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Engendering Disquiet: On Kinship and Gender in Bali

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How adequate are analyses of kinship and gender which rest upon supposedly universal features of the human condition? Are such analyses, for instance, sufficient to enable us to understand the actual diversity of human relationships in Bali? Universalist accounts tend to represent biology as processed into cultural units which separate and unite people at various levels into groups for activities associated with caste, gender and worship. If one considers gender as a kind of activity or practice however, how can this be best analysed in the context of Balinese society? It is clear that, beyond a certain point, kinship theory does not help one understand 'gender' either as a construct or as an activity. This is because kinship theory is usually derived from a Western discourse of the relationships between biology and affinity, a discourse which is steeped in Eurocentric assumptions about such relationships being 'basic', 'natural' and 'primordial' to Man and best appreciated in the context of primitive social systems. So, all 'primitive' societies were said to contain kinship systems, which became a criterion of the authenticity of the 'primitiveness' of a particular culture.

In this paper I question how useful it is to try to reduce practices to do with kinship and gender to general biological or sociological explanations. I suggest first that kinship does not have the kind of reality usually attributed to it. Second, I shall argue that, if we are to try to understand relationships between men and women in Bali, in the first instance these are best understood through Balinese ways of talking about and arguing over such relationships. Ideas do not exist in the abstract, but attain their social reality in situated practice. And much of this practice is in a dialogal mode which contradicts most 'grand theories' that set out to explain interpersonal and group relationships. Third, I shall suggest that there are quite different ways of talking about male-female relationships, which

Western academics commonly link to biology, affinity and territoriality, without needing to engage in any formal reconstitution of kinship theory in Bali.

Perilous Presuppositions

Stipulating a cross-cultural reality to kinship is to equate discourses upon the imaginary with factuality. The unkindest cut of all is the way Western scholars treat kinship among non-Western peoples as something primordial to which they are bound (consider Lansing's vision of Balinese as *kaiket*, 1974), a state of affairs which 'the West' somehow transcends. What is commonly called kinship is a chimera, a mythical monster with a face of folk categories and a tail of metaphysical assumptions. Needham has challenged the validity of prevailing principles and modes of classification (1971, 1975). Schneider has sought to sever the cultural constructs from a heterogeneous social conglomerate (1968, 1972); while Inden has pointed out that people elsewhere may make quite different assumptions about how humans are related (1976). Yet kinship continues to be discussed as a 'social institution' in anthropology. This may be because anthropology is heir to a strongly essentialist (and substantialist) intellectual tradition.

Unless we are quite clear what kind of 'thing' kinship is, we may find that we have a problem of translation and comparison. How do we know that what we call kinship denotes something comparable in other usages? Also, there is the question of what statements about kinship are about. Are we dealing with descriptions about the world? Or is it more a matter of what various classifications of relationships may be used, for particular purposes, to assert, claim, challenge or deny? Finally, there is the metaphysical issue of what at any historical moment, other peoples recognise, explicitly or implicitly, as existing in their world. How does the classification of relationships relate to what is held to exist? I would suggest that using the notion of kinship, even as 'an odd-job word', tends to cover up the difficulty in knowing how we translate; what uses of language may exist; and whether, or in what senses, other ways of classifying are remotely comparable. Anthropological determination to find a fixed and easily identifiable object of study has yielded a particular jural, moral and ontological package we call kinship. It would be a startling example of what someone once delightfully called 'RUP' – Residual Unresolved Positivism – were we to fail to consider the full implications of the fact that anthropologists' ideas about other peoples'

kinship are no simple truths about the world, but affected by our changing assumptions. It is not an issue of how to compare facts but of how, using one epistemological model, to talk about others – or perhaps better, the problem of talking about one discourse using another.

As the issues are complex, I shall highlight some of the points most relevant to a discussion of kinship. In its easiest formulation the problem of radical translation (between unrelated languages where there has been little, or no, cultural contact) is an extreme example of the hermeneutic issue of how to interpret texts or statements. For 'the special problem of interpretation is that it very often appears to be necessary and inevitable when in fact it never is. This appearance of inevitability is a phantasm raised by the circularity of the interpretive process' (Hirsch 1967: 164). The reason is that one is dealing with a system of signs which '... must be construed before it furnishes confirmation of an interpretation. Furthermore, the manner in which the signs are construed is partly predetermined by the interpretation itself' (Hirsch 1967: 165).

Why can one not simply translate by finding out what native words or expressions correspond with the facts? In order to understand the difficulty, it is useful to look at the theory of truth, and meaning, which is required for such an approach. This is the classical 'Correspondence Theory', in which truth, and so true meaning, consists in some form of correspondence between facts and ideas, and which has a very ancient European pedigree indeed. Or, as we shall see, the kinds of schemes used to classify kin relations rely on culturally specific metaphysical assumptions of particular things' or people's having essential properties, by virtue of which they may be definitively classified.

There are serious problems in any 'Correspondence Theory'. Three are relevant here. First, many of the words critical to a translation, such as logical connectives, do not correspond to any facts. Second, as Gellner (1970: 25) has observed, in effect introducing 'reality' as a stage in translating one language into another merely adds a further language and compounds the difficulties. Why this should be so is clear in the light of my last objection, namely that there is an indeterminacy in translation, such that more than one scheme may make sense of what has been said.

There is no simple way of climbing out of one's translational scheme to ask even the best-informed native informant whether one is correct without having to translate him or her. The catch is that 'there can be no doubt that rival systems of analytical hypotheses can fit the totality of speech behaviour to perfection, and can fit the totality of dispositions to speech behaviour as well, and still specify mutually incompatible translations of countless sentences insusceptible of independent control'

(Quine 1960: 72). In other words there is no way of knowing whether the ethnographer's translation of words like kinship, family, or father are in fact what people aim to express in their speech behaviour. Once the ethnographer gets going on her or his scheme, however shot-through with one's own cultural presuppositions, it tends to become self-confirming, because many of the key notions are mutually defined and sufficiently far away from statements for which there is empirical evidence. How do we know that the comfortable-seeming similarity of ideas about kinship round the world is not a result of the observers' sharing similar preconceptions which they invest in their translational systems? Consider, for instance, how radical would be the difference were common notions like 'soul' or 'spirit' to be rendered as 'identity' instead, and how hard it would be to invalidate either (see Hobart 1987: 37–44).

