discourse.

crumble and the entire infra-structure is destroyed.<sup>6</sup> Were the peasants supposed to lecture the Regent and his officials on hydraulic engineering? That is not to say that shared understanding is always impossible. However it usually requires a great deal of work and a more dialogic relationship between the participants.

At this point, we need to reconsider ideas of agency. In a critical review, the Oxford philosopher R.G. Collingwood (1942) dismissed the tendency to conflate activity with agency and passivity with patiency. This trend is exemplified in Hollywood films where action men like Schwarzenegger and Stallone are presented as agents instead of instruments, or willing subjects, that is functionaries under orders of some agent. Agents are that which<sup>7</sup> orders or claims responsibility for a course of action to be carried out by instruments upon patients. Agents – be these Balinese kings or boards of multi-national corporations – are usually distinguished by being far from where the action is.<sup>8</sup> Precisely because agents tend to keep aloof from action, they need ‘willing subjects’ to act as their instruments, and ‘intellects’ to explain the intentions of agents to those affected and to the world at large. This is where the mass media come in – to articulate what is happening and why.<sup>9</sup> Conversely patients are often active, if unwilling. (Think of peasants being dragooned into being soldiers and cannon fodder.) The Balinese farmers were patients: they were the recipients of decisions and actions over which they had little control. While they were silent, they were not passive in the sense that they simply ignored their lords and masters. They got on with farming as best they could and, behind their backs, roundly criticized the officials as sycophantic, venal and stupid.

The beauty of the transmission model<sup>10</sup> – and so its attractiveness to political élites and planners alike – is that it is neat and locates meaning comfortably within their control. It positions them as agents. In so doing it buries the possibilities of ambiguity, of surplus or vacuity of meaning, and of the contingency and unpredictability of much social life (Laclau 1990), which would be a devastating challenge to their self-vision of being in charge, and so agents. Last, but not least, transmission models presuppose the populace as recipients of messages to be just that – recipients. To expect them to become agents within a model which has already constituted them as patients is to ask the nigh-impossible.

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<sup>6</sup> In the flat plains of Bali, where the administration resides, this is a minor issue compared to the highlands, where investment in terracing and hydraulics is enormous – and, of course, greatly admired by tourists who can see ‘authentic’ rice fields.

<sup>7</sup> I use the impersonal form, as agents are usually ‘complex’ (that is they comprise groups or sets of people with complex internal power relations). Only in the limiting case are they individuals, a point obscured by the American cultural imperatives of individualism, which require, however implausibly, that individuals always be identified as agents.

<sup>8</sup> For an extended use of Collingwood’s approach applied to India, see Inden 1990.

<sup>9</sup> Evidently, such explanations are contestable and arguably never neutral. The appearance of objectivity is created by ‘exnominating’ (leaving unnamed, Barthes 137-142) the ‘normal’ subject position. In developed countries, this is conventionally the bourgeoisie.

<sup>10</sup> Transmission models do not formally preclude receivers of messages subsequently becoming senders. However this possibility is contingent upon circumstances, history and social practice, not a feature of the model. Moreover any such reply is conceived as a mechanical supplement to the originating act.

So what is the answer? Fairly evidently there can be no simple one. If there was one clear outcome to the long-running debate between anthropologists and philosophers about the applicability of human reason to social action,<sup>11</sup> it was the sheer variety and complexity of processes of understanding within, let alone across, cultures. The debate is relevant, because it indicated the extent to which the kind of rational, propositional thinking constitutive of modernity, and so development, comprise one limiting possibility of communication rather than the norm. And even this possibility is shot through with unacknowledged imagery and metaphor (Sachs 1979; Lakoff & Johnson, M. 1980).<sup>12</sup> As communication is part of all human relations, a comprehensive theory of communication would require a single total theory of society. If an all-embracing theory of communication is recognized as a pipe dream, an ignored issue in approaches to development communication starts to emerge more clearly: why do the various parties involved in implementing development need such a model so badly? That, however, is another story.

