Tradition as Argument, or

Paratactic Reasoning, Total Crisis and
the Failure of Critique in Contemporary Bali

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The Maha Bajra Sandhi Group was selected [to represent Indonesia at the 2004 Cultural Olympiad in Athens] because of their radical approach to revitalizing the role of an archaic alphabet in daily life, bringing the symbolic down to earth, and reviving the rites of music, offering an alternative understanding of art, family and even life itself in modern society.[1]

- Indonesian National Committee for the Cultural Olympiad, Athens 2004.

The history of any society is thus in key part the history of an extended conflict or set of conflicts. And as it is with societies, so too is it with traditions.

A tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretive debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted.

- Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p.12

The aim of this paper is to begin exploring some of the implications and questions that arise from Alasdair MacIntyre's account of tradition as a form of 'argument'. It does so with reference to a series of performative events organized by the Balinese scholar and public intellectual, Ida Wayan Oka Granoka, in celebration of 'the power of Balinese letters'.[2] Provisionally it is my contention that, despite its innovative and eclectic appearance, Granoka's project embodies a style of argumentation that reiterates certain elements of prior responses to crisis, both in Bali and potentially other parts of the archipelago. In other words I wish to suggest these performances exemplify an aspect of how at least some Indonesians have argued during times of cultural and political upheaval. As a critical response to the problems presently facing Balinese, my sense is that Granoka's efforts are unlikely to achieve their aim, but this for reasons that may be instructive for our reflections on argument. By

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[1] The original Indonesian text reads: *Dipilihnya Sanggar Maha Bajra Sandhi karena pemikirannya yang radikal dalam usaha merevitalisasi peranan aksara yang arkhais dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, membumikan yang simbolis dan menghidupkan kembali ritus musik, memberikan alternatif tentang pengertian seni, keluarga dan hidup itu sendiri dalam masyarakat modern.* (Cited in Granoka 2007.)

[2] Apart from I.W. Oka Granoka and locations within the provincial capital of Denpasar, all names of Balinese people and places are pseudonymous.

way of introduction, I would like to consider briefly why a symposium on argument might concern itself with the problem of tradition.

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I

ON TRADITION

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Mark's introductory essay referred on at least two occasions to the 'pragmatism' of our approach. This I take to mean among other things that *practice* is to be our primary frame of reference in reflecting on 'how Indonesians argue'. So why bother with tradition? In short I believe we need tradition, or something like it, if we wish to render other people's practices intelligible as reasonable human action.[3] For novel utterances and actions can only be said to 'make sense' insofar as they may be interpreted with reference to the precedent set by one or more prior acts. Or, to restate the point negatively, the absolutely *new* is also absolutely *unintelligible*. So our ability to interpret an act of argumentation, let alone a practice – with reference, e.g., to its presuppositions and the purposes it aims to fulfill – entails a prior knowledge of other acts similarly directed.[4] It seems that in this respect interpretability would ride on the recognition of precedent.[5] What I wish to suggest is that tradition may usefully be understood as entailing a special form of precedent. But, as we shall see, not unlike actions and utterances, a 'traditional practice' cannot simply be a repetition of a prior moment, even – or perhaps especially – if this is its commonsense meaning.[6] So what is tradition, if it is at once necessary for the interpretability of practices, and yet something other than a simple repetition of the past? Or, to take the question from another angle, how can we recognize a debt to historical precedent without reifying it in opposition to 'the present'? A quick review of how tradition has been used in Bali offers a helpful way into the problem.

The Idea of Tradition in Bali

Tradition has figured prominently in the literature on Balinese culture and society, and has been made to mean many things for as many purposes. In its most general usage, the term

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[3] The material for this section was first presented in July 2012 to the Bali Studies conference in Denpasar; both the subsequent argument and ethnography are new.

[4] Much rides on how we envisage practice, which is clearly a matter of some contention. As George Bernard Shaw reportedly said of Britain and the USA, practice theorists are prone to separation by a common language. This is often because their 'theories of practice' are directed to answering different questions, which are themselves grounded in incommensurate presuppositions and projects for transformation. On which, a version of this paper will appear in a monograph I am preparing on script and writing in contemporary Bali, where it is preceded by two chapters exploring the idea of practice in relation to the performance of a *caru* rite in Batan Nangka.

[5] Consider, for instance, the cross-referencing employed in scholarly translations of ancient or otherwise arcane texts, where precedent is cited as evidence in support of the interpretation of a given word or phrase.

[6] Ironically, both tradition's most vehement champions (e.g., self-designated 'conservatives') and its detractors (e.g., those 'progressive' critics of the 'invention of tradition') share this common, yet mistaken, understanding of tradition.

figures as a loosely conceptualized historical period ('traditional Bali') and as a cipher for the lost 'religion' and 'spirituality' mourned in the West. It is deployed in this sense as a badge of authenticity, and almost as frequently appears as a synecdoche for 'text' (e.g., 'according to tradition'). In the more recent scholarship, the English word *tradition* is used to translate the Indonesian word *adat*, which is itself borrowed from Arabic; but *tradition* may also be translated back into Indonesian as *tradisi*—which, for its part, is not necessarily limited to *adat*. For Euro-American cultural historians, Balinese tradition has been exposed as a 'discourse' of identity linked to shifting articulations of economy and polity; while for Indonesian government officials it is a form of cultural 'capital', or *modal*, to be managed judiciously for social and economic development. Balinese 'tradition' has been all these things, and many others besides. With respect to purpose and valuation, its usage tends to be of three types, which I would describe as (a) positive, (b) genealogical and (c) operationalized, respectively.

The 'positive' deployment of tradition encompasses those implicitly legitimizing uses, in which we are told that a given art form, ceremonial rite or social institution has its origins in the pre-modern past. Bridging scholarly, state-bureaucratic and various popular forms, this 'positive' use of tradition tends to cut two ways. In the first instance, it may appear as a badge of folk authenticity, set in opposition to the self-conscious creativity of modern art and artifice. In this case, the traditional is often communal, as opposed to individual. Alternatively, tradition may also imply classical standards of excellence—as in the composition of court poetry (perhaps especially *kakawin*), where the ideal is aesthetic, as opposed to instrumental. Such usage is often at once *positive* in an evaluative sense, while at the same time presuming to refer *positively* to something 'out there' in the world. To this end, the term *tradition* commonly qualifies, or is qualified by, something else. So we have 'local tradition', 'oral tradition', 'traditional theatre, music and dance'; there is 'traditional attire', 'traditional agriculture', 'the tantric tradition' and 'the Śaivo-Buddhist tradition', as well as a series of 'returns to tradition' that are informed by the expertise of foreign scholars, and often underwritten by international aid agencies. Taken together, these contribute to a more generalized notion of 'traditional Bali' as a loosely conceptualized historical period—an idea that is arguably implicit in much of our work, even as we endeavor to write against it.[7]

The second way we tend to speak of tradition – what I would like to call *the genealogical* – is rather more narrow in focus; and it takes a comparatively critical view of the island's history.[8] If the *positive* deployment of tradition has served to set a fixed point in opposition to which we might recognize change on the contemporary scene, this *genealogical* approach

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[7] In her study of *kakawin* composition Rubinstein has offered an explicit statement of the position, where she wrote, 'Traditional Bali is, for me, dominated by a set of nineteenth century or earlier cultural values, including values pertaining to literacy. It cannot be delimited by dates, for strong pockets of traditional Bali exist alongside 'modern Bali', and resist the influence of 'modern Bali', the period that commenced when the Dutch succeeded in colonizing Bali—North Bali in 1849, and South Bali from 1906 to 1908' (2000: 3). Something similar to this understanding of the traditional is implicit in much of our work, though it usually goes without the benefit of such careful qualification.

[8] In using the term 'genealogical' I do not wish to link this usage too closely with either Nietzsche or the later Foucault. But I do wish to indicate more generally both a nuanced attention to shifting uses of terminology, and a desire to problematize our language of inquiry.

reveals change *within* the 'discourse' of tradition itself.[9] In this case, the term 'tradition' appears most commonly as a translation for Indonesian uses of the Arabic loanword, *adat;* but, more recently, it has also been linked to the idea of the *désa pakraman,* as the 'traditional village'.[10] Here the organizing problematic for historical enquiry has been the emergence of 'Balinese identity' – and the idea of 'Balineseness', or *kebalian* – in relation to notions of religion, tradition and culture. It is on this basis that we now look askance at unreflective uses of 'religion', 'culture' and 'tradition', in the knowledge that *agama, budaya* and *adat* each has a history that is closely tied to changing articulations of economy, politics and power. This genealogical sensibility is arguably the default position in Balinese studies today; and it owes much to a series of important publications from James Boon (1977), Henk Schulte Nordholt (1986, 1999) Adrian Vickers (1989) and Michel Picard (e.g., 1990, 1996, 2004, 2011). Here the decisive procedure is one of unmasking—an *ironic* revelation of contingency, complicity and transformation where we had previously assumed an *earnest* determinacy, authenticity and stasis.[11]

Thirdly we have what I would call *operationalized* tradition, by which I mean the various ways in which tradition has been reified and put to work by the state, but also by the tourism industry and in local politics. This is, in the first place, tradition understood as 'capital' that must be guarded and put to work for social and economic development, not to mention more immediate commercial gain. This is the tradition of bureaucrats, of entrepreneurs and managers. But it is also the tradition of Balinese schoolchildren. For, in addition to television, it is in the classroom where one first learns to recognize oneself as embodying distinctively Balinese styles of attire and of daily comportment. Speaking very generally, the defining feature of such *operationalized* tradition is deliberate objectification toward a particular, and commonly mercantile end.[12]

So what are we to make of these three deployments of tradition—*the positive, the genealogical* and *the operationalized?* How are they related to one another? In what ways have they contributed to the interpretation of Balinese social life? And, more specifically, how might they inform our approach to Indonesian practices of argumentation? What I have called operationalized tradition has received a fair bit of attention in the recent literature (see, e.g., Noszlopy 2002, Schulte Nordholt 2007, Picard 2008, Vickers 2011), so I would like to focus for the moment on the other two.