Leaving aside the difficulties in translation, what in fact are we comparing? The problem is that, whatever their purported basis in biology, as with gender, kinship relations are not natural facts. What the anthropologist conventionally goes by are native statements held to describe the social relationships of a particular kind in which humans are engaged, so to speak. Now statements differ from 'facts' by being asserted by people on particular occasions, rather than, in some sense, being 'out there'. 'Being someone's brother' is construed from the 'facts', whatever they might be in any instance, in terms of cultural categories, which include ideas of taxonomy, logical operations and much else besides. Anthropologists' statements about kinship are therefore, among other things, applications of classificatory principles to the actions, events and so forth from which relationships are inferred. It is not evident *a priori* that other peoples either use similar procedures or treat practices so idealistically as instantiations of ideas or categories.

There are other grounds too on which to question whether statements about kinship could ever be neutral propositions about the world. Words do not just say things, but do things at the same time. In speaking one does not simply make propositions but also presents that proposition, if such it be, in different ways or with differing force, which may further have effects in the world. Even this formulation is perilous, because propositions are a fine example of dubious mental entities. People tend to speak in utterances, commonly in dialogue with others (Bakhtin 1986a,b). I shall try to show later quite how dangerous it is to think of statements about kinship as descriptions. It fits better with ethnographic evidence to treat these as situated practices of prescribing, asserting, denying, questioning or any of the other ways in which people may use language on different occasions for particular purposes. Endless confusion

is created by mistaking claims for descriptions.

These difficulties seem to pale in the face of the hurdles involved in comparing ideas cross-culturally. Evans-Pritchard (1965) has made the point that comparison easily leads to a circularity. To compare things one requires criteria, but how does one establish the criteria in the first place without comparison? Our notions of comparison are highly conventional and subsume learning 'similarity relations' (Kuhn 1977: 307–19, on 'finitism'). Matters are worse still when dealing with the classification of jural or moral relations which are widely argued to be key aspects of kinship (see for example Fortes 1969). For a start on what grounds could we assume that ideas of 'law' and jural notions such as person, obligation, or prohibition are sufficiently commensurable as to be worth the exercise, when they have changed so much in the West? The assumption that the moral dimension of kinship is important does tend to presuppose that ideas of morality have equivalence cross-culturally, which rather flies in the face of the evidence. A great deal of anthropology consists in closing one's eyes and hoping the world will go away.

What then are Balinese ideas about the material base of kin relations? Significantly, what Balinese say depends on the context in which the issue arises, the occasion and the textual knowledge of the speaker. How they approach the notion of 'matter' is complicated. They stress the transformation of appearance or the causation of events instead (see below). More specifically, theories of conception famously tend to involve differing social claims. Many accounts stressed the complementary fluids males and females brought to making the child, with determination of gender depending on whether the man or woman was the stronger party in the union. That said, detailed inquiry with eighty adult women and men in the research village, yielded eighty rather different accounts. To overgeneralise, members of the elite, in suitably essentialist spirit, tend to put more weight than peasants on pedigree, which is not unconnected to claims to political legitimacy. They also put more stress on ideas of partly innate purity, which is thought to be transmitted by fluids at the time of conception. Just what purity is is a complex and debated issue; and the ostensible evidence of procreation may be overridden where other factors intervene – as when a low-born man attains power or acquires the attributes of a prince. As I discuss below, the realm of 'kinship' may well be, for Balinese, that which makes humans similar or different, in which many considerations combine. Balinese do not identify family resemblances just by referring to inherited traits. Besides the doctrine of *karma pala*, villagers recognise the disparities between 'kin' as much as the congruences. Part of the inquiry about new-born children is finding

out from a spirit-medium the identity of which forebear has manifested itself. Quite different kinds of situational factor come into play too. In Balinese accounts of causation, personal identity is partly determined by the circumstances of birth, including time and space, and it further remains inextricably linked with the fate of a child's four mystical siblings (the *kanda 'mpat*, the ejecta at birth). So there is no mechanical theory of the natural basis of kinship. Rather, personal identity and domestic relations are decided by various factors operating within a causal field.

One way of approaching my opening question about how one might set about understanding human relationships in Bali is to consider briefly – and necessarily somewhat simplistically – Balinese uses of words for causation. Instead of stressing a deterministic biological 'basis' to kinship and gender, Balinese often stress the events which made things and people what they are. When inquiring about how something came to be what it is at that moment, its *karana*, 'cause' or, perhaps better, 'condition of being', Balinese widely use a cluster of six related terms. The first is the species or personal name, *adan*. Indeed, *adan* literally glosses as 'the being of'. Names may be used just as conventional labels, but they must be appropriate to the object or person in question. Persons may change their names if their circumstances change. The vital act of naming humans or species (Hobart 1990) requires the participation and approval of Divinity in some form. The second condition is *lakar*, the constituents of a thing or person, what inheres in its being at any moment. This cannot be reduced to simple matter. What inheres in the being of a person in Bali and makes them what they are arguably includes the *kanda 'mpat*, which survive their initial existence as the ejecta of birth and remain important aspects of a person. A third condition of being is the form or shape of something, its *rupa*. It is this, for instance, which distinguishes males, females and *bancih* (hermaphrodites) from one another. Form is not fixed. Where women in Bali regularly work ricefields, their *rupa* is said to become more like men (see below), and their behaviour may change accordingly.

