The Elixir of Mortality

Towards a Balinese Economy of Death

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THE ECONOMY AS A SYSTEM OF MEANING

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Mark Hobart
Department of Anthropology
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London
Malet Street
London WC1E 7HP

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I wish here to pursue an idea that may at first seem strange. It bears on alternatives ways of understanding contemporary economies, which have come to be imagined not only as the most important part of social life, but as a model for much else. Nowadays everything from health care to university education in many parts of the world is considered, quite unproblematically, as self-evidently understandable and controllable using models notionally derived from economics, no matter how inappropriate. The presupposition behind late capitalism is that the normal state of the world comprises some kind of natural and endless progress and development. Towards what, we might ask? The implicit vision of the future is modernity is no longer Europe, as it was during the colonial period, but is now some version of the United States. However the deep and irresolvable conflicts within American society are only manageable by exporting these antagonisms to, or projecting onto, other parts of the world. So perhaps we should ask whether this is really the good life as Indonesians and other Asians would wish their future to be. In few places is the disjuncture between global economic models and local society starker than in Bali in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

I shall argue that there are two contrasted and incompatible economies in Bali, linked with the tourist sector and most other parts of society.[1] There are ways of understanding economies, radically different from most contemporary models, but which are equally valid and at least as illuminating. By way of example I shall suggest that, for Bali, it is useful to talk in terms of 'an economy of death'. By this I mean several things. The key Balinese notion of human good is linked, etymologically and practically in various ways, to death. The overarching order is one premised on decline and decay. The economic agent in production and consumption includes both living and dead; and activity is predicated not only on individual mortality but also on the relevance of the dead to choices in the allocation of scarce resources. This process is epitomized in the importance of cremation which is at once a mechanism in the decline of large land-holdings and a commentary on the state of Balinese culture. Articulating these processes are presuppositions which stress not growth and continuity, but disruption and transformation. Ironically changes in the Balinese economy which have brought a semblance of affluence threaten not just Balinese society in the sense of a distinct way of life but also the capacity of Balinese to be the effective agents of their own actions.

Some theoretical quibbles

It is not, I think, just my jaded impression that most economic studies seem terminally dull compared to the lively state of recent debate in most other areas of the social sciences. While studies of, say, discourses about power are flourishing, economics all too often still languishes under the dead hand of competence, as do the economies in question. Economics seems, from an anthropological point of view at least, to be at once firmly positivist, obsessed with spurious quantification and committed to *a priori* models, the assumptions of which seem increasingly unlikely. I wish to question, more indirectly than directly, four common presuppositions both on

[1] Despite the rapid change to which Bali, as many other parts of Indonesia, has been subject over the last thirty years, a vast range of social practices are distinctly 'Balinese', including varying regionally within Bali itself. As Balinese society seems always to have been dynamic and open to change, I do not wish to essentialize some 'traditional' society as a yardstick against which to judge change. I am grateful to my research student Angad Chowdhry for his help in reformatting and editing this piece.

theoretical grounds and because they seem peculiarly inappropriate to the analysis of Balinese social action. These are the stress on production, quantification, individual agency and preferences, and the goals of action.

As the more general theoretical discontents have been well expressed by others, I shall be brief. As Hahn and Hollis point out in their Introduction to *Philosophy and economic theory*, not only is the level of philosophical argument in neo-Classical economics (the kind taught at most universities)[2] strikingly poor, but it is still

> grounded on orthodox Positivist tenets. The upheaval caused by Quine's pragmatism, Kuhn's paradigms, and other more recent bouleversements (Post-structuralism and Cultural Studies for example) has yet to send more than a tremor through the temple" (1979: 1).

Among the assumptions is that economics, however rationalist the models, is an objective science resting ultimately on natural causal laws in which all agency is ultimately individual and guided by a universal rationality which enables actors or economists to abstract *essential* features of a complex reality.

In the light of scepticism about the capacity of facts to determine theory, anthropologists among others are questioning the hegemony of Western metaphysical presuppositions in understanding other cultures.[3] However useful it has been, the stress on material production, especially the social relations of production, has itself become a fetishizing of nineteenth century bourgeois preoccupations (Baudrillard 1975). If, as he argues, we are now in an age where considerations of consumption loom large, then we perhaps need to stand back and inquire, rather than presume, precisely what criteria peoples in other societies use in talking about their actions. One of the charms of the classical language of production, distribution and consumption is it allows endless games with numbers where the referents are notionally homogeneous and comparable. One of the few points about Bali – initially made in the debate about time – on which scholars seem to agree is the stress Balinese lay on qualitative differences, whether between days, where one lives and how one works, the provenance of rice and so on. Focusing on quantification and blanket categories like production tends not only to obscure the qualitative differences upon which so much, from caste to family life, depends, but also other ways of representing the processes and preferences concerned.

