Hildred GEERTZ and Clifford GEERTZ: *Kinship in Bali.* University of Chicago Press, 1975.

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A difficulty in the study of Balinese society is the complex variation between regions and even villages—perhaps, in part, as a consequence of the island's extreme Balkanization in the past. The eminent authors of this monograph pay close attention to this as they develop, and at points modify, their analysis from previous works. In an adventurous argument, they confront the formidable problems of Balinese kinship and its social context; and set out to explain the diversity in terms of a general model of variability. Although the point of departure is their own ethnography, their ultimate concern is with 'the operation of kinship symbolization' as part of a wider 'culture pattern' of forms on the ground is to be understood in terms of 'variations on a set ideational themes' in 'the cultural dimensions of kinship' (pp. 3-4), and this emphasis is central to an appreciation of their approach.

As many of the theoretical, linguistic, and historical issues have been dealt with length in reviews by Barnes *(THES*, 21 November 1975*), Hooykaas (Archipel*, 11*,* 1976),[1] and Needham *(TLS,* 25 June 1976), this discussion will concentrate on problems of the Balinese ethnography, on which relatively little has been written; and it may prove useful to examine the applicability and implications of the proposed model in the light of further material.

The argument is based on material drawn largely from three contiguous villages near the court capital of Klungkung, and from Tabanan in the west. Briefly, the authors view the central institution of Balinese kinship as the *dadia*, which is approximately an agnatic, preferentially endogamous, corporate kin group. These are not universally found, but develop to differing degrees, so that 'Balinese kinship units fall along an unbroken continuum from a pole of minimally cohesive families to a pole of fully organized descent groups' (p. 62).

Dadia emerge under imprecise, loosely related conditions. What is stressed instead is their enclosure within, and relationship to, a 'community', which is the kingdom, or region, among high castes and for low, a local area, typically a hamlet. In either case, descent groups may become the principal vehicles of competition for status and power, and usually signal their public appearance by constructing special, often magnificent, temples. Thus, they may be viewed equally as 'religious groups, or micro-castes, or local factions' (p. 5), although the reader may wonder whether this does not conflict with the view (p. 30) that *dadia* are independent, functionally specific groupings.

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[1] I have retained the original style of reference of the Bulletin SOAS, but the Harvard convention in the postscript.

The authors argue that it is not segmentation, but 'the two related concepts of "origin-point" and "origin-group"' (p. 64) which provide the model for the internal differentiation of kin groups. These are then classified according to a loose tripartite typology of degrees of *dadia* 'crystallization' and importance in public affairs (which are seen as concomitant). In the comparatively rare 'highly differentiated' variant, the majority of villagers are organized into descent groups with some subdivision, while 'kinship plays a prominent, on occasion even dominant, role' in the community (p. 72). The most common is the intermediate form, where 'one or two *dadia* have emerged', perhaps with some local function (p. 73). In the final version, found around towns and in unirrigated areas, ties are restricted to the household cluster.

Flexibility is a critical feature of *dadia*, especially among low castes. This, it is suggested, is achieved by teknonymy, the custom of designating adults by reference to their descendants' names, which results in 'genealogical amnesia' and the suppression of internal rank differences (cf. Needham *TLS*). Thus, unwanted ties may be shed, and new assumed, through caste-title assimilation or legitimation by spirit-mediums. In this system, endogamy is seen as the prime means to group coherence, and the index and symbol of collective prestige. Ideally, marriage is with the father's brother's daughter, real or classificatory; but any appropriate agnate is preferred to an outsider. Under these circumstances, status considerations require the prevention of women marrying out, and when this happens, it is interpreted in terms of elopement or bride-capture.

Descent group form varies according to the political roles and arenas of castes. Whereas commoner *dadia,* discussed above, are said normally to be contained within a single hamlet—so that kin group endogamy is, by extension, hamlet endogamy; high caste groups are dispersed and internally ranked by lines of unequal status, which sinks with distance from the core of office-holders. Aristocrats must, therefore, marry within the branch or, alternatively, may confirm their status superiority, and gain dowry, by unions with women of lesser descent lines, or caste. Marriage depends here on strategic considerations of group solidarity, status, and wealth.