A vital fourth condition of being is the instrumental cause of something, its *karana* (*nimittakāraṇa* in Indian Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinking, Porter 1977: 56–8). This term is sufficiently central that it often doubles for 'cause' in a more general sense. *Karana* is the act or event that makes something what it is. The act of manufacturing a motor-cycle is its *karana*, as the act of coition of parents is the *karana* of a child. Fifth, things and people have more or less *guna*, use, or use value. Without this condition, whatever it is is gravely defective. A motor cycle which cannot be driven, rice which cannot be eaten, an adult who cannot carry out the appropriate

work of a woman or man lacks the appropriate *guna*. Finally, things and beings have their conventional or fitting place in the world, *genah*. If a being or thing is too long outside its usual place, its *guna* changes. For instance, if a domestic cat runs feral for longer than a few weeks, it is thought of as having gone wild and therefore becomes edible. A man who lives in his wife's compound on a permanent basis becomes in one sense a woman (see below). So, in contrast to what is ultimately the biological determinism of much academic writing about kinship and gender, Balinese stress a range of partly changeable and interrelated conditions of being.

A final point should be made about my reference to metaphysics. By this I mean the kinds of idea, category, logical operation, ontological commitment or whatever which Balinese appeal to, explicitly in speech, or implicitly by inference or reflection on discourse. Such a metaphysics-in-the-buff, as I have called it (1983), is more common than anthropologists often allow (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1937, 1956; Lienhardt 1961; Inden 1976; Vitebsky 1993). Certainly in a literate civilisation like Bali, texts and traditions of philosophical discussion abound; and philosophical terms and ideas are used in daily life unselfconsciously, with enthusiasm and aplomb, to explain actions and account for the nature of the world. It is one thing for Balinese to interpret matters this way; but to what extent does my approach claim to explain why humans do what they do? The short answer is that it does not claim to do so. My concern is simply to look at the empirical conditions – which include Balinese statements involving metaphysical terms – under which action takes place, and, given the particular sets of circumstances, to piece together the ways in which Balinese talk about what is happening in different contexts.

There is no way in which we could ever know which of the possible sets of constructs, if any, is the one in fact responsible for the events. This modest constraint on my aims follows directly from arguments such as the one noted above, about the underdetermination of theory by experience. If such a caution has any validity it is the death-knell for anyone who purports to establish that any scheme can, in principle, explain events. There is an unstated step in many cultural analyses. After positing a theoretical framework which, with luck, bears some relation to the ethnographic evidence, there is a surreptitious assumption that, given the best and richest conceptual scheme, a causal or rational account could be read off on demand. These general remarks about the questionably substantive status of 'kinship' can also be argued from the ethnography of gender.

Temples and Shrines as Centres of Activity

Among many kinds of temple congregation in Bali are those known as *pamaksan*, *dadiya* or, more specifically, as *soroh*, followed by the name of the worship group. The terms are found in different parts of the island with somewhat different usage. The folk etymology is interesting. *Pamaksan* is usually held to derive from the root *paksa*, force; and refers to those who are expected to worship at (*maturan*, to give offerings, and *muspa*, to pray), or who are obliged to support (*nyungsung*), a temple. Balinese often link *dadiya* to *dadi*, to grow or become, but also, to allow. So it may be read either as those who have grown from one origin, *kawitan*, or those between whom certain acts or exchanges are permitted. *Soroh* is the general word for class or kind. So it denotes a class of people linked to a temple, and so place. In common with almost all temple associations in Bali, the main function of its members is to perform calendrical rituals to the incumbent deity (usually known by a title, *Batara*, which indicates divine status, followed by the name of the temple or worship group – most Balinese taxonomy stresses terminal classes in nominalist fashion). The principles of incorporation of different groups in principle differ mainly in the range of functions and the criteria of eligibility. In practice matters are not always so clear-cut. The grounds for formal association, however, are worth brief consideration.

The criteria for inclusion in such worship groups may be expressed in several ways. A key, but difficult, term is *purusa*. In Sanskrit it is often translated as 'male' (Gonda 1952: 73; Inden 1976: 13), but also as 'seed-man' (Inden and Nicholas 1977: 30) or as part of the 'cosmic manifestation of the primal Superman (*purusa*)' (Long 1980: 58). The notion of *purusa* is variously interpreted in different Hindu philosophical traditions: as an aspect of deity (Gonda 1970: 16ff.), as self opposed to substance (Potter 1980: 263), as consciousness beyond matter, 'sheer contentless presence' as against 'awareness (which) is active, intentional, engaged' (Larson 1980: 308). It is not an easy word. At first sight matters are much simpler in Bali. *Sakèng purusa* belongs to a contrast set with *sakèng pradana*, 'from the male (side)' and 'from the female (side)' respectively (see Gonda 1952: 173). Here *sakèng purusa* designates those related to a male forebear. In this sense the worship groups mentioned above may be read as having their principle of association defined by descent – Balinese use the same metaphor, *turun*, as in English – here agnation. *Purus(a)* also is used for 'penis': so does *sakèng purusa* refer to socially recognised, or biologically conceived, connections? This is not a quibble. Such ambiguities are critical to how Balinese interpret

group membership and explain action.

There is a subtlety here. After all, why not define 'kin groups' straightforwardly by who joins, and dismiss folk semantics as incidental? This is an easy way out, but it imports Western ideas of the relation of word and object. Defining *purusa* by denotation is woefully inadequate. Granted the range of implications, Balinese suffer from (or delight in) the dilemmas of what the senses of *purusa* are all about. Is *sakèng purusa* about conventional association or about acts of procreation? (Where descent is traced through women, it is referred to as *sakèng purusa*.) Is the stress on transmission or substantive qualities? Or is it about something else? Is it, for instance, sharing something with a given deity, considered as ancestral? Or worse, is it some shared attribute, or perhaps outlook, separate from the individual interests of those concerned? Such issues tend to arise when the ambiguous grounds of incorporation are highlighted, inevitably in disputes or changing circumstances.

