

# The Art of Measuring Mirages, Or Is There Kinship in Bali?

Mark Hobart

The inter-bubular groove is a vital statistic. Its possibilities were first exposed by Dr. Eberhard Fleischer (1881), an ethnologist and mathematician, who was greatly attracted to its firm digital properties. His views met with resistance and languished neglected until they were revamped by Hsien and Weiss in their seminal contribution (1954), which held that Fleischer had indeed had a sound grasp of the salient issues. Its advocates have embraced it warmly, holding it to have vast scope. So the inter-bubular groove (the earlier spelling with 'oo' is no longer preferred) has been connected statistically with I.Q. (Zderzaki 1969), with variation in linguistic performance (Gabel 1970), and some have even sought a quantitative ideal (given as 18 cm., Rein-Dreque 1976). Recently, in a vitriolic attack, however, the whole approach has been dismissed as inflated out of proportion and a typical positivist obsession with manifest superstructures (Little and Moe 1977). Whether there is any case left after this rough handling is a moot point.

## Perilous presuppositions

What has all this to do with kinship? The answer is simple. Stipulating a cross-cultural reality to kinship and then classifying its forms is about as useful as postulating the inter-bubular groove and then measuring it.<sup>1</sup> What is commonly called kinship is a chimaera, a mythical monster (whose eponym was fittingly fathered by hot air!) with a face of folk categories, a body of received anthropological wisdom and a tail of Western metaphysical assumptions. A few

1. I make no apology for trying the reader's patience with an imaginary idea — it is hardly less far-fetched than much scientism in anthropology and serves to make the point. In writing this paper, I am grateful to Mischa Penn for his help and criticism, especially about the dangers of what might be called *Lufonetaphysik* as a purported explanation. Field-work in Bali was carried out between 1970 and 1972 with grants from the Leverhulme Trust Fund, the London-Cornell Project and a Homuman Anthropological Scholarship; and from 1979–80 with a research grant from the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Bellerophons have tried to put paid to the monster. 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 tweaked its metaphysical tail by pointing out that other cultures may have quite different assumptions about how humans are related (1976). Yet the monster staggers on, largely I suspect because anthropology is heir to a strongly essentialist intellectual tradition. Unless we are quite clear about what kind of 'thing' kinship is, we may find we have been wasting our time talking about it.

There are three grounds on which I wish to argue that kinship does not have the kind of reality usually attributed to it. First, there is a problem of translation and comparison. How do we know that what we call kinship denotes something comparable in another culture? Second, 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 the members of different cultures recognize, explicitly or implicitly, as existing in their world. How does the classification of relationships relate to what is held to exist? In other words, how are events, states and agents or whatever understood in different cultural theories of being, identity, nature, causation and so forth? 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 the entities classified by other cultures are remotely comparable. Our cultural heritage 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 see that our ideas about 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 cognitive model, to talk about others.

As the issues are complex, let me spell out 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, see Quine 1960:28 ff) is an extreme example of the hermeneutic issue of how to interpret texts or statements within one culture. 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). In radical translation the ethnographer

faces the trap of self-confirmability of interpretations with metaphysical knobs on.

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 (Hobart 1985a:33–7). Significantly this was the view espoused by Aristotle. For, as we shall see, the kinds of schemes used to classify kin relations rely on Aristotelian metaphysical assumptions of particular things or people 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 trenchantly, 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 the linguistic data. 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, as Quine (1960:72) remarked, 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'. In other words there is no way of knowing whether the ethnographer's translation of concepts like kinship, family, or father are in fact what the members of another culture intend in their speech behaviour, or not. Once the ethnographer gets going on his or her scheme, however short-cut 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 (see Quine 1953). 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. I have a suspicion that the wee ghosties and goblins which seem to pervade other cultures are a product of our Victorian imagination of the 'Other'.

Leaving aside the difficulties in translation, what in fact are we comparing anyway? The problem is that, whatever their purported basis in biology, kinship relations are not natural facts as such. What the anthropologist traditionally 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. Statements about kinship are therefore, among other things, applications of classificatory principles to the actions, events and so forth from which relationships are inferred.