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[9] It is worth emphasizing that the *positive* and *genealogical* uses of tradition are often found together within one and the same publication.

[10] Picard has described the oppositional circumstances surrounding the emergence of the *désa pakraman:* 'In order to give the newly restored customary village a more specific Balinese flavour, its name was changed from *desa adat* to *desa pakraman*. Unlike the word *adat*, which has both a colonial and an Islamic connotation, the term *pakraman* claims its authority from old Balinese inscriptions and is derived from the Sanskrit root *krama*, meaning "rule sanctioned by tradition"' (2008: 106).

[11] This reflects very neatly the ironic emplotment of modern historiography (White 1973).

[12] My point is not so much that operationalized forms of Balinese tradition are all alike. I simply wish to note a certain commonality—namely, deliberate reification aimed at furthering a particular end. As the engine of cultural tourism, tradition has been a source of revenue. As an instrument of the state, it has been used to foster national unity through the regularization and management of religious, ethnic and linguistic difference. And more recently, with *Ajeg Bali,* the idea of Balinese tradition has been made to serve the interests of those who wish to marginalize non-Balinese residents of the island while at the same time controlling access to the revenue generated through the tourism industry.

First, we have the *positive* deployment. The *positive* uses of tradition have the advantage of rendering intelligible both change and our sense of the modern. Yet this has come at the cost of conceding an essentialized, if not always romanticized, vision of the past as static. This Archimedes' point, from which we view and evaluate the present, has been variously embodied in text (e.g., Hooykaas 1964), ritual (e.g., Schulte Nordholt 1991), 'the village republic' (Korn 1960), 'the theatre state' (Geertz 1980), or some other exemplar of a prior era. Here what is important about tradition is that it *sit still,* so that we might measure Bali's progressive movement away from it.

The *genealogical* deployment, by contrast, recognizes this essentialization for what it is, revealing all such calls to tradition as fundamentally 'invented', in a variation on a theme made famous by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Everything from Balinese culture and religion to the arts has been an elaborate ruse, we are told—serving the will to power, or perhaps, as we now more commonly say, 'the discursive construction of identity'.

There is considerable merit to the genealogical argument, not least in the evidentiary nuance and theoretical sophistication it has brought to Balinese historiography. The problem is that our most prominent genealogists have come unstuck on the question of *community*. I take it that genealogy is correct in highlighting the impossibility of representing Bali 'as it really is', and that historicizing key terms such as 'religion', 'culture' and 'tradition' helps to highlight changes that would otherwise go unnoticed. Yet, on closer inspection, it would appear genealogy falls foul of its own critique when it finds itself referring to 'the Balinese' as a positivity—that is to say, as a reified 'populace' that is somehow *mis*-represented by the 'discourse of Balineseness'. On the genealogical approach, it seems we would eschew universals in one breath ("Balinese identity is a discursive construct"), and then reassert them in the very next ("this misleading discourse was constructed by/foisted on/ misrepresents actual Balinese"). As a result, the Balinese emerge as the ontology that dare not speak its name. Genealogical decorum will not countenance open positivism. So the genealogically inclined are left to sneak their normative vision of Balinese society in through the back door, with phrases that are dropped in passing—such as 'ordinary Balinese', 'most Balinese', 'the Balinese population at large', 'typical Balinese' and other similarly covert gestures made in the direction of universality.

So what then are the alternatives? What I have called the *positive* invocation of tradition no longer appears viable, and this is largely thanks to the critique from genealogy. Yet, while genealogy seems to offer a more nuanced account of historical change, it too is not without its own skeletons in the metaphysical closet. Cast in grammatical terms, perhaps the lesson to be taken is that representation is always carried out in the optative. In this respect a 'society', be it Indonesian or otherwise, is perhaps best understood as a *desideratum*, as opposed to a *datum*. It is something one endeavors to call into being performatively, something for which one *argues*—as opposed to something that is *given*. Why might this matter? Having earlier noted the interpretive importance of precedent, it would suggest among other things that our reflections on argument as a practice may call for closer attention to the problem of tradition. And here I believe something like MacIntyre's account of tradition may offer a particularly fitting point of departure, most notably for its emphasis

on the rivalry between multiple and potentially conflicting styles of reasoning, and so argumentation.[13]

Tradition as Argument

We might begin by noting that MacIntyre's account of tradition answers to a line of questioning that has both critical and constructive aspects. It responds in the first instance to the failure of modern ethics to generate judgments that satisfy its practitioners' own standards for universality (MacIntyre 1988: 6). For MacIntyre, this failure was the inevitable outcome of an historical decoupling of rationality from the authority of tradition—and, more particularly, from an Aristotelian conception of moral teleology and the virtues. Following from this observation, MacIntyre's later work has been devoted to a reconstruction of moral enquiry centered on reasoned argumentation and the cultivation of shared goods.[14] Tradition figures positively in this reconstruction as the final step in a three-stage conception of virtue, in which it is preceded by accounts of practice and what he has described as the narrative unity of a single human life.[15]

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[13] E.g., 'So rationality itself, whether theoretical or practical, is a concept with a history: indeed, since there are [sic] a diversity of traditions of enquiry, with histories, there are, so it will turn out, rationalities rather than rationality, just as it will also turn out that there are justices rather than justice' (MacIntyre 1988: 9).

[14] Here I can provide but a thumbnail sketch of of its primary contours. For, beyond MacIntyre's own writings, which are extensive, a complex and at times relatively technical commentarial literature has grown up around his work. See Knight (2007) for a detailed assessment of MacIntyre's relation to the wider Aristotelian tradition, and Lutz (2004) on the idea of 'tradition' in particular.

[15] In beginning with practice, the aim was to ground his account of the virtues both historically and sociologically, but without recourse to metaphysics (a position he would subsequently modify). As he explained in the context of its initial formulation, 'Each later stage presupposes the earlier, but not *vice versa*. Each earlier stage is both modified by and reinterpreted in the light of, but also provides an essential constituent of each later stage.' (2010 [1981]: 187)

As for the narrative unity of a single human life, my understanding is that this is directed at once to a critique of the broadly modern liberal proclivity for a compartmentalization of life, whereby 'no overall ordering of goods is possible' (1988: 337), and at the same time to the problem of rendering intelligible – as a form of rational progress – those forms of transformation that entail a change in one's commitments—whether in the pursuit of scientific, religious or moral forms of enquiry (see 2006: 19).

Setting aside for the moment both practice and narrative unity, we might say of tradition that it describes the temporal condition of moral enquiry.[16] In very general terms, we inherit both a set of questions and resources for addressing those questions, as embodied in our language of judgment and argumentation—including not merely *what* counts as good evidence for a given argument, but also the criterion for choosing between rival interpretations of what is taken as given. Together these elements make up the 'substantive rationality' that MacIntyre has described as being at once 'tradition-constituted' and 'tradition-constitutive' (e.g., 1988: 10, *passim*; cp. Lutz 2004: 33-64). Commenting on rival accounts of justice, he explained,

> Where Aristotle's formulations are in terms of *archē, telos, psychē, logos, ergon, praxis, pathos, aretē* and *polis,* Hume's deploy *impression, idea, passions calm and violent, nature, artifice, virtue, society* and *government*. It is not that there are [sic] not a range of shared meanings and references in the uses of these two sets of terms; were it not so, we could not recognize them as rival conceptions of one and the same subject-matter. Nonetheless the radical differences between them are such that if the Aristotelian concepts have application in the way and to the degree that Aristotelians have held, then the Humean concepts are thereby precluded by and large from having application, and vice versa. (1991: 150)

While MacIntyre's historicism draws on Collingwood, his emphasis on language is more directly indebted to Gadamer. But, whereas for Gadamer Tradition was always construed in the singular (Knight 2007: 98-9), for MacIntyre it is both plural and characterized by conflict —as an 'argument extended through time'. Yet he emphasized 'it is not merely that different participants in a tradition disagree; they also disagree as to how to characterize their disagreements and as to how to resolve them. They disagree as to what constitutes appropriate reasoning, decisive evidence, conclusive proof' (2006: 11). On MacIntyre's account, it is through the provision and collective evaluation of reasons – that is, through argument – that traditions are seen historically to be capable of progress, as judged by their own standards.[17] But, crucially, these standards may change as a result of critique occasioned either by the objective challenges posed by social and environmental transformation, or by conflict with rival traditions of enquiry.

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[16] Citing MacIntyre, Asad developed this temporal aspect in an early study (1986) of Islamic 'discursive traditions', which he proposed as the object of study proper to the anthropology of Islam. There he suggested that 'A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to *a past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and *a future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through *a present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions). An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present' (1986: 14). On my reading, Asad's aim was to raise new and more constructive questions by shifting critical attention away from the abstractions of 'social structure' and 'shared cultural meanings', onto the history of embodied practices—such as those of pedagogical discipline, ethical exhortation and public piety (see, e.g., Mahmood 2005, Hirschkind 2006).

[17] The pursuit of progress in rationality is itself envisaged constructively (i.e., 'normatively') as a practice, and so as dependent on the virtues of justice, courage and truthfulness (MacIntyre 2010: 194).