It will be obvious that the interpretations Balinese may place upon the notion of *purusa* stem in part from reworkings of some of its many senses noted by Sanskrit scholars. This is equally true of the other terms mentioned so far. For instance, villagers in the settlement where I worked treated *dadiya* on occasions as deriving from *dadi*, as 'to allow'. Sharing a *dadiya* had the sense of being allowed to share things like food, so those who did not in fact do so were not of the same *dadiya*. By varying the defining attributes Balinese can, and do, give quite different slants to what terms should refer to, whom to include and exclude, and what such decisions might imply. Whether we like it or not, interpretation is not easily divorced from Balinese practice, nor translation from the task of the ethnographer.

Should it be thought I am splitting hairs, let us look at the other terms Balinese use to classify people with whom they live and worship. A common way of speaking about whom one regards as related is as *semeton*, the etymology of which is often given as *se-metu-an*, or roughly 'one exit' or 'from one source' (but also 'see the light', 'break through'). So, on one reading, the exit may be the mother's womb, as *metu* is a synonym in high Balinese for being born. As divorce is common, coming from one mother does not entail having the same father. So perhaps the two most used words to refer to criteria of membership in 'descent groups' are complementarily linked to the perceived functions of males and females in a rather loose way.

Metaphor plays an interesting part in how relationships are portrayed. So far the possible images are of a procreative penis and coming from a mother's womb. The other terms used of 'kin ties' may, significantly, also

be given metaphorical associations. To refer to ties traced strictly through males (jurally?) the term is *saturunan*, of one descent, from *turun*: to descend, drop or fall. To cloud matters, however, there is another word, *katurunan*, the abstract noun from the same root, which designates all who can trace descent (filiality would be the less metaphorical anthropological expression) through males, females or any mix of the two. Under what circumstances, and with what care, Balinese distinguish between the two terms in actual use is a tricky question.

So far the images refer to sequence expressed spatially (descent), or perhaps better to causal juxtaposition (penis or womb → child, a relation sometimes described as 'metonymy'). Other words conjure up different associations. *Lingsehan*, from *lingseh*: a stalk of rice, refers to a bilaterally reckoned grouping. Perhaps the most widely used term in the region of Bali where I worked is *nyama*. As the noun denoting persons, *panyamaan*, its range is similar to *semeton*, if not broader still. When coupled with *beraya*, *nyama beraya* is used of fellow villagers (sometimes set against *panembahan*, those one prays to, or bows before, *sembah*, i.e. persons of high caste), and so suggests recognising a common link. In public meetings it attains a sense at times close to 'moral community'. *Nyama*, however, also refers to parents' siblings, genealogically or by age, and sometimes to all senior members of a *dadiya*. Again *panyamaan* and *nyama* are used interchangeably in many contexts. *Nyama* either comes from the root *sama*, or is its perfect synonym. *Sama* normally is used to indicate something like 'same' or 'similar', sharing some aspect of identity, being alike. The connection is not lost on Balinese. Whether etymologically or metaphorically these terms have precious little to do with 'kinship'. Nor would we be wise to infer that *nyama*, or *semeton*, which is equally used of 'non-kin', really denote kin and the other uses are just marginal, or ancillary, extensions. On what grounds can we be sure that the narrower use is not just one of a number of special applications? To argue the extensionist case is to impute a degree of essentialism to Balinese which there is no evidence that they have.

Balinese do not, as we have seen, speak of their relationships in simple kin terms. As with temples, local ties are defined commonly in terms of sites of worship, known as *sangguh* (shrines) or *sangguh gedé* (simply: big shrines), according to the perceived remoteness of the relevant forebears. Ideologically, inclusion is expressed in terms of *purusa*. However, one's place (*genah*) of worship affects the condition of one's being. For instance, it is not uncommon for people to be told, when illness is diagnosed by spirit mediums, that they are worshipping at the shrine of the wrong *purusa*, i.e. in the wrong place. This allows a play between

social and biological paternity, contrasting ideas of wrong association, and situated practice. Also women, if they are not divorced or do not return home, become house shrine deities (gradually subsumed under the genderless title of Batara, deity, protector) in their husband's group as defined by *purusa* (and vice versa, of course, for in-marrying males). Activity in a place affects one's being. So it is not surprising that Balinese widely regard the work for, and worship at, house shrines as a critical means of distinguishing members of a group claiming shared *purusa* from others. At marriage women pray at both their natal, and their marital, shrines to state their change of residence: the same happens on divorce or return. When we look, however, at who actually turns up on such occasions, the results are rather unexpected if one regards *purusa* as simply agnation.

In some parts of Bali many people do not know, or choose not to pay attention to, the sites where they may worship their *purusa*. In what follows I outline the state of affairs in 1971 in the ward of Pisangkaja, which was part of the settlement of Tengahpadang in Northern Gianyar. (The figures I give below should be treated with suitable caution and are only intended as sighting shots. People are often related in several ways, so what constitute the data are simply the most common assertions of relevant relationship.) In Tengahpadang 88 per cent of householders claimed to know the site of worship of their *purusa*. Attendance at temple affairs being compulsory for its members, on pain of fine or expulsion, turnout is high. At domestic shrines matters are different and, while everyone claims that it is almost unthinkable for a person with proper *purusa* ties not to turn up, this is far from the mark in accounting, for example, for actual attendance in Pisangkaja. Help in preparing the substantial offerings was undertaken largely by the household, however constituted, of the compound heir (69 per cent of helpers), as this is regarded as the place of origin, *kawitan*, of families which have moved away. What is a little unexpected is that jural agnates accounted for less than half the remaining help. In all, 10 per cent of the workforce were affines, and a further 5 per cent just neighbours (from different worship groups), while several other people turned up who had been adopted into other groups and so had no formal link. So far, the pattern is interesting, but not perhaps very surprising.