In their conclusion, which draws on Schneider's approach in *American kinship*, the Geertzes reject the view that kinship is a definable object of study—unfortunately without any reference to Needham's conclusive discussion in *Rethinking kinship and marriage* (1971). Kinship is seen instead in terms of 'models of' and 'models for' domestic relationships, as part of a system in which there is 'competition between the symbolism of settlement and citizenship and that of filiation and origin-point', or, more abstractly still, between the principles of 'sociality' and 'natural kind' (p 167). So, finally the analysis of kinship merges into the general study of Balinese culture.

Working in a largely untouched and unordered field, the authors have developed an interesting framework to cope with the problems. They have isolated and illustrated clearly the salient features of Balinese kinship. However, a number of problems remain, both as to

the argument and its usefulness in interpreting the ethnography. Generally, the level of analysis adopted gives little emphasis to economic and political factors; while concentration almost exclusively on the *dadia* relegates other aspects of kinship and marriage to comparative obscurity.

It is regrettable that no reference is made to Near Eastern material, which provides a fascinating parallel of systems with marked endogamy and encystment. In Ch. iii of the book, Balinese kin group structure is portrayed as distinctive by contrasting it with the classical African segmentary lineage system; but neither do all lineage systems demonstrate complementary opposition, nor need they be based on African models. The authors properly emphasize the contingent character of the *dadia,* the imprecise genealogical definition of membership, and the importance of origin-points. They also show, however, that mythical charters often link local groups in a wider framework focused on more remote ancestors. The term *dadia* (for which a questionable etymology is given (see Hooykaas and Needham), often refers, in fact, to exactly this broader category. It is possible therefore that there is more than one model in terms of which kinship is conceived.

Stress is laid throughout on the bilateral nature of the *dadia*, in part because it is possible to switch groups, and also since ties may be traced through women. An alternative interpretation exists, however. When changes of *dadia* membership occur, they are apparently expressed in the idiom of ancestor-beliefs (pp. 77-8), which might justifiably be termed descent. Although it is not uncommon for kin-group ties to be reckoned through women, in this event there is clear role-reversal, the female adopting the status of male. As the jural rules of agnation are preserved, it is arguable that this is not ambilineal, but rather indicates an extreme form of patrilineal ideology.

There is the further question: in what sense are these groupings, in fact, corporate? One might wish here for a more systematic examination of property-holding and political relations. In the one example cited of 'highly-differentiated' *dadia,* these turn out, significantly, to possess more or less an island-wide monopoly over the manufacture of valuable metallophone orchestras. It is also not entirely clear how far, where group resources are not involved, agnates organize for consolidated political action. For most purposes, after all, individual members are divided among themselves by differences in wealth and interests. In the absence of common concerns of this order, one wonders to what degree *dadia* are, in practice, largely ritual congregations.

The final difficulty, as Barnes has pointed out, is that the formulation of a model of variance effectively precedes detailed ethnographic field-work. So, given the paucity of existing sources, it is hard to assess whether this framework is generally applicable to the analysis of Balinese kinship. The evidence from my own field material from Tengahpadang (the pseudonym used in publications), a rural settlement in central Gianyar, suggests that the situation may be more complicated still.

Tengahpadang contains over 3,000 inhabitants, divided between seven hamlets, or wards, in which over 85% of the villagers belong to active *dadia,* and their various sub-groupings. This might appear, therefore, as an example of a village with a high kinship differentiation, but the proposed concomitants do not follow. No descent group of any caste is restricted to a single hamlet, and all but one of the smallest extend far beyond the settlement; although each *dadia* claims status superiority over others, among low castes this proved no bar to intermarriage; the large local sections of kin groups do not dominate public office; and hamlet politics is organized principally by factions, which comprise more non-kin and affines than descent-group members. Only those groups which own extensive rice land exhibit a measure of public solidarity. In short, Tengahpadang does not seem to fit the typology.