This understanding of progress in the rationality of a moral tradition is patterned on MacIntyre's reading of Lakatos on progress in the natural sciences.[18] Drawing out the parallels with moral enquiry, he suggested,

> The criterion of a successful theory is that it enables us to understand its predecessors in a newly intelligible way. It, at one and the same time, enables us to understand precisely why its predecessors have to be rejected or modified and also why, without and before its illumination, past theory could have remained credible. It introduces new standards for evaluating the past. It recasts the narrative which constitutes the continuous reconstruction of the scientific tradition. (2006: 11)

Crucial for our purposes is the emphasis on a decisive victory of one theory, tradition or research program over another. This is in keeping with an understanding of argument as something like a contest in rationality, a trope with innumerable iterations stretching from the Athenian polis to the present day seminar room.[19] The point is not so much that MacIntyre saw the forward march of progress in rationality as characteristic of ordinary life. Clearly he did not.[20] And yet achieving victory through superior reasoning is quite explicitly recommended as an ideal. Conceptual conflict and 'contradiction' are taken to be a problematic and preferably temporary state of affairs, which is gerundively to be overcome through the *agōn* of rational competition. To be sure, this may be a rather apt characterization of certain strands in the history of broadly western thought. It may even be a model to which one could aspire. (Though at times the sportiness of it all makes rationality sound like something conceived on the playing fields of Eton.) The question is whether this style of argumentation – and so tradition – is so readily exportable elsewhere. From MacIntyre, especially in his later work, we get an insightful and intellectually productive interpretation of broadly European traditions of enquiry in their attempts to grapple both with themselves and one another in pursuit of truth. The two questions I wish to ask are: How do these encounters look when viewed from beyond Europe and the Near East? And what implications might follow from this for MacIntyre's own conception of tradition as argument? As a way into the problem I would like to set MacIntyre's notion of tradition as 'an argument extended through time' against a series of performative events organized by the Balinese scholar and public intellectual, Ida Wayan Oka Granoka.

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[18] For MacIntyre's extrapolation from Lakatos against Kuhn and Feyerabend, see 2006; cp. Lutz 2012: 7.

[19] As Kennedy wrote in his oft-cited study of classical rhetoric, 'The Greek male orator, like the Greek male athlete, seeks to win and gain honor from defeating an opponent' (1999: 6; cf. MacIntyre 1988: 27-9); on metaphorical iterations of 'argument as war', see Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 4-5.

[20] He noted, for example, that 'what many of us are educated into is, not a coherent way of thinking and judging, but one constructed out of an amalgam of social and cultural fragments inherited both from different traditions from which our culture was originally derived (Puritan, Catholic, Jewish) and from different stages in and aspects of the development of modernity (the French Enlightenment, the Scottish Enlightenment, nineteenth-century economic liberalism, twentieth-century political liberalism). So often enough in the disagreements which emerge within ourselves, as well as in those which are matters of conflict between ourselves and others, we are forced to confront the question: How ought we to decide among the claims of rival and incompatible accounts of justice competing for our moral, social, and political allegiance?' (1988: 2; also cf. the much discussed 'disquieting suggestion' from the opening of *After Virtue* [2010 (1981)])

II

LETTERS IN MOTION

> It's hard to say what just took place. It was a parade of sorts, culminating in a performance. Or was it a procession culminating in a ritual? Or something else? It was meant to commemorate the *Puputan Badung* of 1906. But it was also a statement about the future. There were large script-bearing canvasses that looked like *rarajahan*. But there were also boys and girls dressed in nationalist red-and-white. There was holy water and incense. And there were plenty of priests, and prayers, and weapons. But there was poetry, too. The event was several things at once – parade and procession, ritual and commemoration – and yet, in some sense, it was none of these things.
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>   - Fieldnotes, 20 September 2012.

For reasons that hopefully will become clear enough, the process of enquiring about these events – and the way others responded – was as important as anything else that I learned along the way. It began with a visit to the workshop of Pak Saru, an architect I knew by reputation as something of a recluse, who, though generous in his support for local projects, was often circumspect in his dealings with the community. As part of a wider project on script and writing in contemporary Bali, I had recently begun to explore the use of Balinese *aksara* in rites of establishment performed for new buildings and shrines, and he was recommended to me as someone who might be able to help with questions that others had been unable to answer. True to his reputation, Saru's remarks were vague and often seemingly beside the point.[21] But he suggested that, if I were interested in contemporary uses of Balinese letters, I could do worse than to attend something called the 'Grebeg

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[21] Such indirection is widely recognized as a sign of wisdom and sophistication, while my inability to discern his meaning would be seen as reflecting my naïveté.

Aksara', which would take place in the provincial capital of Denpasar later that week.[22] He then abruptly ended our meeting, leaving for another engagement.

Later that day I was informed that Saru had arranged for someone to take me to Denpasar for the event. The person he asked was Putu Subrata, with whom I had worked as a collaborator on previous research projects in Batan Nangka. Putu did not seem especially pleased at the assignment, and even went so far as to imply the trip would be a waste of my time. But he agreed to drop me off a little ways from the ward assembly pavilion (B. *balé banjar*) in Tainsiat, where we had been told the event would begin. On approaching the pavilion on foot, the situation seemed anything but unfamiliar. There were men, women and children bustling about in *pakaian adat* (I. 'traditional attire'), while police directed traffic and military onlookers stood importantly by. A marching gamelan orchestra could be heard playing sporadically in the background, as motorbikes sped along the road bearing passengers loaded down with offerings and boxes of refreshments. My first impression was that it appeared very much like any of the many temple festivals and processions performed in this part of the island.

Arriving at the pavilion itself, the differences became more readily apparent. Most striking were the stacks upon stacks of framed canvasses, some well over a meter in height, bearing intricate diagrams and configurations of Balinese script. The framed depictions of *aksara* were painted in black against a white background, and many appeared to incorporate

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[22] The term *grebeg* is also used in reference to other events at which powerful objects and forces are called together. In Pateluan, for example, all the *rangda* and *barong* assemble annually at the Pura Puseh to be venerated and, at least on some accounts, to assess the state of their realm and subjects. In Balinese usage the term *grebeg* may suggest a procession, especially pertaining to royalty. It is possible this draws on the term's more general sense in Kawi, as 'the thunderous tramping of many feet' (Zoetmulder 1982: 543). It is also worth noting there is a series of well-known rites performed in Yogyakarta known as the *garebeg mulud, garebeg sawal* and *garebeg besar*. These associations may all have factored in Granoka's conception of the event as a 'grebeg aksara'.

images of the weapons and powerful beings – e.g., divinities, serpents, tigers – found in the *rarajahan* drawings used for sorcery, healing and rites for the deceased. From what I had understood from my work in Batan Nangka, these drawings were thought to be 'alive' and so inherently powerful and potentially dangerous. I took it that such objects were to be treated with caution and respect. And yet here were a bunch of young men and women joking about, casually handling these 'living letters' as if they were of no particular significance. Some were so bold as to step over them – wearing shoes, no less – as they made their way across the pavilion—an act of unthinkable recklessness, if indeed these framed images were anything like the efficacious drawings I took them to resemble.

In the hope of finding out what was going on, I struck up a conversation with a middle-aged security guard affiliated with the local ward. Having answered the usual questions (Where are you from? Do you have children? etc.), I asked what they were planning to do with all the framed drawings. He said that he had no idea what they were for, but that his job was to ensure the students remained at the ward pavilion until they were called to the procession. He went on to explain that the event brought together a range of organizations—including multiple NGOs, dance ensembles, student groups and local ward associations. When I asked again about the framed diagrams, he directed me to a young woman called Cipta, who he said was the leader of the student group. When I expressed surprise at the handling of the framed images, Cipta explained that these were not *rarajahan,* nor were they actually 'alive'. Rather, the images were a form of art (I. *seni*) designed by the students and meant to symbolize (I. *menyimbulkan*) the power of Balinese script and literature. As part of the *Grebeg Aksara,* they would be used to commemorate the *Puputan* of 1906, at which the royal court of Badung marched willfully into Dutch artillery rather than accept defeat. She then pointed across the ward pavilion to a large statue in the crossroads of a man carrying a *keris* dagger in one hand and a *lontar* manuscript in the other, explaining that he was the last of the great pre-colonial rulers of Badung, and an exemplary scholar of Balinese literature. It was in memory of his bravery, as embodied in the Puputan, that her supervisor at the University, Ida Wayan Oka Granoka, had organized the procession.

I had wanted to ask why one would wish to commemorate these events so elaborately on this particular occasion—106 years after the event. But the marching gamelan orchestra suddenly began to play, and the students scrambled into position on the road. The ensuing procession brought together a disparate array of themes, persons and objects. Out in front were a group of elegantly costumed dancers and musicians, followed by an elephant-headed *barong* – a powerful and generally benevolent figure – carried along by two men, and wearing a large white sheet covered in Balinese script. Behind the *barong* stood a row of four *rangda,* Bali's iconically fearsome and ambivalently powerful sorceresses, each carrying a folding fan inscribed with a *keris* dagger surrounded by Balinese *aksara*. Then came several rows of students dressed in temple attire and carrying the script-bearing canvasses, behind which was a line of younger men and women wearing red and white headbands and waving large Indonesian flags—seemingly exemplifying the 'revolutionary youth' depicted in popular images recalling the War of Independence. In and among the ranks of the marching students were small groups of older men and women holding above their heads various objects – including what appeared to be masks, swords and palm-leaf manuscripts – many of which were wrapped in sheets of gold-embroidered cloth and housed in intricately decorated boxes borne on palanquins—much like those used to carry the statues and other objects occupied by the divinities and related forces 'called down' during temple anniversaries. Over the sound of the gamelan could also be heard the low, loud – and, at least to my ear, belligerent – pounding of four massive drums, pushed insistently forward on a wheeled cart by a contingent of boisterous young men taking turns at beating the drums with large leather mallets. And, as with any major public event in Bali today, photographers darted in and out of the procession, vying for position with casual onlookers who were shooting video and photographs on their handphones.