When it comes to worship at house shrines, however, the picture is curious. Of those who came to worship only 33 per cent were agnates in any jural, or strict, sense. Close on 10 per cent were affines, who properly should not worship at another's shrine at all. There was also a smattering of political clients, where even caste category was in doubt. The largest

single category were what one might term 'out-marrying agnates', that is men and women who have left the group on marriage or adoption. In the formal language of agnation therefore, those entitled, and indeed required, to worship at the shrine form a minority.

Agnates are still less evident in agricultural labour relations, the milling of rice and other general forms of work exchange or help. Here affinity, neighbourhood and friendship or political clientage predominate (see Hobart 1979: 338–44).

Obviously, one may allow a measure of idiosyncrasy in personal motivation. But on what grounds, one wonders, at least as far as worship is concerned, is it justified to impose our category of agnation, rather than say cognation, a general sense of shared origin or mutual concern, or other reasons yet to be discerned? It is inelegant to dismiss the exceptions as mere contingencies. The scientific ploy of moving from the nomological to the statistical does not apply in the same way where human intention or reflexivity is involved. It is also a moot point whether one can assume – as almost all anthropological analyses do – that the participants' interpretations are homogeneous; in other words that they all share the same ideas of what worship, *purusa*, and so on are about. Lastly, to claim that what is important is the jural, or ideal, model does not help at all. Words like *purusa*, *saturunan* or *nyama* do not denote unambiguous classes of person, any more than those who turned up can easily be pigeon-holed.

Of what value, then, is the technical language of kinship? To speak of agnates as a fixed jural category suitable for cross-cultural comparison is of questionable worth. On the one hand such categories do not fit easily with indigenous principles; on the other they do not even correspond with the 'facts on the ground' (whatever those be). Some terms are obviously more circumscribed in their reference; many are used more narrowly when actually deciding whom to include than when accounting for someone's presence to outsiders. Most of the terms Balinese use are sufficiently open to interpretation that they can be used to encompass almost anyone local who feels like turning up: *nyama* (*beraya*) can be used, for instance, of anyone with whom one wishes to declare relations of a certain warmth and equality. So, when they choose, Balinese can, with clear consciences, declare that those who work and worship together are all *nyama*! The significance of *purusa* may now be clearer. While it may be used to give ostensibly jural instructions (as in adoption, when the rule tends to read something like: when looking for an heir take the nearest person from the *purusa* – although low castes in fact tend not to), it may equally refer to different categories. It may be those who feel

attachment to a place of birth, or to people they grew up with, or those with whom one shares something (still to be defined) in common and so forth. Might one however conclude with the trite comment that patrilineal systems in theory are always bilateral in practice? For reasons that will be discussed shortly, this is not an adequate answer either.

Marriage and the Relationship of 'Male' to 'Female'

It is sensible to look at marriage in the context of male–female relations generally. Humans are not the only class of beings, or things, which properly are found in complementary pairs. In fact, humans are not a very good example to take, because Balinese recognise a third class, of *bancih*, hermaphrodite, transsexual or transvestite, even if there are relatively few persons who allocate themselves or are allocated to this last. Be that as it may, according to various written and oral accounts, 'male' deities have 'female' counterparts, sometimes known, as in India, as their *sakti*, which is commonly translated from the Balinese as 'mystical power', but might more adequately be rendered as 'manifest potency or potentiality'. Female deities, like Durga or Uma (associated with destruction or witches, and rice, respectively), tend to be more immediately involved in Balinese life than do their male 'consorts'. It makes little sense, however, to treat the relation between non-manifest (*niskala*) and therefore largely unknowable agents as marriage. In many situations Balinese do not speak of deities as 'male' or 'female'.

As Balinese domestic and kin relations have been fairly fully outlined elsewhere (Boon 1977; Geertz and Geertz 1975; Hobart 1979), only a few remarks are needed here. Most commonly, after marriage a couple sets up its own home, except for the youngest child or designated heir. Usually a male assumes this role; but, failing sons, women are quite acceptable. As land has become increasingly short, sons tend to stay in their parents' compound, as may daughters. In the ward of Pisangkaja, on which the following account is mainly based, residence arrangements were as follows. In compounds with more than one household, 22 per cent are related by ties other than between males. This excludes female heirs, who are treated in effect as jural males. Significantly, they are said 'to be a man' (literally: 'to have the body of a male', *maraga lanang* in High Balinese), and their husbands are correspondingly designated female. This point will be discussed later. If the constituent compound ties are calculated, those not through males are nearly half. In many instances the exceptions, if they can be called that, are where people live

with affines. As living with one's wife's family involves a double humiliation – one cannot afford to keep a family in one's own compound, and one's family cannot afford to keep one – perhaps it is surprising that the figure is so high. If one chooses to read *purusa* as a principle defining agnation however, the problems this entails emerge with horrible clarity.

The rite of *masakapan*, which is the normal cultural condition for forming an effective functioning human domestic unit, is also required similarly for other recognised pairings as diverse as pigs, drums or slit-gongs. The stress in each instance is upon parts forming a functioning whole. Priests must have female counterparts in order to undertake the full range of their religious activities, but these need not be their wives. In just the same way, a man or woman requires a member of the opposite common gender to form a viable household unit because of the sexual division of labour, but this need not in fact be a wife/husband – a sister/brother or another unrelated woman/man is acceptable. The Balinese emphasis on complementarity includes recognition that good cannot exist without evil, kings without peasants, mystic heroes without anti-heroes. It makes at least as much sense to regard the sexual and reproductive union of humans as an aspect of Balinese ideas about the complex relationship of parts to the whole they constitute, as it does to isolate from context one relationship and compare it with others taken out of context. If we wish to focus on marriage as such, should we not include pigs and slit-gongs, which pass through the same rite?