On other points too, the data conflict with the picture presented by the Geertzes. The ritual drama featuring the mythical witch, Rangda, is mentioned in passing, but nothing of the significance of witchcraft beliefs in local social relationships. In Tengahpadang, most accusations (on which I have information) are between co-resident kin, particularly affines. This, coupled with the domestic incidence of avoidance following quarrels, *pu(w)ik,* and running away*, ngambul*, suggests that the Geertzes' characterization of family life as 'warm, intimate and relaxed' (p. 57) may not be the full story.

More seriously, they stress the structural consequences of teknonymy in low-caste *dadia*. In Tengahpadang, a variety of optional forms of designation are used, and teknonyms are found principally among castes of smiths. It is interesting that these are the dominant groups in Tihingan, the main village studied by the Geertzes. Although high castes do not practise regular teknonymy, their genealogical knowledge, for the most part, proved to be as shallow as that of commoners. This raises a question as to the necessary connexion between nomenclature and 'genealogical amnesia'.

The pattern of marriage in Pisangkaja, one of the core hamlets in Tengahpadang, shows marked divergence from those given in *Kinship in Bali.* First, marriage within the *dadia* is less frequent (25.6% of approved low caste unions) than between non-lineal kin (28.2%). Agreement to marriage across descent groups is by no means rare (over half such unions); while roughly one in four marriages within the same *dadia* is by elopement or capture, in the face of parental disapproval. As descent group endogamy accounts for only a quarter of endorsed unions, and over half of these involve traceable kin ties, it is questionable whether it is agnates, not simply kin, who are preferred partners. This is not just a quibble: non-lineal kin belong to different descent, hence status, groups, so that an even distribution of marriages suggests that status concerns may not be paramount.

More detailed examination hints at a different set of processes; for approval of marriage is closely correlated with rights over property. Although land is not normally transferred through marriage among commoners, agreed unions (excluding the problematic 'jural male' cases) occur overwhelmingly between families with equal landholdings. This proved

statistically significant, whether calculated for individual households or compounds. The possible relevance of such factors as class suggests the advisability of a fuller examination of marriage choice.

An interesting problem is raised by the stated Balinese preference for father's-brother's-daughter marriage. On first inquiry this is universally agreed to be the ideal union; on further questioning, however, it emerges that this is classified as *panes,* hot, unpropitious and dangerous. In contrast, non-agnatic relationships, traced through females are *etis,* cool and desirable. This implies that there may be more than one level, and conflict, of social values.

Finally, the Geertzes' view that low caste marriage is largely confined to the local 'community' may also need qualification. To the extent that descent groups and marriage alliances are mobilized to political ends, one might expect some linkage with political arenas. This requires more precise definition of the 'community' than we are given, for different resources, and hence prizes, are allocated to the hamlet, the *désa adat* (the main religious congregation) and the government village. There is evidence that this may affect the marriage patterns of political leaders. In Pisangkaja, the orators in assembly debates rely on support from within the hamlet, and most of their unions (75%) are contracted there; whereas the local patrons, for whom external contacts are valuable, often marry outside both hamlet (67%) and settlement (50%).

This ethnographic digression points to the need for caution. As the authors of this monograph demonstrate convincingly, generalization about Balinese social structure is hazardous. They have developed an approach which attempts to surmount these problems by focusing on the framework of cultural values surrounding kinship in Bali, as part of a wider system of symbols. Their exposition is sure to provide a fascinating basis for future research on the subject.