Once underway, the procession moved slowly southward along the main street to the crossroads located just above Puputan Square, where the famous Catur Muka ('Four-Faced') statue of Lord Brahma stood towering over the assembled gamelan orchestra. On arriving at the crossroads, each of the groups took up a position around the edges of a stage-like space that had been covered with a giant white tarpaulin marked out with large geometric

patterns. Things then rather suddenly went quiet, as a man dressed in temple priest's attire marched ceremoniously to the center of the stage and unfurled an enormous scroll from which he read out a series of numbered points in Indonesian. From where I was standing it was often difficult to make out precisely what he was saying. But it was quite emphatically a call to action—addressing such things as cultural renewal, national pride and the importance of enthusiastic (I. *semangat*) support for social and economic development (I. *pembangunan*).

The gamelan then started up again, and a group of men took the stage to perform a variation on the *baris*, a militaristic dance that involves moving deftly in line-formation (B. *baris*) while handling a lance. The men were soon joined by a larger group of women, dancing elegantly with the dagger- and script-bearing cloth fans. Meanwhile, the four *rangda* moved slowly around the edges of the tarpaulin, eventually coming on-stage and engaging in battle with the lance-wielding *baris* dancers, who moved to protect the other dancers. But, in the end, as in many popular renditions of the Calonarang drama, both the men and women succumbed to the power of *rangda,* finally turning their weapons on themselves—the women stabbing at their chests and torsos with the *aksara*-bearing fans as if they were *keris* daggers. With the performers having collapsed, their limp bodies draped one over another, the gamelan went quiet and the stage was still—no doubt deliberately replicating well-known photographic images of the Puputan in which the corpses of Badung's fallen court lay in heaps outside the palace gates, having chosen death over defeat. But then, as now characteristic of some popular renditions of the Calonarang (perhaps especially those performed for tourists), the elephant-headed *barong* slowly moved in and revived the expired dancers, who came to their feet one by one. The dancers then took a bow, the assembled onlookers applauded, and a woman's voice came over the PA system to announce the event was over—after which the assembled crowd slowly dispersed, wandering off along the side streets.

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As I made my way back up the road to meet Putu, I tried to work out what had just taken place. In some twenty years of visiting Bali I could not recall having ever seen anything quite like this Grebeg Aksara. And yet, taken individually, many of its more prominent elements were readily recognizable—from the gamelan music and *baris* dance to the photographers and the procession of ornately attired men, women and children bearing empowered objects for assembly at a particular location. Such processions are most

commonly associated with the celebration of temple festivals. But on this occasion none of the local temples appeared to be celebrating their anniversaries. So what was the point of all this? How was the procession related to the call for cultural renewal and national pride? And why did Balinese *aksara* figure so prominently in the event?

The Local Critics

When I asked what he had thought of the event, Putu seemed singularly unimpressed. As a graduate of the Fine Arts Academy, and an accomplished professional musician, he has performed in hundreds – if not thousands – of dance dramas, light operas and comedies, and so has developed what many of his friends consider a jaded view of artistic innovation. Yet, despite my asking repeatedly, Putu was careful not to specify his criticism—perhaps because he had been asked to accompany me to the event by Pak Saru, whom he saw as a patron, and a respected member of the community. It was only on arriving back in Batan Nangka that I got a better sense of his objection.

We had met by chance with Saru's son, Pénjor, who looked up to Putu as a mentor, and was, as it happened, a recent graduate of the literature program from which the Grebeg Aksara drew many of its student volunteers. When he heard we had been in Denpasar for the event, Pénjor groaned and rolled his eyes. I explained that I was confused by what I had seen, and wondered whether he might be able to tell me what it was all about. Pénjor replied, with what I took to be a hint of sarcasm, that the Grebeg Aksara was simply 'too sophisticated' (B. *bes wayah*) for the likes of 'us ordinary folk' (B. *'nak biasa*). He quickly added that the organizer of the event, Pak Granoka, was a 'genius' (in English), joking that his ideas were beyond the ken of mere mortals. It was at this point that Putu added in a more serious tone that the event was typical of university-based intellectuals (I. *cendekiawan*), who wanted to help but were out of touch with the realities of day-to-day life beyond the walls of their 'academic palace' (I.? *puri akademis*).

The following morning I consulted with two priests recognized locally for their expert knowledge of ceremonial rites, bringing with me a set of photographs from the event. The first priest, a Resi Bhujangga of the Sengguhu clan, listened intently as I described the procession and the casual handling of the *aksara*-bearing canvasses. Looking over the photographs, he said the students' actions were both 'mistaken' (I. *keliru*) and potentially dangerous (B. *baya*), as even the most apparently mundane objects – to say nothing of such potentially powerful configurations of script – might inadvertently be 'brought to life' (B. *idupang*)—implying they could cause great harm. The brahmin high priest, who it seems had some prior knowledge of the Grebeg Aksara, described the event similarly as an 'incorrect' or 'improper' (B. *sing patut*) use of Balinese letters. He played on the term *grebeg,* which he said in older Balinese could be used to mean 'destroy' (I. *menghancurkan*). He joked that Granoka was acting 'like a terrorist' in setting out to 'destroy letters' (B. *ngrebeg aksara*), adding, with a chuckle, that the inscribed canvasses bore scant relation to anything he would recognize as Balinese 'tradition' (I. *tradisi*). So, if Putu and Pénjor criticized the event for being out-of-touch with the lives of ordinary people, it seemed these two priests disapproved of what they took to be a risky and inexpert mishandling of letters.

Next I went to see Pak Kantor, a retired professor and public intellectual from one of the neighboring wards of Pateluan. As a prominent figure on the Balinese academic scene, he

had been invited to participate in a seminar preceding the Grebeg Aksara, though he did not attend the procession itself. On enquiring, he said I was right to be confused, as Granoka's ideas were both abstract (I. *abstrak*) and complex (I. *kompléks)*, creating a 'synergy of music, semiotics and mysticism' (I. *sinergi musik, semiotik dan mistik*) that he himself was unable to grasp. He said the group responsible for organizing the event was Granoka's Sanggar Maha Bajra Sandhi, an organization devoted to the cultivation of 'spirituality' (I. *spiritualitas*) through music and dance. He went on to explain that Bali was facing a variety of problems – both environmental and economic, but also cultural and religious – and that the Grebeg Aksara was directed to reinvigorating Balinese society (I. *masyarakat Bali*) in the hope of overcoming these problems. However, he quickly added that the means were ill-suited to their intended ends. The event was unnecessarily complicated and difficult to understand; and the group itself lacked cohesion. Unlike the efforts undertaken by local ward assemblies (B. *banjar*) and temple congregations (B. *pamaksan*), Granoka's endeavor lacked a foundation in the corporate groups historically constitutive of Balinese social life. The Sanggar was centered, he said, on Granoka's own family; and so it lacked grounds for establishing the wider-reaching solidarity required for sustained collective action. It was for this reason, he said, that the event needed 'artificial stimulation' (in English) in the form of large monetary donations from the provincial government. Kantor said Granoka and his group had performed the Grebeg Aksara in sequential years at various locations throughout Bali, and had received over a billion Rupiah (approx. US$ 80,000) to take the show on the road to Vietnam, and later to Europe. I may have looked somewhat incredulous, as Kantor quickly went off to bring me a printout of an article that had been published several years before in *Kompas*, long one of Indonesia's leading quality newspapers.

The article originally appeared in 2006, written by the Balinese poet and public commentator, Putu Fajar Arcana, and bearing the title *Cultural Mission: A Post Card From Bali* (*Misi Kebudayaan: Kartu Pos dari Bali*). As Arcana explained, Granoka's group was sent on tour to perform in a series of cities across Europe in 2006 as part of an effort to repair the island's image as a safe destination for tourists in the wake of the nightclub bombings of 2002 and 2005.[23] He explained that foreign tourist arrivals declined precipitously after the first bombing, and had not yet fully recovered. Arcana went on to discuss the economic impact of the downturn, suggesting that the tourism industry had 'grown weary of waiting for the government to act' on the problem. Yet, having noted the need for action, the article was sharply critical of Granoka's European tour—both for inadequacy to its stated purpose and, at the same time, for its naive complicity with an orientalist vision of the island and its charms. Arcana argued that the tour was as 'cliche', and so meaningless, as a post card depicting a Balinese dancer—adding wryly that, 'it's as if there were an implicit "understanding" between Europeans and Indonesians, and especially Balinese, that their friendly relations must periodically be "reenergized" with a performance of traditional arts'.[24] Having reviewed a lengthy résumé of foreign scholars and artists responsible for creating and perpetuating this exotic and often prurient image of 'Balinese culture', he implied, moreover, that the trip abroad was an irresponsible waste of the money – some 6 million US dollars – that Granoka's group is said to have received from local government.[25]

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[23] As I later learned the group was also sent to Athens in 2004 as part of the Indonesian delegation to the Cultural Olympiad.

[24] The Indonesian text reads: *Seperti ada "kesepahaman" antara orang-orang Eropa dan Indonesia, terutama Bali, bahwa jalinan persahabatan itu mesti diberi "energi" ulang dengan pementasan kesenian tradisi.*

[25] It is difficult to know how one could reliably confirm these sums.