According to traditional accounts the Balinese practise preferential patrilineal parallel cousin marriage (since Bourdieu 1977, this should be a signal of trouble to come), or, failing that, at least marriage within the *dadiya* (Geertz and Geertz 1975), that is, traced by ties of *purusa*. The frequency with which such unions occur varies greatly. In the village of smiths studied by the Geertz it was high, in the mixed-caste community of Pisangkaja (and equally in the other parts of the settlement) it was very low. As against actual father's brother's daughter marriage of 7 per cent in Tihingan, the equivalents in Pisangkaja were 2 and 1 per cent for high and low castes respectively, and sank lower still for second patrilineal parallel cousins. In fact more high-caste marriages between kin were contracted with non-agnates than agnates (66 per cent as against 33 per cent). For low castes the comparable figures rose to 7–8 per cent with non-agnates. This suggests that, whatever the ideals stated in the ethnographic literature, most cousin marriages tend towards other possibilities (the more so as notionally father's sister's daughter unions are avoided because they involve direct exchange, so the other three possible cousin unions are not equally open in theory). Quite what this

implies will become clearer when we look at the overall pattern.

Not all marriages take place with the agreement of the families involved, or even the assent of the partners themselves. As the concern here is with the evidence that recognition of kinship in some sense affects positive marriage choice, I shall omit all those unions (22 per cent for unions between members of the same high caste, 44 per cent for all other unions) in which extraneous factors like being caught *in flagrante* or elopement in the face of disapproval were given as the predominant reasons. What is striking is the high proportion of kin marriages (28 per cent) where there is no agnatic tie at all among low castes. In fact, if one contrasts unions where agnatic ties are thought to exist (also coincidentally 28 per cent) with those where kin ties of some kind are (43 per cent), there is little evidence in favour of a bias towards agnation. The comparable figures for high castes show an equal balance of agnation as against kin ties. So far it is hard to detect from the figures a preference, especially among low castes, for agnatic unions. Were we now to rephrase matters, for the sake of argument, in bilateral terms, the picture is of an even spread with a slight bias, if anything, towards matrilineal kin. The evidence is sufficiently underdetermined to be capable of supporting several alternative hypotheses.

The discussion so far remains seriously incomplete. Almost half the approved marriages of ordinary villagers are between people with no kin tie of any kind in conventional terminology. Need we consider these? Villagers themselves offer an account which is of interest. There is tacit, and not infrequently explicit, agreement on the importance of wealth. Richer families try to avoid their children marrying into poorer families, while often trying to place their own offspring as advantageously as they can. Realistic Balinese remark that one tends to land up marrying those of one's own kind, by that referring not to *purusa*, *dadiya* and so on, but to family capital assets (or rarely, secure salaries). The results of testing this suggestion statistically are spectacular. Marriage is approved significantly more often where the partners come from households of equal wealth. The choice seems to be cash or kin. Or is it kith or kin?

How do wealth and kin connections compare as criteria for approval of marriage? In kin marriages, where unions are agreed to, the parties are closely equal in economic assets. In any case, for reasons to which I wish to turn, it is not necessarily useful to ask if the villagers of Pisangkaja contract ties with others for wealth or because of putative kin links. Wealth certainly seems to play as important a part as, if not more important a part than, kin ties in securing the approval of parents. As the evidence does not suggest a strong bias in favour of agnation as against bilateral

kin, an intriguing possibility arises. Family fortunes do not, for the most part, change rapidly in one generation. So those who marry people of equal wealth in one generation may find their children in a position to marry the same people, now kin, in the next! Kin endogamy may be just another way of saying: marry people of like means.

'Aha!' might murmur a cavilling critic, 'for all your fancy footwork at the beginning, you see you cannot do without using kin terms yourself. Your argument is based as much on statistics as those of the rest of us, so you are just measuring your own mirages!' At the risk of disappointing the critic, I must demur and suggest that she or he is confused. First, all anthropological, and indeed all everyday, talk about other cultures involves translational schemes. The problems start when we confuse these with 'reality'. Second, my point has been just how inadequate the received categories of anthropological wisdom are; for they are self-confirming hypotheses, which can be turned against themselves.

'Surely', it might be countered, 'there is more order than you suggest. After all there is an organised system of prescriptions, preferences and prohibitions. There is an underlying system of rules.' For various reasons this reply is less adequate than might at first appear. For a start, the ontological status of rules is unclear: are they constitutive, regulative, ideal, expectations or observations of normal practice? Further, any positive rule in Bali is open to more than one interpretation. The preference for 'real' patrilateral parallel cousin marriage as sacred (Boon 1977: 132) is countered by Balinese who note that it is dangerous to the welfare of the partners (one reason given is that ties through males are hot, in contrast to those through females), and serves largely to consolidate wealth and ties within the *purusa*. (One might question whether it is sacred at all, for the nearest term in Balinese is *suci*, 'pure', and such unions are not generally regarded as *suci*.) Perhaps the most celebrated proscriptions involve what might be called a reverse in the flow of women, such as father's sister's daughter marriage (Boon 1977: 131) or sister exchange (1977: 138). Not only do both occur, but they are justified by alternative interpretations of what is desirable (here that ties through women are cool and so good; and that direct exchange avoids nasty overtones of rank difference). In other words, prescriptions, preferences and prohibitions tend to be re-evaluated in different interpretations. Recourse to rules, or worse pseudo-logical games (for example Boon 1990), are lures for the unwary.