Neo-Classical economics also has a notably naïve theory of agency. While the vision of the actor maximizing his or her utility, or better rationally allocating choices between scarce resources, does not necessarily entail a metaphysical postulate of humans as inherently selfish (Hahn and Hollis 1979: 3-7), it does embrace a theory of rationality and a simple methodological individualism which have a simplistic, pre-social notion of 'mental' operations like preferences and action. Conscious choice is the precondition and determinant of action, such choice or action being constrained by external circumstance. This view presupposes both a dichotomy of a mental realm of reason and a physical realm of action working under constraint (a curiously spatial metaphor[4]) and a naturalized dichotomy of individuals versus society. Not only are

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[2] Both sides in the argument between Keynesian economists and Friedman (e.g.1953) seem to agree about this. The dispute as I understand it rests more on relative stress on those Siamese twins, rationalism and empiricism.

[3] I have discussed what I mean by hegemony and metaphysics in detail in Hobart 2000.

[4] In Hobbes's immortal words "For whatsoever is tyed, or environed, as it cannot move, but within a certain space, which space is determined by the opposition of some externall body, we say it hath not

individuals the proper and sole locus of rationality, but more worrying individuals, and therefore their preferences and the means for arriving at these, are not recognized as culturally constituted. As Hahn and Hollis point out, economics has great difficulty in dealing with the social nature of choice and action (1979: 7ff.). As these arguments are familiar to members of the workshop, I shall waste no more time rehearsing them and turn to consider alternative interpretations of Balinese economic activities.

The elixir of mortality

It is quite possible, of course, to apply formal economic theories to Balinese behaviour. To do so however, leaves lots of loose ends (for a detailed analysis, see Hobart 1979: 168-258). For instance it is difficult to account for why Balinese grow rice in the first place. It would, other things being equal, be a more efficient use of labour and land for them to grow taro as a staple diet (as indeed Balinese did until a few hundred years ago). It is hard in formal economic terms to predict or justify the very high investment of capital in ancestor shrines, let alone the expenditure of capital and labour in mortuary and temple ceremonies. The pattern of labour use at vital stages in rice cultivation is not only commonly massively inefficient, but is known to be so. Individual and household choices in allocation of available labour often seem to have little to do with maximizing utility. Some of the oddities may be surmounted by appealing substantively to 'social values'. One could argue the cultural importance of rice, ancestors and gods; the need to service social relations through labour arrangements; and leisure as a legitimate goal. Such a model though creates as many problems as it solves. It reifies values and trivializes choice (if everything is maximizing, or satisfying, utility, it merely becomes a description of what was done.) It provides no account of how cultural possibilities are reworked, or what the agents are, or how these agents function. It assumes Balinese act or represent their actions in ways commensurable with, or encompassed by, our analytical models. In what follows, I shall argue that this is inadequate.

In the Balinese peasant economy, the provision of sustenance for the household group is the first and over-riding priority. Although a substantial proportion of food comes from dry fields and house gardens, Balinese speak as if rice were the only real food and rice terraces the main form of subsistence. Terminologically *nasi*[5] is both '(cooked) rice' and the generic word for food. What gives rice – and so food – its nutritive value is *merta*. Now *merta* is a tricky word (Hobart 1987: 39-40). For a start, each kind of being has its own appropriate kind of nourishment. Grass is *merta* for cattle, but not for humans; human faeces (by definition what is no use) is food for dogs and so on. *Merta* is closely linked to a whole set of mutually defined terms. The simplest is *bayu*, breath or energy. *Merta* is what gives one energy. So it is also what has *guna*, use. It is therefore *sari*, the good or usable part or aspect of anything, here for providing energy. *Merta* is the most basic and general good of all living things, without which they cannot live and sufficiency of which is the source of happiness. *Merta* is not however a stable perduring essence which may be garnered, stored and accumulated.