There are other grounds too on which to question whether statements about kinship could ever be neutral propositions about the world. Austin's point about language was that words do not just say things, but do things at the same time (1962). In speaking one does not simply make propositions but also presents that proposition, if such it be, in different ways or with differing (illocutionary) force, which may further have effects in the world (perlocutionary force in speech act terminology).<sup>2</sup> I shall try to show later quite how dangerous it is to think of statements about kinship as descriptions.<sup>3</sup> It fits better with ethnographic evidence to treat these as prescriptions, assertions, denials, questions or any other way in which people may use language on different occasions for particular purposes. The confusion created by mistaking claims for descriptions, in the words of an American cynic, makes Harlem on Father's Day look quite orderly!

These difficulties seem to pale in the face of the hurdles involved in comparing ideas from different cultures. Evans-Pritchard (1963) 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 (e.g. Fortes 1970a). For a start, on what grounds could we assume that ideas of 'law' are similar across cultures, or that jural notions such as person, obligation, or prohibition are comparable when they have changed so much within our own culture? The assumption that the moral dimension of kinship is important does tend to presuppose that ideas of morality have equivalents in different cultures, which rather flies in the face of the evidence (Hobart 1985b). A great deal of anthropology consists in closing one's eyes and hoping the world will go away.

2. See especially Searle (1971) on a celebrated version of the relationship of illocutionary force to propositions.

3. The 'insight' that kinship is just an idiom for other kinds of relationships depends, I suspect, on the kinds of argument discussed above. This is not to my mind however a very helpful way of formulating the problem. There is often a covert implication that native statements about relationships are merely an idiom for something more 'real' – presumably the trusty old war horses of power and production. Unless such an argument is handled with care, it smacks of positivism and essentialism at its worst.

More serious still, just how inadequate are the kinds of taxonomic principle invoked by anthropologists has become increasingly obvious (Conklin 1964; Tambiah 1973; Needham 1975, 1979). It is bad enough when considering the ways in which nature may be classified, but matters become worse when one is considering kinship classifications, which are relational, and raise awkward questions about what kinds of attribute are at stake. Classical approaches, such as the Aristotelian, organize particulars by reference to essential, or definitive, properties possessed by proper class members. This does not always work comfortably for relations like 'being taller than' or 'being younger than'. Nor is it universally accepted, or uncontentious, that objects and people need be defined in terms of 'properties'. As Goodman (1978:97) has noted, our present predicament can be traced back to the pre-Socratics who 'made almost all the important advances and mistakes in the history of philosophy'. In particular they left us with the metaphysical assumption that what distinguishes the substance of which all things are constituted is the set of properties which somehow inhere in each and upon which the distinctions of classification are based. What gives kinship classifications a semblance of universality is the tendency for members of different cultures to divide the world up in various ways for convenience and this generally extends to include the important field of other people. It may be a truism that cultures include various linguistic modes of differentiating 'reality', but this does not mean that all cultures need share the ways in which they do this and certainly does not entail that what is classified is comparable.<sup>4</sup> The healthy empiricism many anthropologists claim is often a polite way of saying that they admit not just to frighteningly naive philosophical ignorance but rank ethnocentrism as well.

Why though should kinship be the focus of so much anthropological attention? The reason, I suspect, is that it seems to refer to basic ways of classifying natural facts found in all cultures by virtue of having living, breeding species' members of *homo sapiens*. Now, while it is generally recognized that kin classifications differ from those of nature – hence the attention given to the difference between social fathers (*paires*) and genitors – this part recognition covers up a far more serious assumption. This is the presupposition that, whatever the classifications, they refer to the same nature. Nature is, however, not a natural category but a cultural construct. Worse, it is one which differs between cultures and even within our own has been subject to massive reformulation in the course of history (Collingwood 1945). It does not really help to argue that recent discoveries of the genetic determination of phenotypes solves the problem. To paraphrase Voltaire, if genes had not existed, it would have been necessary for essentialism to invent them. In fact, of course, if one allows a measure of validity to Kuhn's stress on the constitutive nature of scientific paradigms, then genes are the product of a

4. As I understand it, this is why Needham combines an interest in formal classification with a sceptical awareness of metaphysical problems (Needham 1979 as against 1976).

particular paradigm and the one reasonable certainty is that further research will show all the problems of indeterminacy and alternative models which have beset apparently definitive discoveries.