Although addressing events some six years beforehand, Arcana's article provided the first contextualizing information that I had encountered with respect to the Grebeg Aksara. But, beyond its substantive content, his criticism was also interesting for its style of explication. Seeking precursors for contemporary practice in a series of prior moments – embodied in the work of such well-known figures such as Gregor Krauss, Walter Spies, Antonin Artaud and Miguel Covarrubias – Arcana's invocation of history exemplified the genealogical style of critique now prevalent in the European and American scholarship on Balinese arts and culture. Citing both Vickers and Picard, he argued that 'We may trace an awareness that culture can work as a magnet for tourism in Bali to the times of the early Dutch colonial government'. Having excavated these precedents for Granoka's project, and tying this history to contemporary economic relations, Arcana was then able to reveal it as, in essence, yet another iteration of Bali as a 'paradise created'—a phrase made famous by Vickers' eponymous history of Balinese cultural politics.[26]

Reviewing the criticisms – from Batan Nangka to *Kompas* – it would appear the Grebeg Aksara comes up wanting in respect of each of the three deployments of tradition that were discussed at the outset. First, the high priests and Pak Kantor gave us reason to question its foundation in 'positive' tradition. For the priests, this was on account of its unwarranted innovation and mishandling of letters; meanwhile, according to Kantor, the problem was its lack of grounding in established forms of social organization. Second, we have seen the unmasking of cultural pretense under Arcana's 'genealogical' critique, which suggested that Granoka's efforts were not only cliche, but they also replicated themes historically associated with colonial exploitation. Finally, insofar as the event was judged inadequate to the task of repairing Bali's image in the wake of terrorist bombings, it similarly fell short as properly 'operationalized' tradition.

Taken on their own terms it may seem difficult to argue with these evaluations—that is, insofar as Granoka's project is at once innovative, indebted to colonial precedent and ill-suited to the task of economic recovery. Yet the question is whether we might be missing something by limiting ourselves to these three, admittedly influential understandings of Balinese tradition. What I would like to suggest is that we try coming at the problem from a different angle, and examine the style of argumentation at play in this celebration of 'the power of Balinese letters'. For this we must now turn to consider the purposes that drove Granoka's organization of the event in the first place.

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[26] It must be noted that Arcana is not alone in having taken this genealogical approach to the cultural politics of contemporary Bali. Other Balinese commentators – including, e.g., Degung Santikarma, Ngurah Suryawan, Nyoman Darma Putra, Nyoman Wijaya and Wayan Juniartha, among others – have made similarly sophisticated use of the recent historical scholarship in their writings and other contributions to public debate. These Balinese scholar-commentators are actively involved in a range of projects directed to improving collective life on the island; and, in contrast to their broadly western counterparts, the political import of their work is generally quite explicit. As I have tried to show elsewhere (Fox 2010), the current Euro-American scholarship on Balinese history owes much to these very figures – Darma Putra, Santikarma et al – as they were originally some of its key informants.

Konsép Sinkretisme Besar

In the weeks following the *Grebeg Aksara* I had the opportunity to speak with Granoka at some length, both about the event itself and the aims of his work more generally.[27] In the course of our conversations it became clear there was more to Granoka's project than his detractors may have thought. Centered on a sophisticated, if eclectic, vision for producing a 'synergy' of artistic creativity, scholarship and spiritual development, the Grebeg Aksara was meant to further what he called a 'holistic transformation toward a new era' (I. *transformasi holistik menuju jaman baru*). On his account, the goal was nothing short of 'revolution' (I. *revolusi*)—though it was a revolution directed to the 'renewal' (I. *pembaruan*) as opposed to destruction (I. *penghancuran*) of the postcolonial state. Re-spinning the etymology of *revolution* through a Buddhistic idiom, he cast this as a 'turning of the wheel of dharma' (I. *memutar roda dharma*).[28]

Granoka's erudition and intensity were often overwhelming, making it difficult at times to follow his leaps from one idea, thinker or period of history to another. The links were frequently made by way of word play, drawing derivations and sequences of equations by homophony. For example, he exemplified what he described as the divinely transformative character of music by running in quick succession from Balinese gamelan orchestra notation (B. *ding, gending*) to an Indonesian epithet for divinity (I. *mahakuasa*) by way of German philosophy (G. *ding an sich*), culminating in the sequence:

> *Ding… gending… das ding… das ding an sich… dalam arti kuasa yang mahakuasa*

> [the musical note] *ding* … musical phrase … the thing … the thing in itself … meaning the power that is all powerful [i.e. Tuhan, or 'God'].

Although we spoke predominantly in Indonesian, with occasional comments in Balinese, his remarks would frequently incorporate words, phrases and even entire sentences in any number of other languages—from Sanskrit and Kawi to English, German and Latin. If his terminology was markedly heterogenous, so too were the ideals he espoused—bringing together the works of the Old Javanese court poets with Vedic hymns and ancient Greek philosophy, but also the writings of modern day anthropologists, philologists, theologians and authors of pop science.

My initial encounter with this unruly assemblage of languages, ideas and authors was occasioned by my asking Granoka about his use of Balinese script in the Grebeg Aksara. When he had described his 'revolutionary' intentions, I asked whether he meant to use Balinese *aksara* as an 'instrument' (B. *prabot*) or 'means' (B./I. *sarana*) to this end. He said no,

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[27] In addition to leading the Sanggar Maha Bajra Sandhi, Granoka lectures in the Faculty of Letters at the island's flagship university, and has published scholarly works on various aspects of Balinese language and literature. He is also an as yet unconsecrated member of a priestly lineage from the community of Buda Kling, home to the island's famed 'Bauddha Brahmins' (Hooykaas 1963), which he proudly cited as the source of Bali's true spiritual legacy and hope for the future.

[28] This is presumably an Indonesian play on the well-known Pāli/Sanskrit phrase, *dhamma-cakka-ppavattana / dharma-cakra-pravartana,* associated with the *sūtra* of that name.

the *aksara* are better understood as a form of what he called *sadana*.[29] Pushing our conversation back into Indonesian, he went on to explain that the idea of an 'instrument' (I. *alat*) implied externality, something one used to accomplish an end that was both objective (I. *obyektif*) in character and fully-formed from the outset. By contrast, the idea of *sadana* implied transformation of a more imminent nature—it 'enters into us' (I. *masuk kedalam kita*) as the energy or capacity (I. *daya*) that allows us to accomplish our aim'. It may, moreover, transform our conception of the ends we envisage for our actions. He then played off the term *daya,* saying that *sadana* goes straight to one's heart (K. *hṛ-daya*), gradually transforming and developing by stages (I. *bertingkat*) its capacity for change and the realization of one's potential (I. *poténsi*).[30]

So, how might we square this account of spiritual exercise and transformation with the various forms of disapproval I encountered in Batan Nangka? Was it simply that the sophistication of Granoka's project was lost on the villagers? Alternatively, were they right in thinking he was 'out of touch'? Could it be both? Or perhaps neither?

Granoka seemed all too aware that his efforts were widely misunderstood, and often criticized. I believe it may have been in part for this reason that he took such care in answering my questions.[31] In response to my asking when he had first thought of organizing an event like the Grebeg Aksara, he gave me a book entitled *Cultural Reincarnation* (I. *Reinkarnasi Budaya*) that he compiled in 2007, and which he said gave a more comprehensive account of his 'vision and mission' (I. *visi dan misi*).[32] During one of our meetings at his home in Denpasar, we looked through the book together discussing the diagrams and photographs that were juxtaposed with text and other forms of writing in various scripts— Roman and Balinese for the most part, but also a modified form of *Devanāgarī,* and even a few Chinese characters. Rather like our conversations, the book brought together an almost unbelievably wide range of materials—citing authors, languages and themes that could in no way be said to constitute a 'naturally' cohesive whole. In this regard, there was a notable similarity between Granoka's remarks, the book and the performance of the Grebeg Aksara. They each appeared to exemplify a style of explication that was directed to accomplishing a particular end; and this end was articulated with reference to an eclectic, yet somehow regular, assemblage of precedents. With an eye to the temporality of tradition, I would like to reflect briefly on each of these aspects in turn—that is, the way in which current

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[29] The Sanskrit term *sādhana* suggests very generally the idea of bringing something about, of 'accomplishing' or 'effecting' (Apte 2014 [1890]: 1115). In Buddhist discourse, and particularly in the tantras, it comes to refer more specifically to rites of self-transformation and empowerment (see Bentor 1996: 1-8). The corpus entries in Zoetmulder's OJED (1982: 1586) suggest that a similar sense is not uncommon in Kawi. Though Granoka was not forthcoming with respect to his sources, it would not be surprising if he were familiar with these usages.

[30] Granoka described this transformation with a further play on the term *aksara,* suggesting that his aim was to move from *aksara* to *a-ksara*—that is, from 'letters' (*aksara*) to 'indestructibility' (*a-ksara;* I. *tidak termusnahkan*). This play on words may have been drawn from the Dutch scholarship on Balinese literature (see Hooykaas 1978: 76).

[31] Granoka's forthcoming responses might be contrasted with Pak Saru's indirection, as two styles of address each engendering a different sort of authority.

[32] The phrase *visi dan misi* is common Indonesian bureaucratese, from NGOs and government projects to local school initiatives and banking cooperatives.

circumstance is addressed with reference both to authorized precedent and a vision for the future.