### Labelling and articulation

How are such broader considerations relevant to development policy-making? Wood has argued that 'labelling is a feature of all social communication', the analysis of which is necessary to 'reveal processes of control, regulation and management which are largely unrecognized even by the actors themselves'. Labelling – or, more accurately 'designation' – involves 'a relationship of power in that the labels of some are more easily imposed on people and situations than those of others' (1985: 347). What is at issue is hegemony, which is

the acceptance of selected designations as natural and therefore ubiquitous. These hegemonies are constructed and articulated through unnoticed, common and familiar acts. It is these that structure, determine, foreclose and establish frameworks and boundaries for action...without people even being aware that their behaviour is constrained (Wood 1985: 351-2).

Does hegemony apply however only at the level of designation? What are the presuppositions about what labels are and how they work? Under what conditions do particular clusters of designations become naturalized? How is the power to designate distributed? And how are labels treated by those designated?<sup>13</sup> As the issue of labelling has been addressed by Wood and by others in this collection, I wish to consider some of the presuppositions which inform the frames of reference, including the hegemony of development itself.

'Development' is an overarching articulation. How do we know, in any instance of economic or social change, to what extent the outcome is due to development planning and implementation? The issue is one of both explanation and

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<sup>11</sup> E.g. Wilson 1970; Hollis and Lukes 1982; Overing 1985.

<sup>12</sup> In Indonesia, the common term was *pembangunan* which had connotations of 'building' or creating from raw materials, which required careful control, so defining the nature of appropriate agency. On different Indonesian words for 'development', see Hobart 1993: 7.

<sup>13</sup> That is: how are people interpellated (Althusser 1984), and recognize themselves as, subjects?

representation. Fairly uncontroversially, the kinds of change subsumed under development involve a whole host of factors – technical, organizational, political, economic, social and cultural. As economic and social practices, viewed at the local level, are continually changing anyway, precisely what is exclusively or effectively attributable to development planning and implementation is far from self-evident. However commonsensical causal models might seem, theoretically they are antiquated and deeply problematic.<sup>14</sup> For example, what exactly is being asserted? That implementation of development is a sufficient condition of the desired outcome? This is a most improbable claim. That development is a necessary condition? So many factors are necessary in any instance that attributing relative weight is an act of judgement rather than description. However this has rarely stopped governments and aid agencies *claiming* the efficacy of development projects.

Whatever the actual circumstances which are often complicated, contested and partly undecidable, we need to consider how development is represented *as* efficacious, successful or whatever, and by whom. And this involves communication and so the mass media, because a central activity in politics is representing desirable change as a result of the agency of those in power. And, precisely because these claims are inherently contestable, such representations have to be repeated, often *ad nauseam*, in development broadcasting. Put bluntly, it is frequently difficult precisely to determine the success of development independent of claims of what is the case.<sup>15</sup>

What is at issue here is articulation. The critique from cultural and media studies of models of system and structure is that they confuse reality with representations made by different agents or interest groups to different audiences as to how complex events and relationships are articulated under particular circumstances. In place of such attempts at determination, this approach stresses

the form of the connection that *can* make a unity between two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time... So the so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected (Hall 1996: 141).

Instead of taking development at face value, cultural and media studies aims to examine the conditions under which articulations are made and reiterated. Insofar as the ideals of modernization through development are hegemonic to national political

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<sup>14</sup> Causal models have been recognized since Hume as primitive and explanatorily largely vacuous. Their enduring popularity is precisely because they enable complex relationships to be articulated in simple terms for particular audiences and purposes.

<sup>15</sup> Obviously one overriding need is to represent the state – or government of the day – as the agent of development and successfully in charge. Problems arise when things go wrong, as they invariably do. The job of development broadcasting and the news is to attribute beneficial change to government policies and programmes and to finesse away the failures. How this was achieved by Indonesian state television is well described by Kitley (2000).

discourse throughout much of the world, the media become central to articulating visions of the desirability and necessity of development to mass populations.<sup>16</sup> The mass media are, therefore, not incidental to development planning and implementation, but partly constitutive of them.

### **Rethinking reference and representation**

The issues adumbrated above are, however, only the tip of the media iceberg in the sea of development. For instance, what is presupposed in how humans are labelled in development? And what is the significance of how development is represented in the mass media?