The natural facts to which observations about kinship ultimately correspond may then vary between cultures. Are the similarities upon which biological relationship is inductively established in fact self-evident? We can, out of amusement, apply Wittgenstein's famous argument (1969:17) about 'family resemblances' to see what is assumed in searching for common properties among family members. For what exists is

a family the members of which have family likenesses. Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking; and these likenesses overlap. The idea of a concept being a common property of its particular instances connects up with other primitive, too simple, ideas of the structure of language. It is comparable to the idea that *properties* are *ingredients* of the things which have the properties e.g. that beauty is an ingredient of all beautiful things as alcohol is of beer and wine, and that we therefore could have pure beauty, unadulterated by anything that is beautiful.

If there is no simple method of induction to determine membership by resemblance, perhaps we need to consider the kinds of assumptions about what, if anything, different cultures hold to be common between family members.

If the principles upon which taxonomies are organized raise problems, how do such classifications correspond to the world? There are no grounds a priori for assuming isomorphism between taxonomy and cultural notions of how the world is constituted. The question of how the two are related involves metaphysical ideas about reality. For instance, among the Balinese there is little idea of eternal natural law set against custom. Regularity, such as it is, is imposed by the will of a supreme, but remote, Divinity. Just as custom changes according to place, time and circumstance (*désa*, *kala*, *patra*), so it is assumed (but unknowable) that Divinity directly, or through a Hindu pantheon of gods, may alter arrangements and what stability there is may stem from human attempts to propitiate the agents which control nature. An important guide, at once moral and objective, is the idea that action has determinate effects upon the actor, according to the doctrine of *karma pala* (the fruits of action). Not only does this affect humans throughout their lives, or across incarnations, but it directly influences their constitutions, characters and the circumstances of birth. To assume that ideas about kinship in Bali rest on some bedrock of natural fact underwritten by the observer's knowledge of how the world truly is, would be crass ethnocentrism.

If there is no universal, shared view of nature, what are the Balinese ideas about the material base of kin relations? Curiously, the Balinese tend to be vague, not only about theories of conception, which reflect differing social claims as much as anything, but also about the notion of matter (Hobart 1983). They stress the transformation of appearance or the causation of events instead. The

elite, in suitably essentialist spirit, tends to put more weight than peasants on pedigree, for purposes of political legitimacy. This is expressed in an ideology of ritual purity, held partly to be transmitted by conception. Quite 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 the attributes of princes. As I discuss below, the realm of 'kinship' may well, for the Balinese, be largely to do with what makes men similar or different in which many considerations combine. Nor do Balinese handle family resemblances just by referring to inherited traits. Besides the doctrine of *karma pala*, villagers recognize the disparities between 'kin' as much as the congruences. Part of the inquiry about new-born children is finding out from a spirit-medium which ancestral identity has manifested itself. Quite different kinds of contextual factor come into play too. In Balinese theories 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.

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 1982). Certainly in a literate civilization like Bali, texts and traditions of philosophical speculation abound and are used with enthusiasm and aplomb in daily life to explain actions and account for the nature of the world. It is one thing for the Balinese to interpret matters this way, but to what extent does my approach claim to explain why men 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 native statements about metaphysics—under which action takes place and, given the particular sets of circumstances, piece together the ways in which the Balinese interpret what is happening in different contexts. There is no way, I suggest, 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 Quine's, 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 that any scheme can, in principle, explain events. There is an unstated step in many cultural analyses. After positing a theoretical framework which bears some relation to the ethnographic evidence, there is a surreptitious assumption that, given the best and richest conceptual

scheme, a causal account could be read off on demand. My aim is less ambitious, but I suspect more realistic.

These general remarks about the questionably substantive status of 'kinship' need to be argued from the ethnography. In what follows I try to show, in the light of my strictures on explanation, that we can not only talk usefully about the Balinese, but possibly come closer to appreciating the richness of other cultures, once we let go of notions like 'kinship'. I start by looking at the language of 'kinship' and the institutions which might seem associated with it. Then I consider why statements about relationships of this kind are in the register of assertion rather than the description of facts. Finally I outline various models used by the Balinese to explain the 'facts' in any instance. The conclusion is that reading any particular classification (let alone defining the 'system' as patrilineal, matrilineal or cognatic) into Balinese 'kinship' is like looking for the definitive reading of an ink blob or the inter-bubular groove. We are dealing with native models of terminology, action, metaphysical ideas or whatever, and to try to read through them to the essence of the system is akin to rubbing the print off a page in order to see what it really says behind the words.