Of Crisis and Critique

Granoka described contemporary Bali as beset by what he called a 'multidimensional crisis' (I. *krisis multisudut*) destabilizing everything from the tourism economy and local government to artistic creativity, religion and morality.[33] He likened the situation to the story of the demon Kala, who swallowed the moon and caused an eclipse—a common metaphor for the benightedness of our times. He explained that it is unclear how one can live virtuously (B. *mayasa*) and effect positive change in an age of darkness (I. *jaman kala, kegelapan*): though the eclipse itself may be impermanent, its effects are unforeseeable and often irreversible. By way of example he pointed out that, despite the facade of modern convenience and prosperity in the island's more affluent areas, the institutions that sustain day-to-day life are on the verge of collapse from deep-seated corruption and a lack of substantive purpose and accountability. He explained, for instance, that in Bali today it is likely one will be arrested as a 'suspect' – and forced to pay a bribe – if one stops to report an automobile accident by the side of the road; similarly, university students are often expected to present their supervisor with additional (illicit) 'fees' before they are allowed to graduate; and the leading local newspaper demands payment for covering significant local events. He explained these are but a few examples of a wider failure to establish the institutions required for a stable and prosperous life. Under the circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising that efforts to work through established channels to cultivate shared goods ultimately turn out to be counterproductive—that is, insofar as they legitimize and perpetuate the very institutions that are seen to be at the root of the problem. This has been all the more frustrating following the post-Suharto reform movement's inability to deliver on its promise of transparency and good governance. However laudable were the calls for regional autonomy and democratization, for many the most readily apparent consequence of 'reform' has been financial uncertainty.

Though Granoka was clearly in some sense arguing for a return to tradition, he was unimpressed with popular calls to defend Balinese religion and culture under the rubric of *Ajeg Bali*, which he saw as a distraction that would lead to 'stagnation and mental atrophy' (I. *stagnan atrofi penyusutan otak'*). He was equally distraught at the state of the university, which, though notionally the seat of critical enquiry and reflection, had come to epitomize the indulgence and lassitude of a civil service devoted primarily to its own enrichment. It was, as he put it, a mediocracy that rewarded subservience, while much-needed innovation was stifled. A large-scale meltdown was imminent, he said; and yet the people most at risk were too busy trying to make ends meet to do anything about it, while those better positioned to work for reform had become disaffected or complacent. Granoka went on to rail against the irony of musicians shuttled off to play gamelan at the hotels for a pittance, while foreign investors reaped millions on the food and alcohol consumed by guests attracted to the restaurants by their performance. It would be reassuring, he said, to see this as somehow aberrant, or unexpected; but these developments were the inevitable –

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[33] The language of 'crisis' (I. *krisis*) came into popular usage in Indonesian following the financial crisis of 1997, with such turns of phrase as, e.g., Monetary Crisis (*Krismon*), Economic Crisis (*kriskon*) and even Total Crisis (*Kristal*).

and foreseeable – coming-to-fruition (B. *karmapala*) of commodifying Balinese culture—which, again ironically, was justified in terms of bringing the benefits of economic development to the entire island. He explained that it was for this reason that, although members of his Maha Bajra Sandhi group were frequently invited to perform for cremation rites and temple ceremonies, he insisted that they refuse payment for their work—which was properly to be understood as a form of service (B. *ngayah*).[34]

Notwithstanding his emphasis on Bali, Granoka described these problems as but symptomatic of a broader predicament facing the nation as a whole. This was in part the product of what he saw as Indonesia's failure to become a civilized and prosperous nation (I. *bangsa yang beradab dan sejahtera*) following the defeat of the Dutch and the achievement of independence. Despite the formal sovereignty of the Republic, he saw Indonesia as still very much living 'under the shadow of Eurocentrism' (I. *dibawah bayang-bayang eurosentrisme*)—held back by its 'formalism, rationalism and instrumentalism'. In his book Granoka has, moreover, described Indonesians as 'living like slaves' or 'servants' (I. *budak*) to a foreign ideology (I. *ideologi yang asing*), arguing that the upshot is that 'we are still a "colonized" people' (I. *kita tetap adalah bangsa yang 'terjajah'*). In the rush to keep up with modern life, and often simply just to survive, Indonesians have forgotten their 'culture' (I. *kebudayaan*)—which, on a more optimistic note, he said would prove the source of their renewal. But a slavish return to the past will not suffice. Instead, he has called for 'reducing servitude' (I. *mengurangi perbudakan*) through 'peaceful revolution'—which, as he put it, would entail 'producing a new configuration by transforming a number of older elements' (I. *transformasi beberapa elemén lama menjadi konfigurasi baru*). It was to this project of transformation that the Grebeg Aksara was directed—drawing together familiar elements in a new way in aid of a particular vision for the future.

SintésaSistematikBaru

As one might expect, Granoka's vision for the future was expressed in language at once deliberately and explicitly eclectic. For example, both in our conversations and in his book, he frequently repeated the series *verum-bonum-pulchram*, which he attributed to Plato, but then followed in Sanskrit with *satyam-siwam-sundaram*, a phrase often associated with the Indian guru, Satya Sai Baba, which he glossed in Indonesian as *benar-baik-indah*—for what is 'true, good and beautiful'. Both the tripartite combination of terms, and the serial juxtaposition of equivalents across languages, were a regular feature of his explication. Having watched Granoka employ this style of speech in addressing public forums, it seemed that, as a sort of rhetorical flourish, it was directed to persuasion by means of erudition and terminological superfluity.[35] But I also believe these juxtapositions may have reflected his desire to exemplify what he called the 'unification of all science and knowledge' (I. *penunggalan seluruh ilmu dan pengetahuan*)—e.g., 'of east and west, right brain and left brain, dialectic and non-dialectic thought'. This realization, he said, was a precondition for

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[34] This is standard practice for those invited to perform on such occasions, where a careful balance must be struck between refusing 'payment' and accepting a monetary token of 'sincerity' or 'appreciation' for services rendered.

[35] As we shall see, there are also precedents for this style of juxtaposing 'equivalents' – e.g., terminology in Sanskrit and Old Javanese, or Old Javanese and Balinese – in more conventional forms of Balinese discourse.
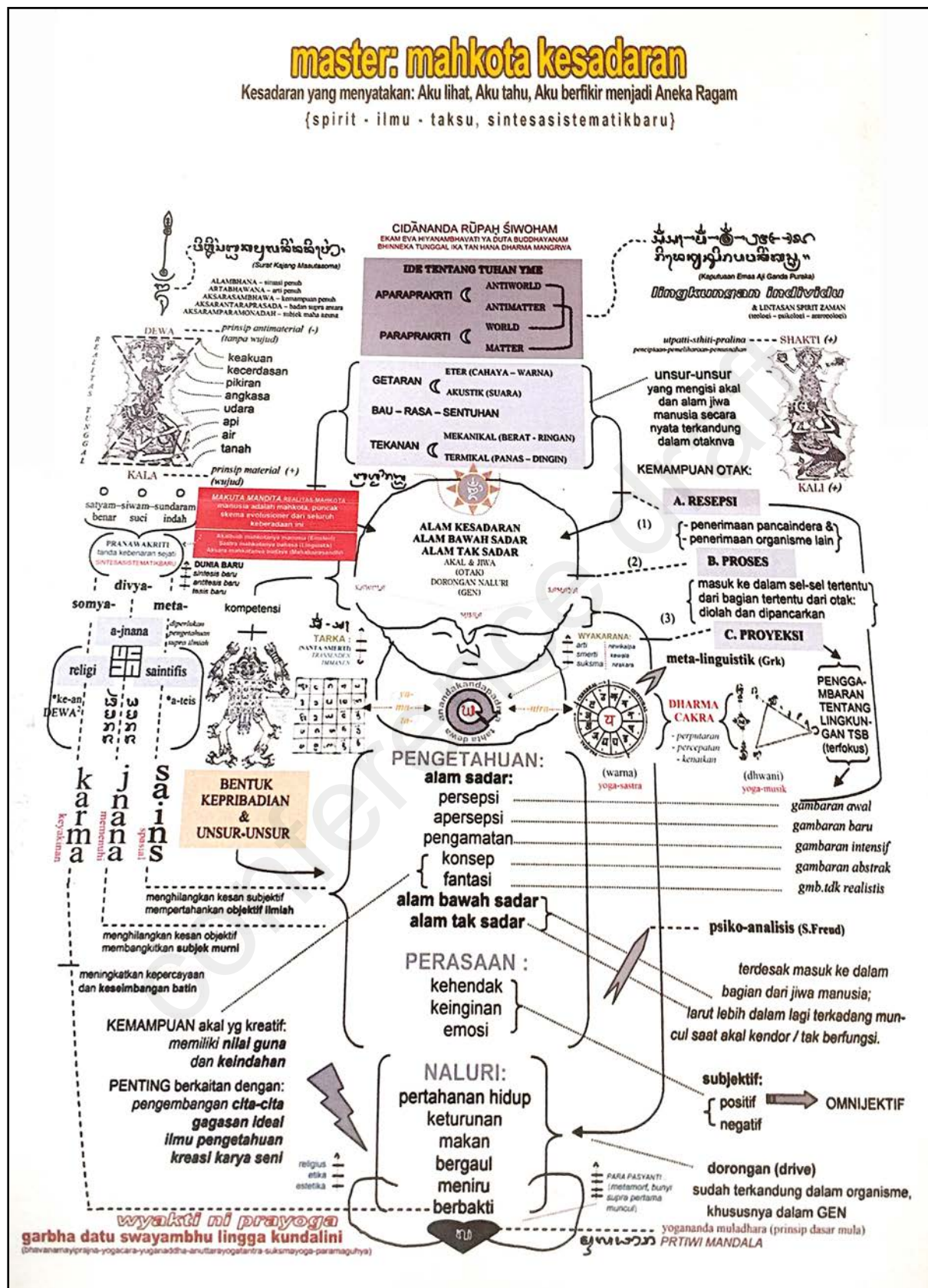
the prosperity of a nation that aspires to being not merely independent (I. *merdéka*), but also possessed of practical wisdom (I. *mahardika*).

Diagram from *Reinkarnasi Budaya* (Granoka 2007).