A problem with most anthropological accounts is that cultural constructs are seen as having an independent reality and structuring action at other levels, such as the normative, psychological and so forth. The

difficulties are several. It has not been established, for Bali at least, in what sense such levels in gender and kinship relationships are supposed to exist, or by whom they are recognised and under what circumstances. The notion that abstract ideas determine action and so, retrospectively, may be used to explain them looks to have more to do with the pervasive idealism of Western academic thinking than it does with Balinese representations or practice. Finally, postulating levels of reality involves an uncomfortable degree of essentialism. Almost any problem can be cleared up, as Russell tried to do with his paradox, by proliferating levels; but it is at the cost of making an ontologically cluttered world. The solution may also be spurious (see Hobart 1985: 48–9). The difficulty can be highlighted in the difference of Boon's ideals and the idea of metaphor touched on by the Geertz, for example, that a village is a 'sacred space within whose bounds the fates of all residents are supernaturally intertwined' (Geertz and Geertz 1975: 167). It is one thing to suggest Balinese use a spatial metaphor of a centre and relative distance in terms of which to talk in a certain context. It is another to impute an abstract ideal in terms of which reality in fact is ordered. The former asks us to inquire seriously how people actually use and rework ideas in practice. The latter is not just a retreat into largely ungrounded speculation, it also continues the hegemony of a peculiarly Western vision, which is to perpetuate colonialism by other means.

Constructions of 'Male' and 'Female' in Bali

Constructions of female and male roles, in Bali at least, tend to be strikingly situational. This is less obvious than it might be, because it is easy to be distracted by stereotypes from the relationship between such ideological statements and contrary accounts and usage. More serious, it is still commonplace to impose alien categories upon what people say and do: underdetermination here underwrites facile explanation. Instead of perpetuating prevailing naturalist or semiotic assumptions about gender, it might be useful for a change to inquire into indigenous discourses. I shall suggest that Balinese make extensive use of *guna*, use or function, what a person can do, as a criterion of what makes a woman or man. No single frame of reference, however, is all-embracing. As *guna*, however important, is not the sole aspect of being, it could not be.

The most cursory glance at what Balinese say and do casts a critical light on monolithic academic theories. For a start, Balinese recognise transsexuals as a third distinct role or kind of being, which can only be

reduced to a dichotomy by intellectual sleight of hand. While one could doubtless mock up a model to argue that women in Bali are perceived as somehow more natural and men more cultural, it flies in the face of what Balinese say on the subject. It commits the category mistake of imputing a nature/culture distinction *a priori*. Also, in conversations I have overheard, both men and women argue that males are more often prey to anger and lust; and that women bear the greater actual burden of learning and passing on the elaborate details of Balinese civilisation. Frequent disclaimers notwithstanding, debates on gender remain bedevilled by questionable European dichotomies and supposedly context-free 'transitivity' between them. As Errington noted, in writing about gender in Southeast Asia, it may be important not to assume gender to be dualistic. Balinese accounts of the conditions of being suggest humans differ among themselves at once by both degree and kind. So it may not quite be adequate to treat 'men and women as basically the same sorts of beings' (1990: 30).

Even such partly polemical points about academic and indigenous stereotypes run the risk of hypostatisation. They ignore what is actually said and done in different situations. Obviously there is no space here for a detailed analysis of situational use. So brief summaries of a few instances must suffice. On several occasions in Bali I heard males or females assert that women think about the short-term – and men the long-term – consequences of actions (*karma pala*). After fairly detailed research over a year, separately with different groups of women and men, what I learned suggests that in many circumstances one could as easily argue the reverse case. We are dealing however with attributed explanations. There is no simple link between what people say and what they do, what they may say afterwards, and what they say about what other people did. This makes global generalisations even more vapid.

Public pronouncements may well be contradicted in other settings. It is not uncommon to hear statements or witness behaviour, especially in formal public contexts, that implies that males rank superior to females. A popular theme among both women and men when chatting at home or in food stalls is how members of the opposite sex have a far easier time in life. I was rather surprised, therefore, to hear a group of men discussing in what form they would prefer to be reincarnated (rebirth is thought often to be within a few years). They agreed they would all prefer to be reborn as women. I raised this incident with various other groups of villagers and the theme was taken up with some relish. It transpired that almost everyone, whether females or males, took the same view. As several hastened to point out, they had no control over the matter, though! So

much for the simplistic summaries and hypothetical questions on which so much anthropology relies!

Even if one allows for the highly situational and contextual nature of assertions about gender, another problem intrudes into anthropological writing on the subject. This is epistemological closure. Even those scholars who are wary of naturalist traps are liable to fall into their Western hermeneutic antithesis and assume that the body is regarded as a semiotic system. It is one thing to explore the analytical value of treating visible differences as potentially signifying (as does Errington 1990: 31–7); it is another to presume that other peoples necessarily do, or that valid conclusions stem from assuming so (for example Boon 1990: 224–33). (The Samoan practice of treating male offspring as daughters when a family deems there to be too few of the latter becomes a delightful instance of denying or overriding visible differences when they grow up muscular and hirsute!) Short of claiming a totalitarian epistemological supremacy, a minimal precondition would be an account of the semiotics of the people in question. That still leaves the question of the ways in which people do in fact evaluate that substantialised duality we call 'gender'. Elsewhere (1983), I have outlined a long discussion between Balinese about the difference between humans and animals. It was concluded by a well-known orator's stating that it depended on one's ability to carry out the full activities of a human. Women are expected not only to be able to bear children, but to engage in domestic tasks like cooking and make offerings, as well as to perform the appropriate female public duties. Equivalent expectations fall on men. Incidentally this accounts as well (and is certainly more faithful to Balinese discursive usage) for the opprobrium with which childless women and men are regarded, and the status of widows and widowers, as does the rather trite structuralist theme of deviation from the 'normal' complementarity between the sexes. Like the blind, they are unable to function fully by Balinese standards.

Earlier on I noted that form (*rupa*) – here the body (*raga*) – is part of a widely used scheme of causation or, perhaps better, what makes things what they are and delimits what they can do. The quite common practice of women's being designated heirs in the absence of a suitable male is interesting, because, as was noted, such women are said to '*maraga lanang*', to have the body of, or be, a man. This seems not to be a specious metaphor. For when Balinese are questioned how this could be, the usual answer is that the women are men for the purposes of inheritance. Furthermore, where there is substantial property, these women quite often behave as the dominant partner in the relevant domestic and sometimes public domains. Their role is quite compatible with their body's

capabilities. A more striking instance is the custom of the womenfolk in the nearby village of Petulu of doing the bulk of the hard work of double-hoeing the rice fields. Unlike most Balinese women, they can be seen in the fields heavily smoking cigarettes!