Liberty to go further… By LIBERTY, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of externall Impediments" (Hobbes 1914: 110, 66)

[5] *Nasi* is strictly low Balinese and Indonesian; *ajengan* and other terms being used in *Singgih* or high Balinese. However these terms are employed in fairly restricted contexts.

Rather it is caught up in processes of growth and decline. For one kind of being to flourish another usually has to die. Degeneration is built into *merta* itself, for all too easily *merta matemahan wisiya* – *merta* turns into poison. Try eating a week-old lobster.

Etymologically and textually *merta* is one of two contrasted terms. *Mrta* is the Sanskrit and Old Javanese term for death. *Amrta (amrita)* is the Sanskrit for 'immortal; nectar, ambrosia; nectar-like food' (Zoetmulder 1982: 69). In Javanese and Balinese versions of the Mahabharata, it is the elixir which makes the gods immortal. Beings like snakes which slough off dead skin are considered to be potentially immortal, a fact explained by their licking up drops of the elixir when some fell (hence their split tongues)[6]. Now Balinese often use *mrta* and *amrta* synonymously, a habit which stricter philologists attribute to ignorance or carelessness. In his detailed study of the history of the term however, Bosch found it necessary to point out that the opposition is relatively recent.

> We do well to remember that the conception of *amrita* originally did not imply the notion of an eternal life… Immortality to man means to live a complete life and to be happy (1960: 62-3).

One might therefore argue, as indeed Balinese sometimes do, that *amrita* is simply what is appropriate for the continuance of immortal gods, as *mrta* is for mortal humans. One may go further. Not only does *mrta* degenerate, but any being which absorbs *mrta* is equally condemned to eventual putrescence (whether by the eating, or simply by being the kind of being which depends on a kind of sustenance which is inherently decadent).[7] We may not be dealing with a theory of miraculous substances but at the situating of human production and consumption of food – and by extension 'the economy' – in the context of wider presuppositions about the nature of action and transformation.

Towards an economy of death

1. Process:

It is something of a truism that capitalism depends on expanding production to meet rising expectations. I am not concerned here with whether this view is justified, but with the presuppositions which inform it. I suggest that the metaphor of growth within an organized system (a 'world hypothesis' of 'organicism' in Pepper's terms, 1942) can be shown to be a pervasive presupposition in much Western academic thinking. Crudely, the Enlightenment vision of knowledge expanding almost infinitely has its practical corollary in economic and political 'development'. The metaphor has cosmic extensions: the debate in astro-physics is significantly couched in terms of the universe expanding or contracting, with all its implications for time, cause and purpose (Flood and Lockwood 1986). By contrast I suggest one may usefully consider a world hypothesis of decline in Bali, although not in quite the sense which is usually meant.

Much mileage is made of the relevance to Bali of an idealized Indian cosmic process of decline through four *yuga*s from the age of perfect order to the present near-

[6] As they also partake of food however they are mortal, see below.

[7] Zoologists now talk in a strikingly similar language of the corrosive consequences of oxygen on organisms.

chaos (even if the connection is not always recognized, e.g. Geertz 1973). Such grand interpretations need to be treated with caution. Not only do Balinese tend to talk of the first two *yuga*s as part of the emergence of perfection and the last two of decline, but the entire model is easily adapted to more immediate concerns. Two village priests I knew in the early 1980s worked out on the basis of their reading of recent events that each *yuga* was sixty years long. Another used to argue that Bali had just left the age of decline (the *Kaliyuga*) and was entering the first (the *Krtayuga*) again as evidenced by the increasing material prosperity, health facilities and the absence of war and violence – a view presumably pleasing to economic developers and anyone nostalgic for the New Order alike. More recent events suggest this optimistic vision may have its problems.

To read Balinese cosmology – if it be that – in this way however is to miss much of its significance. While Balinese may make occasional use of *yuga*s to order recent events, the themes of the emergence of a perfect order (one might note this need have little to do with growth and expansion) and, far more important, entropy or decline are alternative cultural ways of construing processes generally. While, in Balinese logic the possibility of degeneration is meaningless without its contrary, empirically it is the image of decline which is the *leitmotiv*, at least until recently. In other words, the inevitability of decay and death is an important presupposition in Balinese understanding of human and super-human processes.