He went on to explain that Indonesians were rightly proud for having achieved independence when they expelled the Dutch following the second World War. But, as a nation, they were still held back – and 'enslaved' – by their unquestioning fealty to the 'rationalizing-mechanizing' proclivities of a 'Cartesian-Newtonian stream of thought' (I. *aliran Cartesian-Newtonian*). Commenting specifically on the Grebeg Aksara, he said it was the Puputan of 1906 that stood out as an exemplar for Bali's resistance to a crudely materialistic form of domination. The *keris* daggers on which members of the court had impaled themselves were, for Granoka, a symbol (I. *simbul*) of a self-penetrating awareness that would help them to stand steadfast in the face of a physically superior force. Through his efforts with the Maha Bajra Sandhi, he hoped to inculcate a desire to emulate their courage as a means of resisting both intellectual subjugation and the temptation of capitalist exploitation. Playing once again on relations of homophony, he said the aim was to lead Indonesia from independence to practical wisdom (I. *dari merdéka ke mahardika*), from syllabary to indestructability (I. *dari aksara ke a-ksara*), from linguistics to metalinguistics (I. *dari linguistik ke metalinguistik*), and from physics to metaphysics (I. *dari fisika ke metafisika*).

Here the language of *movement* was crucial. These were not static ideals, but rather trajectories. In contrast to the reifying tendencies of our received language of cultural criticism (structure, society, culture, meaning, subject, logic, object of study, etc.), Granoka's aims were articulated in terms of where one was 'heading' (I. *menuju*), what one was 'bringing to the fore' (I. *mengedepan*), 'entering into' (I. *menapaki*), and 'going through' or 'surpassing' (I. *menembus*). We are, he said, at a 'turning point' (I. *titik balik*) that requires the bold vision of a 'pilgrim' (I. *peziarah*) that dares to look out onto the future and draw on whatever resources may be necessary—to bring about a newsystematicsynthesis (I.? *sintésasistematikbaru*). As his book explains, 'This is the form of my refusal regarding the narrowly modernist spatial-formal way of doing things … [my approach is by contrast] comprehensive, fulfilling, and heading toward perfection (perfectly holistic). That is the future!' (2007: 102)

The Source of Being Human

The point of departure for Granoka's newsystematicsynthesis was the idea that language (I. *bahasa*) is the source of the human capacity for abstract thought (I. *pikiran abstrak*); and it is this capacity that differentiates humans from animals. As he put it, it is language that makes us human from a 'cognitive' perspective. But language is also the source of our very being, insofar as DNA is itself a language—what he called 'genetish', a term borrowed from the British popular science writer, Matt Ridley. More specifically, he sees the lettered proteins[36] that make up DNA as a form of written syllabary not unlike that embodied in the Balinese script employed in rites of empowerment, an idea he summed up with the Old Javanese phrase, *wit ning sabda, kamulaning dadi wong*—which might be glossed as something like 'the origin of letters, the source of becoming human'.[37]

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[36] As Granoka noted, the letters A, C, T and G are used to represent DNA sequences in scientific discourse.

[37] The paratactic juxtaposition of nominal phrases is not uncommon in Kawi composition, an issue to which I shall return in just a moment.

He argued that our mistake has been in limiting the analysis of language to the 'semantic level', and our understanding of the cosmos to that of an overly rationalized 'material-mechanistic' model—again, following the 'Cartesian-Newtonian stream of thought'. In so doing we have overlooked the musical vibrations (I. *vibrasi*) that make up the foundational sound of the universe, and so the source of our being—and of our *being human*. He explained in vaguely Pythagorean fashion that we must rediscover the linguistic ground of our *being* in the transformation of musical notes, the primordial sound that is the root of everything. We can return to this 'perfect' language (I. *bahasa yang sempurna;* a notion he attributes to Umberto Eco), which will provide the grounds for moving forward. As we have seen, he feels the world is in a state of crisis, and we have reached a 'turning point' from which we may begin anew. By taking an unabashedly 'eclectic' approach, he argued, we will come to see that musical notes, genetic code and the ancient letters of the mantric seed syllables are one. Accordingly, the means of transformation – and of redirecting ourselves toward perfection – will be 'a synthesis of music, linguistics and mysticism'.

Granoka envisions this transformation in three stages, which are themselves to occur within the third stage of a larger temporal scheme that links (i) the ancient kingdoms of Sriwijaya and (ii) Majapahit with (iii) modern Indonesia—a form of periodization possibly drawn from pre-colonial Javanese historiography.[38] Yet, albeit framed in Indonesian nationalist terms, Granoka's efforts toward transformation are made on behalf of 'humanity' as a whole, as reflected in Maha Bajra Sandhi's world tours—exemplified by the *ritus dunia* ('world rite') the group enacted at the Cultural Olympiad in Athens 2004, and their subsequent performance in Hanoi to celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations with Vietnam.

III

WAR BY OTHER MEANS?
SOME PRECEDENTS, IMPLICATIONS AND QUESTIONS

So what are we to make of Granoka's project, and of the various criticisms I encountered in Batan Nangka and beyond? And how might the interpretation of these events inform our thinking about argument, and so tradition, in Indonesia more generally? I suggested that tradition might be usefully understood as a way of conceptualizing the temporal condition of practice, which may vary historically from one set of practices to another. Tradition would in this sense embody specifiable styles of orientating desire, and of arguing for a particular kind of future, with reference to an authorized version of the past. Here it is important to bear in mind that, when taken in these terms, it would not make much sense to ask whether the Grebeg Aksara was authentically 'traditional', as opposed to 'innovative' or 'modern'.[39] Rather the question of tradition would be one of discerning its orientation in time. For

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[38] Of a well-known genre of Javanese prophetic texts called *Jangka Jayabaya*, Florida has written, 'The schema for the periodization of Javanese history presented by these texts divides historical time into three major eras (*kala*), each consisting of 700 years' (1995: 273). Florida's description of these texts offers several interesting points of comparison with Granoka's project.

[39] The notion of an 'invented tradition' would then, it seems, be either tautologous or incoherent depending on usage.

instance, we have seen that the performance in Denpasar was part of a larger project directed to addressing a contemporary crisis, and that it referenced both past and future in distinctive ways. What I wish to suggest is that, despite being distinctive, its mode of argumentation may not be as novel as it appears.

The central issue is cultural complexity, and of particular interest is the way Granoka's project brought together an array of seemingly incongruous elements in an effort to effect a transformation of human agency and collective life. Where MacIntyre's account of tradition stressed victory and displacement, the Grebeg Aksara seemed to embody a rather different style of argument and articulation—one directed neither to vanquishment nor the elimination of inconsistency, but rather to a sort of paratactic re-assemblage. Here I mean to use the notion of parataxis loosely, to point up a form of juxtaposition in which the relation between assembled components is indeterminate, or at the very least left unspecified. Extending the metaphor, this might be contrasted with the hypotactic proclivities of a broadly Aristotelian rationality exemplified by the hierarchical ordering of reasons, virtues and goods espoused by MacIntyre and those who have followed him.[40]

Looking back over the preceding sections, several often overlapping forms of parataxis may be seen at work in Granoka's project. We find this style of articulation figuring *inter alia* linguistically, thematically, chronotopically, terminologically, textually, discursively and orthographically. Most readily evident is the juxtaposition of languages, with terms and phrases drawn from Indonesian, Kawi, Sanskrit, Balinese, English, Latin, German and Chinese.[41] These do not each exert equal force; Indonesian stands out quite clearly as the language of articulation, holding the others together in a seemingly tenuous relation of mutual intensification. And yet the other linguistic registers are not exactly passive, as each brings to bear its own peculiar force—evident among other places in the paratactic juxtaposition itself. This may be seen (or heard) in compounds such as *sintésasistematikbaru*, or sequences like *spirit-ilmu-taksu* or *verum-bonum-pulchram / satyam-siwam-sundaram / benar-*

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[40] See Notopoulos 1949 for an interesting and potentially pertinent discussion of parataxis in Homer. Here he described 'the parataxis in style, structure, content, and thought which characterizes pre-Socratic literature' (1949: 7), but also such varied things as pottery, sculpture and social organization. He argued the idea 'That parataxis is first of all a state of mind rather than a form of literature is evident when we come to Greek art which reveals a story paralleling that of literature. That we have a similar story in Greek art strengthens the reasons for positing for the understanding of Greek literature and art a mind which evolved from a flexible, loosely coordinated unity to an organic unity' (1949: 11). Though the argument cannot be transposed to Balinese styles of argumentation *tout court,* it is highly suggestive.

[41] Very briefly, among the associations forged by Granoka's linguistic panoply include the following: Alongside its work as the language of articulation, Indonesian summons the ideals of national unity and the hopes of modernity; Balinese bears the stamp of cultural authenticity and pertinence to 'everyday village life'; Sanskrit forges the link between the former two and an Indic high tradition of ancient wisdom and spirituality; Old Javanese exemplifies a more localized strain of esoteric power and knowledge, as well as continuity with the glory of Majapahit providing the charter for a better Indonesia; English further demonstrates the modernizing sensibilities of science and cosmopolitanism; German is predominately talismanic, channeling high literary and academic culture; Latin similarly points to an idealized and broadly Eurocentric vision of academic culture; and, finally, Chinese serves as an inoculation of high Asian Civilization directed to countering the appearance of western hegemony implicit in the preponderance of English, German and Latin terminology.

baik-indah, but also in any of the many phrases and glosses regularly juxtaposed end-to-end in Granoka's speech and writing.[42] While fairly common in Kawi composition, where Old Javanese and Sanskrit 'synonyms' are frequently combined (e.g., *nawasanga;* see Gonda 1998 [1973]: 472-3) to form a single semantic unit, this style of juxtaposition contrasts sharply with more common forms of modern Indonesian syntax.[43]

An analogously paratactic style is evident in Granoka's juxtaposition of disparate themes and authorities—from Indic and Javano-Balinese textual sources to Indonesian discourses of nationalism and development, western philosophy, pop science, colonial philology, neo-Hinduism etc. Yet no particular effort is made to render explicit a relation of entailment or derivation. Rather iconic names, images and phrases figure as evidence of an overarching 'synthesis' that is meant to embody performatively the transformation it describes.[44] This engenders various forms of repetition, word play and other elements characteristic of older styles of 'text-building' in Java and Bali (Becker 1979)—including both a propensity for neologism, alliteration and assonance, as well as a degree of inattention to orthographic convention and consistency.