Mark Hobart

Postscript to *Kinship in Bali*

In the book review it was neither possible nor appropriate to discuss the broader issues raised by the work. So I concentrated on some omissions and limitations, notably that ethnographic evidence from elsewhere in Bali undermined the expository generality implied in the title *Kinship in Bali*. As some readers might like to know more, I add this postscript, which touches on arguments about Balinese kinship developed in my PhD thesis (1979; esp. pp 309-99) and an article, *The art of measuring mirages* (1991). The latter's sub-title rather gives the game away: '*or is there kinship in Bali?*' Before clarifying this provocative, if not counter-intuitive, question, I take it that the reader has read *Kinship in Bali* or at least the review above. As I have considered Clifford Geertz's model of Interpretive Anthropology elsewhere (2000), I examine here what seems to be a central, constitutive concept that underpins *Kinship in Bali*, namely 'culture'. It is its presuppositions and entailments, rather than the term itself, that I find problematic, because it anticipates, pre-empts, largely ignores (while pretending the opposite) and so disarticulates the participants' own understandings of their practices.

For their analysis to work, the Geertzes had to assume that kinship was an integral part of Balinese culture as a whole which comprised a system coherent, organized and total enough as to be a sufficient explanatory template for observable social practice. What happens though if practice fails to fit? Indeed, what status does an ideal have? The supposedly culturally exemplary and desirable marriage is with the father's brother's daughter. Unfortunately, Balinese widely held such marriages to be dangerous to the couple's welfare (*panes*, literally 'hot'). So who decides what a cultural ideal is? Clifford Geertz's former student, James Boon, attempted to square the circle by claiming that 'first cousin marriage' is 'the most sacred union' but a dangerous sense (oddly, he uses not Balinese, but the Indonesian *panas*, 1977: 132). Boon blithely imposed a Euro-American concept on Balinese who had no such term until they were more recently taught the Dutch concept of '*sakral*'. Detailed ethnographic evidence from elsewhere (summarized in the review) showed quite different preferences at work that Balinese articulated using a very general classificatory scheme as being desirable (*etis*, literally 'cool').

Much depends then on what we understand by culture. James Clifford neatly summarized the function of this (distinctively American) rendition of culture in

> the new ethnography [which] was marked by an increased emphasis on the power of observation. Culture was construed as an ensemble of characteristic behaviors, ceremonies, and gestures susceptible to recording and explanation by a trained onlooker… certain powerful theoretical abstractions promised to help academic ethnographers 'get to the heart' of a culture more rapidly than someone undertaking, for example, a thorough inventory of customs and beliefs. Without spending years getting to know natives, their complex languages and habits, in intimate detail, the researcher could go after selected data that would yield a central armature or structure of the cultural whole (Clifford 1988: 31).

Totality and coherence are not attributes that you encounter empirically: they are presupposed by the model. Instead of getting to the heart of Balinese culture, the Geertzes mummified a largely imaginary organ.

Grand summative concepts like culture are epistemological simulacra that offer scholars the illusion of systematic knowledge about what is almost always partial, fragmentary and contested. Culture is a duplicitous notion. It pretends to encompass not only the rules but also the self-understandings of people in another society within a wider theoretical framework. It begs the question of double discursivity: what is the relationship between Euro-American scholarly discourse and how the people being studied set about talking, planning, judging, commenting, disagreeing and acting under different circumstances?

The Geertzes' account of Balinese kinship ignores how people engage with and argue over their own collective representations. Instead, in a classical 'scientific' manner, Balinese behaviour is to be interpreted using imported analytical concepts, which are presumed to be both necessary and sufficient to explain structure and social action. Stipulating kinship as a cross-cultural object of study involves questionable assumptions and measuring mirages. First, how do we know that what we call kinship denotes something comparable elsewhere (Needham 1971)? Second, are—or when are—such statements either unquestioned (unquestionable?) descriptions or classification or interpretations or what? What if they are used strategically, tactically or even unthinkingly to assert, claim, challenge or deny particular relationships in different contexts? Finally, what do members of different societies recognize as existing or possible? And what do they think they can know or understand? What are the approved or permissible styles of evaluating events, states, agents (or whatever they recognize)? How do they set about use reflecting on what Western scholars have in mind by being, identity, unity, coherence, relationship, intention, causation, substance and so forth? Balinese usage suggests there are few grounds to assume *a priori* that they have an unproblematic equivalent to what we call 'kinship' (1991: 43).

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