Granted how widespread the practices of framing and labelling of problems and populations are, and how convenient they are to governments and many aid agencies, they are unlikely to be abandoned in the near future. Their popularity does however illuminate more general problems about how governments, donors and scholars imagine human beings as the subjects of development. Arguably, the broad discourse of development involves two frameworks for representing what development is about, which are incommensurable and mutually contradictory. This is part of a broader disjuncture, which runs between and through academic disciplines, between approaches which work through statistical and informational modelling of populations as against those which privilege ‘the philosophy of the subject: will, representation, choice, liberty, deliberation, knowledge, and desire’ (Baudrillard 1988: 214).<sup>17</sup> In an argument which applies equally to debates about the ‘effects’ of television-viewing and to development policy formulation, Baudrillard pointed that endless epistemological confusion

results from the fact that there is a compound, a mixture of two heterogeneous systems whose data cannot be transferred from one to the other. An operational system which is statistical, information-based, and simulational is projected onto a traditional values system, onto a system of representation, will, and opinion. This collage, this collusion, between the two, gives rise to an indefinite and useless polemic...for the simple reason that there is no relationship between a system of meaning and a system of simulation... It is this lack of relationship between the two systems which today plunges us into a state of stupor (1988: 209).

I suspect that those who have been involved in implementing development projects will recognize the incompatibilities that arise between the demands of the models and attempts to treat people as subjects. Formal models tend to locate agency in the model’s original architects but disguise this by imputing agency to its instruments, the development practitioners – a degree of conferred agency which may or may not

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<sup>16</sup> Hegemony, according to the theorist behind much cultural studies, Ernesto Laclau, consists of those articulations which have been accepted in society as natural and self-evident at any moment. Rather than hegemony being fixed and immutable, it depends on changing practices of articulation (Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Although he was writing originally about ‘the uncertainty which surrounds the social and political effects of opinion polls (do they or do they not manipulate opinion?)’, Baudrillard was making a general point about theoretical models.

be realizable in practice. However, as Baudrillard made clear, as with transmission models of communication, claims about the agency of the recipients are incoherent, because they belong to an alien philosophy.

Once again, we are back to the shortcomings of accounts of representation based on referentiality. It was to address these that Baudrillard proposed his much-cited notion of simulacra. Whereas representation ‘starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent... conversely simulation starts from the *utopia* of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*’ (1983: 11, unless indicated otherwise all emphases are in the original). Elaborating on Foucault’s analysis of how representation has been successively rethought in Europe since the sixteenth century (1970), Baudrillard depicted the serial transformations of the relationship of representation as follows:

This would be the successive phases of the image:

- it is the reflection of a basic reality
- it masks and perverts a basic reality
- it masks the *absence* of a basic reality
- it bears no relation to any reality whatever:

it is its own pure simulacrum.

(Baudrillard 1983: 11)

What exactly did Baudrillard mean by this though?

There is a problem in reading Baudrillard though, who was writing in a French academic style, which stresses logical consistency rather than the nuances of applicability. So some cultural translation is required. Was Baudrillard proposing, as is often assumed, that all representation in the late twentieth century consists of simulacra? From his other writing, evidently not. Nor does misrepresentation, partial or skewed coverage, or lying imply the existence of simulacra. The lack of simple fit between signs and referents is a common feature of human communication, upon which, positively, the possibility of figurative language and imagery depend.

What Baudrillard was referring to is a singular condition, made possible by the global development of mass media, by which the relationship of signs to their referents becomes attenuated to the point of virtuality. In a world with such a super-abundant proliferation of images and words, previous signs come to provide proximate references for subsequent representations. An example is television advertisements, which work by ‘sounding’ off previous advertisements and established stereotypes. (And with stereotypes, we are back to how humans are labelled in the mass media.) Evidently different phases of the image coincide and overlap. Only in some instances is reference to the world so minimal as to comprise full-blown simulacra. Baudrillard’s point, however, was to show just how pervasive and inextricable from the workings of the electronic mass media these are.