### The vocabulary of Balinese 'kinship'

Among many kinds of temple congregation in Bali are those known as *pemaksan*, *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 slightly different usage. The folk etymology is interesting. *Pemaksan* 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. *Dadiya* is commonly linked to *dadi*, to grow or become, but also allow.<sup>5</sup> 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. 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 vary little except in the range of functions and the criteria of eligibility. The ones under discussion do little but worship. The grounds for membership are what we must look into.

5. Pace Lansing (1974:28), where the unlikely derivation is given as from *daja*, in the north, towards the (pure) mountains.

The criteria for inclusion in such worship groups may be expressed in several ways. A key, but complicated, 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 concept.

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 ancestor. In this sense the worship groups mentioned above may be read as having their membership defined by descent – the Balinese use the same metaphor, *urum*, as in English – here agnation. *Purus(a)* also means 'penis': so does *sakèng purusa* refer to socially recognized, or biologically conceived, connections? This is not a quibble. Such ambiguities are critical to how the 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.<sup>6</sup> Granted the range of implications, the Balinese suffer from the dilemma of what the key concept of *purusa* is all about. Is *sakèng purusa* about conventional association or about acts of procreation? Is the stress on transmission or substantive qualities? Or is it about something else? Is it, for instance, sharing something with a given (ancestral) deity? 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 some of its many senses noted by Sanskrit scholars. This is equally true of the other terms noted so far. For instance, my villagers 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 moves might imply. Whether we like it or not, interpretation is not easily removed from the Balinese stage of action, nor translation from the task of the ethnographer.

6. Balinese theories of reference incidentally seem to differ significantly from our folk and philosophical accounts.

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 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 male and female sexual roles 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 for 'kin ties' have, significantly, equally strong metaphorical associations. To refer to ties traced strictly through males (jurally?) the term is *seturunan*, of one descent, from *turun*: to descend, drop or fall. To cloud matters, however, there is another word, *keturunan*, the abstract noun from the same root, which designates all who can trace descent (filiation 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.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most widely used term in the region of Bali where I worked is *nyama*. As the noun denoting persons, *penyamaan*, its range is similar to *semeton*, if not broader still. When coupled with *beraya* (a word hard to translate, see Boon 1977:122 where he remarks on its 'egalitarian implications'), *nyama beraya* is used for fellow villagers (sometimes set against *penembahan*, those one prays to, or bows before, *sembah*, i.e. persons of high caste) and so suggests having a common bond. 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 *penyamaan* and *nyama* are used interchangeably in many contexts. *Nyama* either comes from the root *sama*, or is its perfect homonym. *Sama* normally is used to indicate something like 'same' or 'similar', sharing some aspect of identity, and the connection is not lost on the 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

7. Perhaps less surprisingly the language of segmentation is starkly spatial: *késah*, leaving; *krad*, moving; *pekaad*, going away.

the extensionist case is to impute a degree of essentialism to the Balinese which there is no evidence that they have.

### Events and interpretations

So far I have argued that there is little ground to assume from Balinese use of certain important, and closely related, concepts that they mark out conveniently the equivalent to a domain which we call 'kinship'. To what extent, however, does such an argument stand up to an examination of what people do, and say they do, in daily life? In this section I would like briefly to present material dealing with the kinds of groups found in practice and articulated in terms of these Balinese notions and also look at inter-personal relations intended to produce children, namely 'marriage'. In so doing I shall provisionally use the familiar language of kinship but go on to suggest that the data may equally be represented in other terms. For any given interpretation, or theoretical scheme, is underdetermined by the evidence which can be construed in terms of several different possible models.