This stress on entropy, indeed violent annihilation, is a pervasive theme in Balinese religion. Of the two great Indian traditions of Vaisnavism and Saïvism, it is not the former with its focus on continuity and gentle regeneration which has prevailed in Bali, but Saïvism with its glorification of destruction, rupture and uncertainty. It is interesting that scholars have almost always ignored that popular part of Balinese culture which is labelled ‘war’, ‘witchcraft’, ‘magic’ and ‘gambling’ by which Balinese strive to reverse decline by the trickery or extinction of opponents to their own advantage. The contrary of the degeneration implicit in the notion of *mrta* is arguably not creation or continuity, but chance, luck, skill and intrigue. So knowledge, in some ways, is closer to the antithesis of destruction, just as it may be the means to it.

2. Agency:

In a fascinating and under-estimated work, Keith Tribe took issue with neo-Classical and Marxist economic arguments over the nature of land, labour and human agency (1978, see also 1981). Two points are relevant here. First, arguments about the true nature of land and labour are misleading because the historical discourses within which they occur are incommensurable. Second, the stress upon the individual as the unit of economic analysis is misplaced because historically other kinds of agent are found, for example the household as represented in classical Greek texts and the German *Hausvaterliteratur* of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In short, we are in danger of looking at economics through present-day bourgeois spectacles.

The themes combine in Tribe’s study of the history of the notion of ‘economy’ itself. Drawing on Montchretien’s use of the expression *oeconomie*, he notes that the word

> refers itself to the Greek root *oikonomia*, used by Aristotle in contrast to *chrematismos*. This crucial distinction of Greek language separates the effective and thrifty ordering of a household from the business of money-getting and trade. Further, the derivation of *oikonomia* should not be read as 'the laws of household management' in the sense of a precursor of the laws of management of a national economy, for *nomos* refers in this case not so much to "laws" but to stewardship (i.e. agency). Perhaps the most general translation that can be made of the term *oikonomia* is that it covers the wise administration of the household and the maintenance of the objects of administration in their rightful place' (1978: 81-2, my parenthesis).

He goes on to point out that political economy until quite recently was modelled on the image of the State as a royal household.[8] In other words we conflate quite different notions of economy and agency under one label.

Tribe's criticism of economic discourse has direct application to Bali where the household (*kurenan*) is treated as the unit of taxation, labour obligation and membership of such other groups as village wards, irrigation and voluntary associations, broader kin groupings and, significantly, for mortuary rites.[9] Its members act for many purposes as a single body and constitute a 'complex agent' in making decisions and taking action (see Collingwood, 1942: 141-2) and is commonly represented in public by its recognized head. In many places in Bali however, for purposes of ritual to do with village land and its deities, households are subsumed as part of the village compound as another complex agent. So predicating an economic analysis on the individual as the basic unit is wildly wrong. The happy assumption that the individual is the natural and self-evident agent in the economy or the polity is simply the imposition of one historically and culturally specific set of presuppositions onto the rest of the world with all the resultant mess.

There are important differences between individuals and more complex arrangements as agents. One is of immediate relevance. A household often has a notional existence partly independent of the lives and deaths of particular members, so the relationship between any individual and the agent itself involves a disjuncture of identities which is not the case where the agent is necessarily the individual. Obviously such a disjuncture raises all sorts of interesting questions the constitution and divergence of potential interests, cultural styles of argument and decision-making, the relation of decisions and action, the appointment of instruments of the agent and so forth, which tend to be overlooked otherwise. My concern here though is slightly different. It is with the changing pattern of who goes to make up the household, compound, or other groups as agent. A household consists not just of the living and the relations between them, of unborn potential members, but crucially it includes the dead.

As economists, and doubtless many developers, are likely to dismiss this last step as at best irrelevant to the analysis of the economy of development at worst as unrepentant romanticism, may I briefly explain why it cannot be waved aside? Insofar as Balinese, or people in any other society, publicly take the dead into account and act and judge the actions of others accordingly, we have few grounds empirically for excluding them. It

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[8] Nor is this usage obsolete. The Iron Lady of British politics, Margaret Thatcher, was much given at one time to comparing the national economy to a housewife's budget.