What is the relevance of Baudrillard to development studies? The various worlds of development implementation, aid agencies, international organizations and scholarly commentary work have distinctive histories of portraying relevant issues. Subsequent discussion therefore is not just about representing current actualities in

order to meet the interests and goals of the organizations, but it is also to articulate these concerns within a pre-existing discourse, which is itself a site of contestation. Insofar as donor governments and funding agencies (and indeed the recipients) need to justify the rationale for development aid to other constituencies and engage broader publics, the mass media become vital, because they articulate knowledge and understanding of the world for most people, according to a logic of representation that has precious little to do with the intricacies of development economics and technology. As the media studies scholar, John Fiske, commented appositely on television news:

Third World countries are, for example, conventionally represented in western news as places of famines and natural disaster, of social revolution, and of political corruption. These events are not seen as disrupting *their* social norms, but as confirming ours, confirming our dominant sense that western democracies provide the basics of life for everyone, are stable, and fairly and honestly governed. When deviations from these norms occur in our own countries they are represented as precisely that, deviations from the norm: in Third World countries, however, such occurrences are represented as *their* norms which differ markedly from ours. For the western news media, the Third World is a place of natural and political disasters and not much else (1989: 285).

Such hegemonic articulations are built up from previous representations from a hodgepodge of eclectic sources circulating in the mass media. In other words, the hegemonic account of the under-developed world by the West to a significant degree constitutes an elaborate simulation.

Two aspects of these processes are immediately relevant. The first is the recognition of the sheer complexity of representation and communication in the modern world. Utterances and depictions that aim to describe events and prescribe courses of action work arguably work best within what Wittgenstein once designated 'language games': that is within closed worlds within which the participants share mutual knowledge and agreement over goals (1958). As we saw, when Balinese local officials meet local farmers, complications are already rife. Even such attempts at communication, if these they be, take place within a framework of articulatory practices over which the participants have scant control. And such articulations work according to processes of representation in which the referents are at best only in part about what they seem.

A second point is that development is not simply the practical business of helping other, less fortunate people. It is implicated in how one of the world's largest industries routinely represents others in a complex process of global cultural translation to readers and television viewers in rich countries. A primary function of these media is at once to engender and channel fear, and to assuage it by presenting viewers' circumstances as comparatively safe and favourable. In an important sense, under-development is not about the under-developed, but about who 'we', and 'the West' are?<sup>18</sup> Images of underdevelopment serve to create the illusory impression of

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<sup>18</sup> My point is that 'the West' and 'the masses' cannot be studied independent of their representations, including notably the mass media. The process is also gerundive: the masses exist *to be developed, to be regulated, to be educated*.

coherence, even ‘identity’, to what more commonly resemble fragmentary, conflicting and non-unitary processes.

### **Black umbrellas**

The New Order régime, between 1966 and 1998, defined itself around development, with President Suharto designating himself *Bapak Pembangunan*, the Father of Development. Although at the time widely regarded as a grandiose gesture, the launching a television satellite, Palapa, in 1976 and placing a television set in every village in the archipelago<sup>19</sup> was in fact a brilliant appreciation of the centrality of the mass media to development. A vast audience of Indonesians was created who could be addressed no longer as Sukarno’s revolutionary masses, but as subjects to be developed. Television was so central to the New Order’s self-articulation as the agent of development that it is hard to imagine the régime’s survival without it.

Before commercial television channels were licensed and began broadcasting starting in 1989, state television, TVRI, had a monopoly. Programmes explicitly about development projects and planning usually took up at least two hours a day. And much other broadcasting was inflected towards naturalizing development – through soaps, cartoons, religious programmes, talking heads or whatever – as the self-evident goal and justification of government. Further, regular news broadcasts were overwhelmingly slanted towards to two themes: the ubiquity and success of development and the luminous presence of the President as the agent behind it all.

By the 1990s, despite draconian censorship and intimidation of journalists, critics began openly to describe TVRI as the ‘propaganda arm of government’<sup>20</sup> As the role of television under the New Order has already been documented (Kitley 2000), I wish to consider not how ‘messages’ about development were articulated by the producers, but how they were understood by viewers, the people whom this hegemony was supposed to embrace. Because space is limited, the issues can most effectively be highlighted through viewers’ reactions to a feature length television film, *Payung Hitam* (Black Umbrella broadcast by TVRI Bali on 18<sup>th</sup>. July 1993), which was critical of certain aspects of development.<sup>21</sup> The results are surprising.

The plot consisted of two interwoven stories.

The minor plot (with which the film starts) is about an expedition to the region by research students from the state university in Bali. They have seen an ancient man, but when they took photographs, there was nothing on the developed film. They report back to a sceptical Dean who, after persuasion, agrees to two staff members

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<sup>19</sup> These comprised black and white sets, powered in remoter regions by rechargeable car batteries.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Stories behind the news: When will the rights come?’ *Vista-TV*, No 023, 17<sup>th</sup>. August 1996, 24-25.