Whether one wishes to regard the Balinese 'kinship system' as patrilineal, cognatic, about putative origins, or dealing with degrees of similarity or difference will depend in part on the theoretical predilections of the anthropologist *de cuius gustibus non est disputandum*. What is foremost in one model is decentered in another; what are prescriptions or proscriptions in one version are preferences or dangers in another; what one stresses as ideal, another treats as usual practice and so on. From this it should be clear that there is no 'kinship system' as such to describe, for we are dealing in assertions made by people in culture about the different ways in which the 'facts' are interpreted. If the Balinese can, and do, represent what is going on in terms of alternative, if not always fully articulated, models, it does not necessarily follow, however, that these are all much of a muchness to an anthropologist. Some models account for the facts with greater elegance, with fewer imported assumptions and so on, than do others. There may also be internal grounds on which one version is preferable to others. In fact I shall suggest that the interpretation which most adequately accounts for the available ethnography has, in fact, nothing to do with kinship per se at all.

As Balinese domestic and kin relations have been fairly fully outlined elsewhere (Boon 1977; Geertz and Geertz 1975; Hobart 1979; Howe 1980), only a few remarks are needed here. Traditionally 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 village ward of Pisangkaja, in the settlement of Tengahpadang in central Bali, on which the following account is mainly based, residence arrangements



were as follows. In compounds with more than one household, 22% are related by ties other than between males. This excludes female heirs, who may be argued to rank as jural males (see Hobart 1977). If the constituent compound ties are calculated by sex, 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 merge with horrible clarity.

The Balinese do not, as we have seen, speak of their relations in simple kin terms. As with temples, local ties are defined commonly in terms of sites of worship, known as *sanggah* (shrines) or *sanggah gedé* (simply: big shrines), according to the perceived remoteness of the ancestors involved. Traditionally inclusion is expressed in terms of *purusa*. Two points should be noted. 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*. This allows a play both between social and biological paternity and about ideas of wrong association. Also women, if they are not divorced or do not return home, become ancestors (of neutral sex) in their husband's group as defined by *purusa* (and vice versa, of course, for in-marriage males). The work for, and worship at, ancestral shrines is in theory therefore the critical means of distinguishing members of a group claiming shared *purusa* from others. At marriage women publicly inform both their natal and their marital ancestors of the change of residence and the same 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 the settlement of Tengah-padang, however, such knowledge was pretty general (88% of the households). 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 actual attendance in Pisangkaja, on which I have data, and details of which are given in Table 1. Help in preparing the substantial offerings was undertaken largely by the household, however constituted, of the compound heir (69% of the 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% of the work force were affines, and a further 5% 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.

Table 1. Recruitment to ancestor worship groups in Pisangkaja

Activity	Househ.	Agnates	Ex-agnates*	Affines	Neighbors	Clients	Other	Total
Offering preparation	103	18	6	15	5	1	1	149
Worship attendance	—	38	62	11	—	4	—	115

\* Ex-agnates refers to people who have married out of the compound or who have been adopted into other families, and so properly speaking, worship at other shrines.

\*\* As my concern is with links to the shrine, I exclude the households who are obliged to look after it, as their attendance is a *sine qua non*, punishable by loss of rice land and other sanctions of a mystical nature. So for convenience, they have been excluded.

When it comes to worship at ancestor shrines, however, the picture is curious. Of those who came to worship only 33% were agnates in any jural, or strict, sense. Close on 10% 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 actors' interpretations are homogeneous; in other words that they all have 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*, *seturunan* or *nyama* do not denote unambiguous classes of person any more than those who turned up can easily be pigeon-holed. One suspects that most of the neat analyses of 'kinship systems' are achieved by looking at the evidence through the wrong end of the ethnographic telescope. That way the warts do not show!

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

8. 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).

principles, on the other they do not even correspond with the 'facts on the ground' (wherever those be). Most of the terms Balinese use are sufficiently open to interpretation that they can encompass almost anyone 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 the Balinese can, with clear Wittgensteinian 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 has 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 which will be discussed shortly, this is not an adequate answer either.

Now let us turn to marriage. It is sensible to look at this 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 myth, 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 aspects of complex principles (which is how they are often understood) as marriage. The rite of *ngantèn*, which is the normal cultural condition for forming an effective functioning human domestic unit, is also required for other recognized pairings as diverse as pigs (Hobart 1974), drums or slit-gongs. The stress in each instance is upon parts forming a functioning whole (see Hobart 1983, on a capacity to function being a criterion of identity). Priests must have female counterparts to undertake a range of ritual activities but these need not be their wives. In just the same way, a man or woman requires a member of the opposite sex 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 (Hobart 1985b: 188–9), 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 'dualistic' functioning of wholes 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?