Much writing on gender seems to me to impose unnecessary conceptual straitjackets on what people say and do. Western scholars usually wobble somewhere between a naïve realism that regards the complementarity of gender roles as distilled somehow from 'real' sexual difference and an idealism which treats it as a reflection of 'underlying' taxonomic principles. The problem of the former is that, apart from postulating the commentator's privileged access to reality, it says nothing about how classifications are used subsequently. The latter treats conceptual structures as homogeneous and as agents, of which humans in society are mere instruments. Both treat culture as a monologic system of thought or categories, rather than as involving heteroglossia (in Bakhtin's terms, 1986a) reworked dialogically in different situations. Where anthropologists regard this last possibility with suspicion, this is understandable, in so far as it threatens instant punditry and sweeping but doubtful generalities, and actually requires the commentators to learn the language properly and spend time actually listening to people.

Briefly I wish to explore the possible relevance of a dialogic approach to gender. Relationships are complicated, as is the connection between what people do and how they explain it, in that both are construed and reworked in different ways in different contexts. Appeal to the 'normal' suffices no more than to the 'ideal' (Hacking 1990: 160–9). Instead, one needs to ask who appeals to constructions of what is normal, ideal or whatever and in what situations? This raises the broader question of presuppositions of homogeneity and the monologic nature of language in anthropological explanation. On what grounds do we assume that there is a substance or class, 'gender', beyond dialogically constituted differences, that there is only one way of classifying such differences, that discourse on gender (or kinship) takes the form of a monologue, or that contradiction reflects a failing of the unreflective native mind?

Once one lets go of the vision of culture as some homogeneous monologue, other possibilities come to mind. Rather than gender's being the essential determinant of differential social behaviour, we need to consider when, how, and under what circumstances differences between women and men (however construed) are used as an explanation of action. Such differences widely seem to be sufficiently talked about in everyday life as not to be easily subject to simple regimentation. Certainly, on the occasions I have heard Balinese talk about them, they are fraught with

contradiction and irony, and are even used recursively as a reminder of the contextual limits of encompassing schemes of explanation. When Balinese therefore refer to other aspects of social life by using the differences between females and males, this need not be a simple-minded attempt to domesticate deities, drums or what-have-you in a folksy, homespun way. It may offer far less comfortable constructions of the nature of relationships. Balinese may use attributions of male and female to a deity and its *sakti* respectively to suggest not just that the relationship is not simple, but that it is perilous for humans to talk about what is not manifest (*niskala*). Analogy, however, involves the mutual coloration of vehicle and tenor. So one should not assume that we are dealing merely with the extension of differences of sex. I have also heard the interlocking and shifting relationship of the large and small drum parts used to comment on the complex interdependence of husband and wife. Relations between women and men are distinguished *inter alia* in Bali by envy, distrust, antagonism and misunderstanding, as well as longing, care and attachment. This colours usage in ways which are not associated with other paired differences. If simple complementarity is all that is sought, it is unclear why Balinese do not use distinctions of day and night, sun and moon or countless others. There is, in short, no essential way of reading gender. Ascriptions of difference are recursive, situational and underdetermined by facts. Nor do we need *prima facie* to impose such a dichotomous substance when commenting on Balinese discourse in order to encompass the facts or 'collective representations'. On occasion Balinese may, of course, assert there to be essential differences between males and females. Others may question such statements. Assertions of overarching system by Balinese are themselves a distinctive aspect of heteroglossia.

This is not the place to elaborate the extension of Bakhtin's notion of dialogue as a theory of society. I wish, though, to note three points. Anthropologists have tended to ignore what people actually say – perhaps because it clouds the neat picture which is usually presented in academic monographs. Dialogue, however, in various senses has an obvious bearing on the topic of 'gender'. In Bali, relations between males and females form a recurrent theme in popular theatre. For instance, the problems of sexual attraction and unsated desire among the young and issues of status, power and propriety among the old, are represented with many misunderstandings and consequences. Balinese are far subtler commentators on their own usage than most Western anthropologists are. Further to this, the importance of theatre as a form of commentary by Balinese on their own practice makes dialogue central in two ways. Not

only is the commentary elaborated in dialogue between actors, but, because the audience is actively involved in appreciating critically what happens, the relationship of troupe and audience is more dialogic than monologic. Finally, dialogue as an image of the differences between women and men is singularly appropriate for a subject which consists in no small part of women and men engaged in argument about such differences. The use of so complex, variable and dialogic a set of relationships as those between men and women does not entail dualistic closure. On the contrary, it suggests all sorts of possibilities, not least an argumentative world. Above all, it offers a vision quite different from timeless biological determinism. It implies that humans – and other forms of critical will – are capable, by the conditions of their being, of reflecting upon, and on occasion changing, those conditions.

Dialogue does not lend itself to the easy closure of monologue. The nature of relations between males, females, *bancih*, divinity and other beings is argued about and its significance rethought in public meetings, theatre, the market, coffee stalls and on all sorts of other occasions in Bali by interested participants. To subsume this diversity under some universal construct of gender or kinship, before inquiring whether Balinese actually talk in these terms, or need to presuppose them in order to talk, is hegemonic. They are arguably as unnecessary as a 'concept of time' is to talk about and appreciate processes of change. If this argument engenders disquiet, so be it. Dismissing the predilection in detective stories for unlikely, but titillating and marketable fantasy, Raymond Chandler once wrote of Dashiell Hammett that he 'gave murder back to the kind of people who commit it for reasons'. All too often it is a strange, truncated Bali that Western investigators serve up, severed from Balinese commentary on their own motives and practices. Perhaps it is time that Balinese were allowed back into the discussion about Bali.

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