<sup>21</sup> I watched a video of the programme, which has been recorded as part of a long running project to monitor Balinese television with several Balinese, introduced below. Unfortunately the recording was cut before the final credits, so details of its provenance are unknown. The film was in Indonesian with occasional Balinese words.

accompanying a second expedition to discover the truth. (The protagonists in the two stories meet coincidentally, but the plots remain separate until near the end.)

The main story concerns the plan for a development project to attract tourists to the mountainous part of Bali in an area devoted to horticulture for the lowland market. The story starts with a small boy, Wayan Dod, aged about 13, being told he must leave school unless his father pays the fees. (His father is a gambler who later descends to raiding Dod's piggy-bank to fund his forays.) The father refuses. When Dod's mother urges his father to pay, he says he has no money.

Mother: And what's the reason! Sell one of your fighting cocks.

Father: What? Sell a cock? I've told you, we're not wealthy folk. The kids don't need to carry on in school anyway. What's the point of all that education, when they're just going to be unemployed after? You'd do better to get them work in the fields, tending strawberries like Pak Ariadi. You can earn that way.<sup>22</sup>

However Dod labours away in the market place, as one of several boys who provide an escort service with black umbrellas for visitors in this notoriously rainy part of Bali. There follow scenes of two officials from an unnamed, and rather mysterious, Indonesian development agency, who meet the village head to negotiate the planned arrival of coachloads of tourists to see authentic tropical horticulture (coffee and strawberries!) and animal husbandry. The village head and the 'peasants' whom the developers meet are rapturous at the prospect of tourists (i.e. income). One official however is concerned that when their boss comes from Jakarta, it might be raining, so he would not see the project in a good light. The other replies that the village head will see to that.

The headman calls on Dod's father, Rugeg, to find the best rainmaker on the island and explains how much money is in it for them all. Rugeg duly obeys. The rain clouds clear. The boss from Jakarta is impressed and the project receives his blessing. Tourists turn up and express delight at everything. Everyone is quietly talking about how much money they are going to make. The rainmaker is called in so frequently to stop it raining that the village head offers to make a house available for him. (These scenes are cross-cut by shots of the expedition searching the same area for the ancient man. They encounter a figure dressed like a hermit in a loincloth, who brings a storm down on them before vanishing.)

Meanwhile the umbrella trade has dropped off completely because it rarely rains. The little boys discover who is responsible and confront the rainmaker with the problem. He says it is too late, he has signed a contract. If they have any complaints, they had better go to the village head. Shortly after the rainmaker meets Rugeg, whom he advises to look after his children properly, otherwise they will take to looking after themselves and will then be naughty and disobedient.

Meanwhile, the boys are in despair. One of them suggests they go and see his grandfather (who it transpires is in fact the hermit) who lives in a cave. However the boys are followed at a distance by two members of the expedition. The boys explain the development project. The project and the tourists are a good thing, the hermit says. Dod explains that the rainmaker is destroying their business and asks

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<sup>22</sup> Dod's father was alluding to the fact that, education without contacts and money to buy position, does not ensure employment, a point the viewers agreed with.

the hermit's help in thwarting him. The hermit replies: 'As a matter of fact hindering other people in the course of their work is forbidden in my view. We are not permitted to make things difficult for others'.

When the rainmaker next attempts to stop the rain, the hermit engages him in a spectacular battle of *sakti* (supernatural power). The rainmaker loses and falls into a coma. The boys return to the hermit's cave, but they are followed by the police, where they find the two academics in conversation with the hermit. At first the police try to arrest the boys, 'so that their parents shall know that their children have engaged in criminal activities. They have dared to interfere with the village development project'. The police then add that the rainmaker is ill. The hermit tells them it is the rainmaker's own fault for being arrogant and claiming to be the most *sakti* person in Bali. The village head then turns up and orders the hermit's arrest for not living in a house like other people. The hermit retorts that the cave is beyond village jurisdiction and he can do as he wishes there. He has intervened on the boys' behalf because their parents have failed to do so.

Hermit: And what's more you, as Village Head, have failed in your responsibility to your subjects. Without paying attention, you have violated these children's rights to earn a livelihood in this village.