Table 2. Distribution of kin marriages in Tihingan and Pisangkaja

	Tihingan	Pisangkaja		Total
	No.	High caste No.	Low caste No.	Pisangkaja No.
Father's brother's daughter	18	2	4	6
2nd and 3rd patrilineal parallel cousins*	17	—	1	1
Ward Endogamy	84	31	126	157
Cumulative	119	33	131	164
Total	243	97	321	418

\* There is a regrettable difference between the Geertz's figures (1975:96) and mine as the latter are based on second-cousin patrilineal unions only. The reason is that third-cousin marriages always involved other closer ties, never patrilineal alone. Therefore I have kept them out.

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's it was high, in the mixed-caste community of Pisangkaja (and equally in the other parts of the settlement) it was very low. The figures are given in detail in Table 2, and speak largely for themselves. As against actual father's brother's daughter marriage of 7% in Tihingan, the equivalents in Pisangkaja were 2% and 1% 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% as against 33%). For low castes the comparable figures rose to 87% with non-agnates. This suggests that, whatever the ideals stated in the 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.

Table 3. Frequency of approved marriages in Pisangkaja

Relation of partners	High caste No.	Low caste No.
A. Descent group ties only	23	26
B. Descent and known kin tie	21	29
C. Kin tie but no descent tie	—	54
D. No tie	5	87
Totals	49	196



Not all marriages take place with the agreement of the families involved, or even the assent of the partners themselves. As my concern here is with the evidence that recognition of kinship in some sense affects positive marriage choice, I shall omit all those unions (22% for unions between members of the same high caste, 44% for all other unions – the basis on which all calculations are made can be found in Hobart 1979:354ff) in which extraneous factors like being caught in *flagrante* or elopement in the face of disapproval seemed dominant reasons. What is striking is the high proportion of kin marriages where there is no agnatic tie at all among low castes (28%, see Table 3). In fact, if one contrasts unions where agnatic ties exist (28%, A + B) in Table 3, with those where kin ties of some kind are held to occur (43%, B + C), 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. On this evidence, the Balinese might appear to qualify through the backdoor of practice for a volume on cognatic organization!

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 traditional terminology. Need we consider these? The 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> Regrettably the sample of appropriate marriage was too small to give reliable results on other ways of formulating the problem. 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, if not more, than kin ties in securing the approval of parents. As the data do not suggest a strong

9. By Spearman's Rank Correlation Test it is significant at 5% if only the two households are taken, but significant at 0.1% if allowance is made for a measure of spill-over between households in a compound, which is the basis on which many Balinese said they operated.

10. By Spearman's test significant at 0.5%, see Hobart 1979:348–62 for a detailed analysis.

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 the rest of us, so you are just measuring your own mirages!' At the risk of disappointing the critic, I must demur and suggest he or she is confused. First, all anthropological, and indeed 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. Quite what are these translational schemes, or models, though? It is to this problem I turn in the last part of the paper.

### Models and mirages

As a start it is useful to undermine my own material. What I have treated as facts are in effect assertions as to what took place, often countered by rival assertions by others. When a *dadiya* is a *dadiya*, or some other kind of worship group, may well be open to disputed claims (for two examples, see Hobart 1979:604–9). Equally, in marriage the Balinese distinguish several kinds of union which include real and mock capture, arranged marriage and so forth. Each has subtly different status implications. So how a marriage is represented is not a neutral matter, but is rephrased according to circumstance. Powerful political figures may go to pains to show their marriages as by capture, while the victims deny it. Similar considerations of presentation of self apply for other forms of marriage. Further, in small communities with much endogamy people tend to be linked by several ties at once, not just of 'kinship', but wealth, neighbourhood, friendship and others. It would be a fool who would try to reduce these all to some 'real' pervading principle of motivation, such as power (in whose terms, one might ask?). With this underdetermination of the evidence by any single interpretation, we might be wiser to concentrate on the conditions under which Balinese assert one view against another. To do otherwise is to measure mirages.

'Surely', it might be countered, 'there is more order than you suggest. After all there is an organized 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' patrilineal parallel cousin marriage as sacred (Boon 1977: 132) is countered by noting 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 are lures for the unwary.