[9] The patriarchal bias in the oeconomy noted by Tribe is less evident in Bali where some 40% of households are reckoned in many situations to be effectively headed by women, although men are more likely to attend formal village debates

is not a question of whether, in Balinese or the analyst's terms, the dead actually affect the living and their economic behaviour (the 'actually' is, in fact, by the way), but of whether they act as if they do. We are not in some uneconomic fairyland here. As I have suggested elsewhere, the fault lies in an academic epistemology which treats knowing and remembering as passive states of a mirror-like mind (Hobart 1990). As Balinese arguably view remembering as an action by which the dead are reconstituted by living agents, there is nothing fanciful in an analysis which takes them into account. On the contrary, as I noted, economics is notably weak on a theory of agency. Balinese, I would argue, are some way ahead on this.

The point may be made a different way. It is usual to approach indigenous economies in terms of such relations as supply and demand, production and consumption. Balinese, however, tend to approach the matter rather differently. They are inclined to work with the view that there is never surplus, rather an inevitable deficit. In the language of contemporary economic discourse, demand always exceeds supply; production can never meet the requirements of consumption. Marshall Sahlins has suggested that hunters and gatherers respond to the Galbraithean gap between aspirations and achievement by dropping aspiration (1974). The Balinese reply, if I might articulate it in these terms, is to observe that production and consumption, expressed as aspiration and achievement, require introduction of humans, at once as observers and agents. In other words, the means-ends relationship is mediated by variable perceptions of needs, obligations and by endless human frailties. It may not satisfy the analyst's desire for abstract systems to play with, but it is a world one can realistically live in (cf. Bourdieu 1977).[10]

Whether we describe it as human agents, simple or complex, recognizing other agents or as constituting them, the dead are held in many situations vitally to affect the living. Apart from the situational and idiosyncratic attribution of much ill (and good) fortune to the dead by spirit mediums, the pattern of investment by families in Tengahpadang bears witness to the importance of the dead under whatever description. Of the compounds in the ward of Pisangkaja, in 19 instances the value of ancestor shrines was roughly equal to the total value of all other buildings in the compound, in 35 it well exceeded it. The nine where it was less read as the litany of families who were well known to be in grave decline. As rice fields, ancestor shrines and house pavilions were the main form of capital investment, the figures are of interest. As various other factors govern the purchase and sale of rice fields, the high level of investment in shrines is significant.[11] The question is what, if anything, the relationship shows. Casually Balinese tended to speak of the link causally. If proper care were given to the dead, then everything prospered. If not, all efforts floundered. (More specifically, Balinese often linked the degree of attention to agricultural rites similarly to the relative

[10] Economists generally extrapolate from micro-economics to grander systems. Their micro-systems, however, are equally abstractions and work notoriously badly at the level of immediate agents' choices. In the ward of Pisangkaja in Tengahpadang in Northern Gianyar where I carried out fieldwork starting in 1970, for instance, the wives of some of the richest families would sell food at local stalls each day, notionally the means for the poorest to scrape a living, while many wives in very poor households did not do so when the choice was available. We need to understand more about cultural styles of survival and of recognized variation. Sayers pointed out that unemployment may bring about a passive attitude to one's predicament (1987). Perhaps we need equivalent sensitivity to the effects of perceived poverty

[11] In fact there is a close correlation between acquisition of agricultural land and heavy investment in ancestor shrines.

productivity of fields.) The connection seemed, on examination, to be well founded. As villagers themselves pointed out, there were conscientious people who tended to look after their lands and ancestors well, those who 'forgot' their obligations and preferred the good life, or simply failed to care. The dead in Bali are, in a sense, simply part of the language – perhaps better, the metaphysics – of effective agency.

3. Cremation:

Tourists and film-crews fly from all over the globe to ogle and record Balinese cremations. This is perhaps unsurprising. They are by any standards spectacular moments of the expenditure of capital and labour. Ordinary village families may take years to gather sufficient to afford the offerings and paraphernalia, even when they share the costs of remunerating the high priests, offering and funerary specialists and craftsmen, as well as the transport of ashes to the sea and further ceremonies. For princely families, where priests must be specially invited, elaborate biers built, carriers hired and feasts offered, the costs are often crushing. In pre-conquest Bali, princes seem to have had an extensive network of clients, both tenant farmers and local subjects, on whom the burden of labour and provisions partly fell. With the cessation of customary means of acquiring land and labour such as war, corvée labour and political negotiation, the onus of continuing large scale cremation (*palebon*) and the further secondary cremation (*maligiya*) appropriate to rulers fell on their existing resources. By 1960, when the Land Reform Laws limited the size of household holdings to eight hectares of rice land, there were few aristocratic families who still had so much left from up to hundreds of hectares in pre-colonial days.