Head: These are only children's concerns, only a few people. But the development of agro-tourism (*wisata agro*) is in the interests of the many.

Hermit: That does not mean that the weak must be crushed, does it? Even though they are children, they still have the right to make a livelihood in their village.<sup>23</sup>

At this point the male lecturer introduces himself and intervenes. Everyone immediately defers to him. He suggests they return to the village to discuss how to balance the rival interests and advises them to leave the hermit in peace. He was only protecting the children's interests. On the return journey, the lecturer reminds the officials that the children are their heirs and whatever is done must bear them in mind. He points out that the farmers will be in trouble if they change the rainfall (the hermit had pointed to the arrogance of his rival trying to change nature) and resolves the problem of rainfall by noting that it is 'authentic', that they can build regular shelters for tourists along the way and sell goods there, and the boys can make money from tourists for their umbrella services.

Almost everyone is now happy except the rainmaker who is still unconscious. The hermit goes to heal him and discovers it is his long-lost brother<sup>24</sup> whom he feared dead when his family were killed by a volcanic eruption. They are reconciled; the rain pours down; and the film ends with Dod happily running through it in search of customers with his black umbrella.

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly this argument reiterates the classic distinction between utilitarian and Kantian approaches to morality. The village head argues for the greatest good of the greatest number, while the hermit defends the rights of all humans, no matter how they are categorized.

<sup>24</sup> This is a familiar narrative device and, once again, contains potentially irresolvable conflict between competing interests by providing an overarching frame of reference to which all should submit.

### Commenting, labelling and articulating

How the film reiterates the conventional labels of Indonesian development projects at the time is fairly clear. Several features may be worth noting however. Agency is remote. Even the project boss from Jakarta is presented as effectively part of a chain of instrumentality, which reach down to the rainmaker and the gambler. Ordinary Balinese are depicted as willing patients, who gratefully and uncritically accept the benefits of the project. The academic and the hermit are organic and traditional intellectuals respectively who, in seeing eye-to-eye, articulate seamlessly the desirability of modern development with traditional values. As the intellect representing the ultimate agency behind the project (something like ‘government’, certainly not the project boss, who failed to appreciate the damage caused), the academic is empowered to enunciate on what is right and is accepted by everyone unquestioningly. The film therefore not only labels<sup>25</sup> but reiterates a host of presuppositions which make the labelling possible, apposite and acceptable to the participants, and presumably audiences.

The disruption, the crisis which leads to the critical re-evaluation of what such development projects should be about, is attributed to a small boy, who is given two separate labels. First he is a child, therefore subject to others who may reasonably determine his fate without consultation. Second, however, he stands for the future – an appeal to Balinese ideas about descendants, who are vital to the continuity of the patriline. It is in this latter capacity, not the former, that his interests are deemed relevant. However it is two categories of people who are *not* labelled, but are backgrounded as if this were their natural place, which is significant. These are the ‘ordinary’ villagers and women. The film’s thesis – that development should benefit everyone – does not extend to women, who are virtually absent from the film. When they do appear, they are confined to the classic New Order role of mothers and wives.<sup>26</sup> They are more infantilized than their own male offspring. While the film suggests the efficacy of labels in development, it also shows how large sections of society are made invisible and disarticulated. So the film indirectly highlights how the presuppositions behind labelling are themselves normalized through the mass media.

What did my fellow viewers make of the film though? Three were particularly vocal: an old actor in his eighties, an ex-village headman and a landless labourer (that evening all present were males). I asked if they had enjoyed it. The labourer was enthusiastic. It was very good, most appropriate. It was just like that in life: small people are ignored in development and lose out badly. The old actor broadly concurred. The ex-headman was less impressed. ‘What was the *panglèmèk*?’ he asked. (*Panglèmèk*, the moral point, is considered a crucial part of a performance,

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<sup>25</sup> The absurdity of labels is delightfully (but I think unintentionally) illustrated by the threat of arresting the hermit for not living in a house like everyone else!