With these comments in mind, we may turn to models of Balinese 'kinship', with a close eye on how fully they reflect Balinese ideas and what theoretical assumptions they make. As various versions have already appeared, I need not recapitulate them in detail here (Geertz and Geertz 1975; Boon 1977; Hobart 1979). What is interesting in the Geertzes' *Kinship in Bali* is the contrast they draw between the African (in this instance, polysegmentary) lineage and Balinese kin groups which stress origin, *kawitan*, represented spatially by shrines. The central Balinese opposition here is between ideas of origin and citizenship. In contrast, say, to American kinship as portrayed by Schneider, where the dichotomy is between shared substance and legal code, in Bali it is

a competition between the symbolism of settlement and citizenship and that of filiation and origin-point. The competition [...] is at once religious, stratificatory, aesthetic, and political, and it amounts to a struggle between the principle that the fundamental bond is coresidence, sociality, and the principle that the fundamental bond is sameness of natural kind, genus. (Geertz and Geertz 1975: 167.)

At this level, origin-point is opposed to village or state, but a village here is not 'a body of custom but a metaphysical idea [...] an expanse of sacred space within whose bounds the fates of all residents are supernaturally intertwined' (Geertz and Geertz 1975: 167). In other words we are dealing with contrasting clusters of symbols, or cultural constructs.

Certain points should be noted. There is a parallel between the Geertzes' work and Schneider's approach to kinship. Whereas villages from one point of view are constituted by their legal codes, *dadiya* are based on ties of natural kind as well as having codes of conduct (see Schneider 1968: 25–9). Similarly Clifford Geertz earlier distinguished Balinese institutions into 'planes of social organization' (1959a), which bear an intriguing resemblance to Inden's carefully ethnographic account of the several 'substance-codes' found in Bengal which

include those of worship (*puja*), place or country (*désa*) and livelihood (*jivika*; Inden 1976: 13–15) as well as that of *jati*, or genus, into which humans are classed. The difference is that the Balinese do not stress substances, nor their being natural – so that Balinese taxonomic classes (*soroh* rather than *jati*, see above) are differently defined, largely by appearance and function I suspect. Finally, it is implied that the cultural constructs are instantiated by means of a spatial metaphor.

In *The Anthropological Romance of Bali*, Boon elaborates this model to distinguish three 'cultural components' or constructs which form ideal marriage types (1977: 121–30). These are love, or romantic marriage, typified in elopement and mock capture; political marriage; and sacred endogamous marriage. Behind these ideals lies a conflict of love and true kinship (see 1977: 141), to be found in literature and, sometimes, in life. Romance has two senses, but both ways can be predicated of Balinese culture, in contrast to Epic. For

Epic posits constant, consistently principled, heroic familial aristocracies whose leaders establish the lawful and the just at the expense of the enemies of right. Romance portrays vulnerable, disguised protagonists, partial social misfits who sense surpassing ideals and must prove the ultimate feasibility of actualizing those ideals often against magical odds. (Boon 1977: 3.)

So romantic marriage seems to be pitted against the demands of duty.

For all the apparent similarities, Boon's argument heads at times in the opposite direction from the Geertzes'. Where they focus on Balinese social institutions and the play of spatial metaphor, Boon seeks ideals held to be immanent, as part of a cross-cultural classification (see his criteria of Romance, 1977: 3 and 225; his typification of societies, 1977: 1 and 6; or his taxonomy of motifs and love, 1977: 7). The problem of this idea of 'actualizing ideals' is that it smacks of a cheerful essentialism, which is borne out in Boon's enthusiasm for implicit comparison. The difficulty of leaning on literary sources for support is that they beg the problem of translation (romantic lust might be a more apt caricature of Balinese attitudes than love). And I confess I find it hard to tell whether Bali is a Romantic or an Epic culture. It depends a bit on whom you ask and at what time of the day. Where the Geertzes approach the whole notion of kinship with commendable caution, Boon at times seems to assume that it exists in some sense – if not, I would not know why he should ignore questions of translation, comparison and metaphysical assumptions.