One might ask why Balinese princely families continued to perform elaborate mortuary rites which they were well aware brought about their economic demise as surely the physical death of those they celebrated. The question, I suspect, only makes sense if one assumes a pre-social rationality. Unless you adopt a highly Eurocentric stance, being a Balinese prince for the most part was not a matter of 'pure prestige' (whatever that would be, Geertz 1967: 221), so much as being a kind of agent, the kind who is expected to instantiate Balinese ideas of powerful agents by performing such ceremonies.[12] Agents do change regularities (the princes of Ubud embraced – and directed – the writers who popularized Bali in the 1920s and 1930s) but some presuppositions die harder than others. This, as I understand it, is what Collingwood meant in talking of (relatively) 'absolute presuppositions' (1940). The question implicitly presumes there to be a universal rationality from which Balinese deviated, presumably for 'cultural' reasons, but which, under the peculiar conditions of colonialism, they were expected to anticipate some sixty years later in the 'New Order'. Again, we run the risk of imposing our ideas of economic and political agency in the contemporary managerial ethos. Demonstrating one's capacity to contain and even direct the death of one's own immediate superiors, to command unstable, self-seeking and even antagonistic support and face all the things which might go wrong is arguably

[12] How different aristocratic families have addressed changing ideas of agency varies greatly. Some families have partly opted out of what is also a language of rivalry and competition for position and following. Others have seemingly taken a leaf out of Geertz's writings and fetishized ever more extravagant mortuary ceremonies as moments to try to instantiate pure prestige.

as much a matter of agency as is the proverbial (and insulting) image of the housewife choosing between brands of margarine.

Whatever the case, Balinese princes by and large, and villagers less conspicuously, committed themselves to the celebration of the dead as determinedly as their fathers had iconically committed suicide rather than disgrace themselves in front of Dutch armies a few years earlier. Certainly cremations would seem to be a significant factor in the decline of aristocratic estates, and so formal economic utility, between 1910 and 1970. The princely family in Pisangkaja is said to have lost some 50 out of 70 hectares of rice land in this way. Nor do they seem to be the exception.

All this talk of aristocrats and history might seem to have precious little to do with the stern world economy of theorists of the world system and globalization. After all developers are supposed to be as interested in the poor peasants as these unfortunate folk are supposed to have been in the doings of their regal superiors. Unfortunately, on this view, Balinese peasants are equally lacking in the appropriate rationality. Because it would conjure up a spurious reality, I have not bothered to calculate the total number of man (*sic*) hours per annum, assuming that human labour submits, *pace* Foucault (1979), to convenient quantification. However temple festivals and other ritual requirements took, and still take, up a great deal of time. At least until the 1990s,[13] every villager in Tengahpadang was involved in something like ten festivals a year which each require in the region of 100,000 to 250,000 labour hours from the adult members of a relatively small community (100-300 adults), besides the input of making voluntary offerings, attending, praying and putting one's house straight afterwards. This was part from what must be an almost equal investment of labour in offerings to ancestor shrines daily, monthly and annually (by the Balinese calendar of 210 days), periodically in the rice fields and endless other routine obligations. Now, among the major temple festivals, three of the four (to the founding ancestor of the village in the temple of origin, *Pura Puseh*; to Durga, the guardian of the dead in the *Pura Dalem*; and to one's forebears (at the *Pura Panti* or *Pura Pamaksaan*; the exception being the *Pura Désa*, the temple of the village (guardian), who may be identified with Siwa, or Batara Guru, one's teacher, parent and so ancestor anyway) are to aspects of the dead. Such identifications are notoriously complicated but, even on the most miserly reading, we are faced with the fact that, in one form or another, Balinese villagers are equally involved in celebrating the dead or, what comes to the same thing, death.

As Balinese states have gone into decline following colonization and incorporation within the nation state of Indonesia, royal cremations if anything seem to have grown more magnificent. This has been attributed to the intrinsically theatrical nature of the Balinese state (e.g. Geertz 1973, 1980). Unfortunately it is anachronistic to extrapolate backwards from the present to the pre-colonial period.[14] We are dealing more likely with a complex irony. The conquest of Bali by the Dutch in 1908 heralded the death of traditional Balinese states, albeit somewhat disguised by a form of indirect rule. With this, much of the original underpinnings of power and so wealth of Balinese polities since the eighteenth century or so were swept away. The princes were left with the

[13] My *caveat* is not because the investment has necessarily changed, just that I have not researched temple ceremonies recently.