Historically this style of composition has characterized a range of Balinese (and, it seems, Javanese) articulatory practices. Some prominent examples include the manner in which rulers have been depicted in articulating and maintaining their realm; the organization of ceremonial work (B. *karya*), which is itself often represented as constitutive of the realm; the manipulation of syllables (B. *aksara*) in healing, architecture and sorcery, but also poetry and spiritual exercise; the ordered linkage and movement (B. *ngigel, masolah*) of body parts in 'dance' and 'theatre'; the assemblage of *lontar* manuscripts (B. *cakepan*), in which otherwise unrelated 'texts' are brought together for a particular occasion and purpose; and even in some forms of painting (e.g., 'Kamasan' style) that depict multiple and sequential events within a single 'scene'.[45]

One of the more interesting characteristics of such paratactic relation is that, at least in many cases, its indeterminacy is antithetical to the rigors of bureaucratic reason, and so technocratic governance.[46] Without wishing to generalize unduly, once they have been projected toward a particular end, this style of composition tends to leave its assembled elements to work out relations among themselves—that is, as directed to a given *telos* (B. *tetujon*). So, for example, the king's articulation of the realm, as the realization of his will and

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[42] Here one might also compare the way in which Granoka's *Reinkarnasi Budaya* rearranges syllables to form new words and phrases as a sort of contemplative instrument, or *yantra*—e.g., DE-SA MA-PRA-YO-GA, SA-MA PRA-YO-GA DE, MA-PRA-YO-GA DE-SA, PRA-YO-GA DE SA-MA (2007: 160).

[43] One of the issues we may wish to consider is the extent to which relations of hypotaxis have required linguistic borrowing—in Balinese and Kawi, but also Indonesian.

[44] Geertz's description of an imaginary Indonesian student – who was meant to stand as a synecdoche for the country's formative culture – makes for interesting comparison—particularly his 'extremely complicated, almost cabalistic scheme in which the truths of physics, mathematics, politics, art, and religion are indissolubly, and to my mind indiscriminately, fused' (1968: 117).

[45] It is my understanding that the latter contrast with the 'synchronic' images that tend to characterize paintings and other forms of visual representation following the period during which western artists and others were actively engaged in the study and cultivation of 'Balinese art'.

[46] An interesting historical example for further study would be the transformation entailed in the rationalization of Balinese ward and village organization under Dutch rule.

desire (B./K. *pakayun[an]*), is *not* characterized by micro-management; similarly, the preparation of offerings is carefully organized, to be sure—but the groups of men and women charged with this responsibility are usually left to work out among themselves how best to carry out their tasks; we might similarly look to the comparative lack of step-by-step, start-to-finish choreography in older forms of 'dance'; or the on-the-hoof composition of storyline in *wayang* and dance-drama.[47] In each case, one is expected to proceed on the basis of a practical knowledge adjusted to the vicissitudes of circumstance.[48]

All this differs rather sharply from what we have seen with MacIntyre, for whom complexity often seems to imply incoherence, as a problem in need of solution (see interview with Borradori, cited in Lutz 2004: 13). By contrast, Balinese appear to be more comfortable with – and even to value – the productive tension that comes with incongruity and the juxtaposition of opposed forces. Put another way, and without wishing to oversimplify, EuroAmerican thought has generally cast conflict as ideally constituting a temporary state of affairs on the way to something else;[49] while, for Balinese, the push-and-pull of rival beings and forces has been seen as an ineliminable aspect of the world—something to be survived, accommodated and potentially directed to a productive end, as opposed to being definitively overcome.

These points of disjuncture suggest a number of questions that I hope we might take up in the course of the symposium. Among those I find most pressing include the following. First, whatever its significance, the paratactic style of reasoning I have outlined above is but one of several sorts of argumentation in Bali, and may be contrasted with various forms of persuasion that prevail in the ward assembly, on the dramatic stage, in state bureaucracy and elsewhere. Each of these is presumably shot through with the others in complex ways that warrant closer scrutiny. Second, given the strong European articulation of argument and conflict, it might also be worth our reflecting both on how these themes have – or have not – been linked in the history of Indonesian thought, and what other associations they might have developed. War and sexual conquest, for example, are commonly linked in the Kawi tradition, both in dramatic narrative and terminology. Relatedly, in my experience Balinese readily recognize a character type that brings together sexual prowess with skill in oratory

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[47] This sensibility is perhaps reflected in the way that Balinese *apang/mangda* (cp. Indonesian *biar* and *supaya*) indicates both (a) the idea that something ought to be done (where it seems to function grammatically as something like a modal verb) and (b) the reason why it ought to be done (where it functions grammatically as a conjunction). In many cases the distinction does not appear to be accorded great importance; in fact, many of those with whom I discussed these two usages had some difficulty in discerning the difference between them. A sample sentence containing both uses of the term *apang* would be: <u>*Apang*</u> *ngaturang canang sig pangkungé,* <u>*apang*</u> *sing gulgul* ('One <u>ought</u> to offer a *canang* at the ravine <u>so that</u> one is not disturbed' [i.e., by those who reside there]).

[48] It is also worth noting that such parataxis can only be made to appear static retrospectively (e.g., as a 'logic' of articulation) through a reification mistakenly conflating the articulatory act, or event, with its trace. It is for this reason that I have preferred to call it a style. Such articulations, whether paratactic or otherwise, are always directed to carrying forward with a project of transformation, for which Granoka's language of movement (*menuju, mengedepan, menapaki, menembus* etc) seems to offer a particularly apt example.

[49] Obviously there are many exceptions; an interesting example would be accounts of radical (or 'agonistic') democracy, which developed insights from the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt (see, e.g., Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 2000). These, too, are quite explicitly organized around a combative metaphor for rationality.

and often gambling, as well as in the use of physical violence. There is, to my knowledge, no single term for this sort of power – and so potential for persuasion – but it is definitely on the *kasar/buduh* end of the spectrum. Third, having noted some of the difficulties that arise from the genealogical account of tradition, particularly around its articulation of 'the Balinese', it is worth trying to specify as far as possible the constructive project – or projects – served by our historical and ethnographic enquiries into how Indonesians argue. Or, to rephrase this as a question, what is the political aim of our critical project? And, as importantly, what will it look like – and how will we know – if we accomplish it?

Finally, I would also like the chance to think through more carefully what I believe may be a residual essentialism in MacIntyre's formulation of 'substantive' rationality.[50] While he has devoted at least three book-length monographs (1988, 1990, 2010 [1981]), and any number of articles, to demonstrating the plurality of these tradition-constituted/tradition-constitutive rationalities, and how they are related historically to one another, the competition both within and between them is still said to be governed in principle by a 'formal rationality' that minimally consists of the law of noncontradiction. Citing Aristotle in the opening sections of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, he suggested that 'anyone who denies that basic law of logic, the law of noncontradiction, and who is prepared to defend his or her position by entering into argumentative debate, will in fact be unable to avoid relying upon the very law which he or she purports to reject' (1988: 4; cf. Lutz 2004: 9-10). In effect he seems to be saying that granting contradiction entails a forfeiture of grounds for rational judgment. My point is that, while falling foul of noncontradiction may be fatal for a 'contest of rationality' modeled on the Greek *agōn*, it is potentially less important for other kinds of argumentation, exemplified by Granoka's project and the wider Javano-Balinese tradition of what I am provisionally calling a 'paratactic' style of reasoning. If this were so, then the distinction MacIntyre has drawn between substantive rationality and a more universal set of basic logical principles may need some rethinking. An interesting place to start would be comparison with his own characterization of Descartes' presumption to radical doubt,

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[50] Regarding the character of differing 'substantive' rationalities, he argued 'The resources of [mid and late twentieth-century academic philosophy] enable us to elucidate a variety of logical and conceptual relationships, so that we can chart the bearing of one set of beliefs upon another in respect of coherence and incoherence and in so doing exhibit as the shared inheritance of the discipline of academic philosophy a minimal conception of rationality. But whenever and insofar as philosophers proceed to conclusions of a more substantive kind, they do so by invoking one out of a number of rival and conflicting more substantial conceptions of rationality, conceptions upon which they have been as unable to secure rational agreement in the philosophical profession as have Gifford lecturers in expounding *their* rival and competing claims concerning natural theology and the foundations of ethics.' (1990: 11-2; compare Lutz's commentary on *After Virtue* [2012: 187])

where an historically particular set of presuppositions were mistaken for universal characteristics of Mind.[51]

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[51] 'Descartes's failure is complex. First of all he does not recognize that among the features of the universe which he is not putting in doubt is his own capacity not only to use the French and the Latin languages, but even to express the same thought in both languages; and as a consequence he does not put in doubt what he has inherited in and with these languages, namely, a way of ordering both thought and the world expressed in a set of meanings. These meanings have a history; seventeenth-century Latin bears the marks of having been the language of scholasticism, just as scholasticism was itself marked by the influence of twelfth and thirteenth- century Latin. It was perhaps because the presence of his languages was invisible to the Descartes of the *Discours* and the *Meditationes* that he did not notice either what Gilson pointed out in detail, how much of what he took to be the spontaneous reflections of his own mind was in fact a repetition of sentences and phrases from his school textbooks. Even the Cogito is to be found in Saint Augustine.' (MacIntyre 2006: 9)

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