As the last model is my own (1979), I shall refrain from commentary as much as I can for fear of what the Balinese call *nymggihang dèwèk*, speaking highly of myself! I also had the advantage of writing in the light of the other accounts which I tried to incorporate in an empirical model of possible permutations. Rather than try to isolate ideals, as has Boon, I focused on the ways in which terms and concepts were used in practice. For instance in Tihingan the stress is on relative distance from an origin (*kawitan*). In Tengahpadang it seems to be on belonging

to one or another *soroh*, often treated as bounded classes. So membership may be regarded by the Balinese either as a matter of degree or as clear alternatives (that is analog or digital functions respectively). In turn, of what one is a member may be phrased in terms of various words suggesting principles of reckoning or recognition, each of which carries a range of conventional associations. The result is a field of possible representations of relationships. There was empirical evidence of an expressed concern with the criteria of sameness, or similarity (one might note the use of the prefix *se-*, indicating that what follows is grouped as a unity), implied in 'kin' metaphors, whether spatial (origin, descent, exit from one source), or processual (grains on a single ear of rice, the growing implied in *dadiya*). Some of the concern was summed up in villagers' play on *nyama* which was held, rightly or not, to be about sameness (*sama*). Now sameness differs from ideas of kinship in that it allows a wide range of criteria. There was confirmatory evidence that this could equally be read as about shared interests, life chances or even physical looks, by virtue of the doctrine of *karma pala*, by which people are similar or different according to their past actions. Instead of treating Balinese actions in terms of models of kinship and marriage, it made good sense to view these as a question and injunction respectively: who is like you? and marry someone like you!

\* \* \*

In conclusion, on what grounds might one prefer one interpretation to another, allowing that the 'facts' will support alternatives? I suggest two considerations. If a model depends upon assumptions for which there is little evidence in the culture under study, or if it makes assumptions which are questionable on internal philosophical grounds, there are reasons for caution. Boon's approach may be questionable on both grounds. Part of the problem goes back to Schneider's thesis that culture has many levels of reality, none being 'any more or less real' than others (1968:2), except that 'the cultural level is focused on the *fundamental* system of symbols and meanings which inform and *give shape* to the normative level of action' (1972:39; my italics).

Cultural constructs are seen, then, 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 that such levels exist or are recognized. The argument is curiously reminiscent of Plato with abstract ideas giving shape to action and, by implication, explaining them. Finally, postulating levels of reality involves an uncomfortable degree of essentialism (the dangers of which have been spelled out well in Gudeman and Penn 1982:92ff). 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

1985a:48–9). The difficulty can be highlighted in the difference of Boon's ideals and the idea of metaphor touched on by the Geertz. It is one thing to suggest the 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 on the ground, or in fact, is ordered. The former just asks us to look at how men use ideas in practice; the latter beckons us into Plato's cave where '*Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate!*'

Let me reflect for a moment on where this leaves us, if my arguments for more sensitive ethnography and greater awareness of the problems of translating and comparison are worth anything. Allowing a place to indigenous metaphysics is not intended as a grand explanation of why people act as they do in other cultures. It gives more, and less ethnocentric, scope for the modest aim of looking at the empirical conditions under which humans act, even if we are steering away from a safe world of generalities and into doubt. For

Our doubts are traitors,  
And make us lose the good we oft might win,  
By fearing to attempt.  
(*Measure for Measure* I.iv, 75–7.)

If comfortable anthropological theorizing and the illusion of easy explanation looks more remote, at least it is closer to what every ethnographer knows at heart, and what the man in a Balinese street could tell him, namely that the world is a complicated place with no simple answers. It also returns the world to the kind of people who live in it, with its paradoxes, uncertainties and all. What anthropologists do when they interpret, or reflect on interpretations, can be seen in different ways. Some, as far apart as Radcliffe-Brown (1952) and Geertz (1973), think of it as a stage towards a sophisticated science. Others – myself included – begin to wonder where anthropology shades into the arts and literature. We are in danger of finding what we are looking for. If we wish to go out and measure the world, we can do so, but we may merely create phantasmagoria like the inter-bubular groove. Perhaps the Balinese are right and there is a price to pay for such doings. As someone closer to home once remarked:

Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure;  
Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure.  
(*Measure for Measure* VI, 410–11.)

This chapter was originally published in 1991 in *Cognition and Social Organization in Southeast Asia*. eds. F. Hüsken & J. Kemp, Leiden: KITLV Press, 33–53.