<sup>26</sup> The polite designation of *Bapak*, Father, for men and *Ibu*, Mother, for women, which has survived the New Order, is not symmetrical, because Mother designates a purely domestic and supportive role, whereas Father articulates the family to the polity and the public sphere.

without which becomes pointless entertainment.) As the others argued it through, they became more confused as to the point. Where the film was useful, the ex-headman said was in its aim to reach development officials, to impress on them the need to think about the poor, not just the rich. If the rich getting a thousand Rupiah (then about £ 0.30) the poor should get one hundred. So everyone benefits.<sup>27</sup>

The old actor returned to the moral point. Was it somehow in the implications of stopping the rain? The moral part was poorly done, the ex-headman retorted. Look at how they showed the father stealing from the son's saving box. The film was all over the place. I returned to the actor's question. Was stopping the rain arrogant? Yes, it showed a grave lack of *panglokika* (appreciation of the diverse needs of those under your authority). You should not meddle unthinkingly with the environment. Consider what happened with the water flow when the government dammed rivers for new irrigated rice land.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout these exchanges I was slightly surprised that my fellow viewers were more muted than on other occasions, when they tended to dissect the apparatuses of power, wealth and development with forensic panache. It soon became clear why. The acting was bad. The characters were badly delineated, the speech was stiff and unnatural; no one looked the part. The film was in Indonesian – the language of development. But plays based on Balinese village life do not work in Indonesian. The result was ridiculous. Yes, the producers of the film had been sufficiently clever (literally 'slippery') in castigating the failings of government officials that it would be hard to bring legal charges against them. But most viewers would not get the point. Unless the acting is convincing and the point well made, who is going to notice? They should have used one of several Balinese theatre genres that audiences could relate to. It takes really first class and courageous performers (they named two famous figures) to bring off a piece like that.<sup>29</sup> The film's actors were frightened. If no one realized the point, it was a waste of time. That, as far as they were concerned, was that.

The commentaries on the film make several important points. Attributions of hegemony by scholars may themselves become hegemonic insofar as these do not reflect how people actually engage with the development going on around them. The recognition from critical media studies that knowing the conditions of production tells us little about the conditions of reception, use and commentary applies with equal force to development studies. On what grounds are we justified in labelling the peasant farmers who chose to remain silent after the Regent's peroration the subjects

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<sup>27</sup> As the viewers made clear, if the rich do not benefit substantially, they will not be interested.

<sup>28</sup> This was a sore topic throughout much of Bali, because it reduced the supply to existing fields. In fact, as part of Bali's 'development', the Suharto government planned to authorize permits for so many golf courses that they would, in effect, have absorbed almost the entire water requirements of the island, in which irrigated rice was the main crop.

<sup>29</sup> These two often featured in short, masked theatre pieces, *Bondrès*, usually sponsored by government development agencies. However, the actors were so skilled that they could elegantly satisfy their sponsors and excoriate them for corruption and the failed implementation of projects at the same time.

of hegemony? Here the researcher's relationship with her or his subjects of study is crucial. Only by appreciating what went on after the officials had left and knowing how farmers related the speechifying and (largely inadequate) technical support to their daily practice would it be possible to question the vision of the compliant subjects of hegemony. Models of how the masses are interpellated remain ideal and top-down. How people actually engage with being labelled and addressed requires critical ethnographic studies of how – indeed whether – interpellation works in practice.

That is not to say that Balinese villagers always heroically resist hegemony. Rather, the clumsy attempts of officials and television producers alike to implicate them in the national discourse of development at best might convince the perpetrators. Under such circumstances, how effective is labelling in development policy-making? Evidently Balinese are implicated in development, but not under conditions of their own choosing. Not least, they are affected by the distribution of resources which flow from development aid. However, as these are largely organized along pre-existing lines of patronage, most people's implication into development is tangential or even antagonistic. Labelling takes place in a context of unstated presuppositions and a history of past practices of articulation.

This brings us to what is silenced, the absence of labels and processes of disarticulation. As the village commentators percipiently noted, discussion of development was taking place in the wrong language and so, to most of the supposed addressees, was articulating vacuities. To me however, the most salutary point the commentators made was their recognition that the capacity to engage people is not simply a function of narrative, ideology or structure, but depends intrinsically on the quality of the performance (cf. Richards 1993). The next stage of critical inquiry would seem to require recognition of articulation, disarticulation and interpellation as practices, and the increasingly central role of the mass media. Until then, development studies scholars are likely to find themselves reclining in the shade of some very black umbrellas.

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