[14] Geertz's analysis depends on extrapolating certain rites from their pre-colonial political context which, on recent accounts, was far from about pure prestige (Vickers 2005).

pomp of mortuary rituals, which at once epitomized their new status and, with the destruction of their political oeconomy, merely speeded their decline. In several senses, Balinese are busy re-enacting and bringing about their own cremation – ironically instantiated in the grandiose cremations to which tourists and camera crews flock. Geertz's image of theatre is unintentionally apposite. For Balinese are no longer by and large the agents of their own destinies, the more so as development and international tourism is encouraged. They have been reduced to actors, whose script is increasingly been written for them by others and servants on their own island.

4. Economy as metaphor:

There is a genuine sense in which there is no such thing as 'the economy'. On the one hand there are different discursive formations, the commensurability of which may be outweighed by the differences. On the other, reference to the economy is to an aspect of complex relationships, a way of talking about processes and structuring perceived regularities, which may for different purposes be taken under the headings of 'power' or 'symbolism' or whatever . Like 'time', 'the economy' is an abstraction which is inferred from tangible processes. And like time, it is shot through with metaphorical representations which, in being acted upon, are constitutive of its nature. Consider Hobbes's image of the function of commodities and money in the State (Commonwealth):

> all commodities, Moveable and Immoveable, are made to accompany a man...and the same passeth from Man to Man, within the Common-wealth; and goes round about, Nourishing (as it passeth) every part thereof; In so much as this Concoction, is as it were the Sanguification of the Common-wealth: For naturall Bloud is in like manner made of the fruits of the Earth; and circulating, nourisheth by the way, every Member of the Body of Man. (1914: 133).

We still speak of the flow of goods, the circulation of money, the expansion of the economy. Perhaps, before we set about re-ordering other peoples' worlds, we should reflect on how catachretic[15] our own categories are.

Organic metaphors seem to play a far lesser part in Balinese discourse. Not only are complex agents not referred to by analogy to humans (as we talk of corporations as 'bodies' and their activities in pseudo-organic terms), but images of growth, continuity and survival are restricted to living beings. The language for talking about the State, the economy and so on are quite disjunct from that used of its members. The connection lies not so much in shared metaphor as in the presupposition of decline and transformation. Now such transformation may be from the simple and gross (*kasar*) to the complex and refined (*alus*), as in the conversion of household rubbish into fertilizer which yields rice and other crops. However Balinese stress happiness and welfare as the avoidance of disaster - the ultimate good for which Gods are invoked is *rahajeng*, protection from misfortune, which carries connotations of the absence of anything, and so anything unfortunate, happening. It is the danger of destruction which looms largest. And knowledge, rather than trust in continuity, provides a more reliable means of

[15] Catachresis is the use of metaphor such that it becomes constitutive of the phenomenon under discussion. My point is that discussion of the economy is inseparable from, and partly constituted by, the various metaphors used to talk about it. The famous differences and incompatibilities between different theories of economy are partly a product of rival metaphors.

combating entropy. The utopian assumption which has underpinned Balinese hopes in the tourist industry that somehow things would continue to get better and better without any serious cost to Balinese society has been rudely shattered. Quite apart from bomb attacks in tourist areas, the fantasy that Balinese could get away with unregulated and unsustainable expansion of the tourist sector, which had no regard for Balinese society, has come home to roost with a vengeance.

The message is simple. Those in positions of authority or influence who claimed that tourism was the answer to Balinese economic needs were either naïve or self-serving. In urging new kinds of good and practice on the Balinese, they promoted what they did not understand (because, in this sense, 'the economy' is beyond comprehension), with consequences they could not imagine or understand, to a people who, tragically but largely unwittingly, assisted them. Those who advocated the mad dash for the tourist dollar have become disingenuous participants at *ngaluwèn*, the ultimate and heretofore unwitnessed mortuary ceremony of the Balinese. In forgetting the logic of the oeconomy of death in favour of a fantasy of unlimited and cost-free progress, Balinese are in danger of condemning themselves to a singularly grim future. It is their own funeral they are likely to be attending.

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