

# Monument or Mall? Pilgrimage and Tourism in Indonesia

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## *Introduction*

The title of my paper is derived from an article appearing this past spring in the New York Times regarding contestation over the character of the World Heritage site of Borobodur in Central Java. The gist of the conflict was the removal of kiosks and other modest structures used by local Javanese traders who sold a variety of tourist goods, foods and drinks to the visitors who came to see the impressive Buddhist pilgrimage site, reputed to be world's largest in scale. The governor of the province planned to "revamp" the entranceways and build a three-story mall called "Java World" that would also provide visitors with tram service to the base of the site. Without rehearsing for you the many arguments against this plan, it suffices to inform you that plans for the mall have been postponed, pending "study." I have also abandoned my plan to focus on Borobodur in this presentation for reasons quite separate from the internal politics of Javanese locals and official planners. Time constraints simply preclude the comparative analysis I had considered developing for this paper. However, most of the themes that shape my discussion of another site situated in Bali – Pura Besakih — emerge from the Borobodur contest regarding sacred site and commercial endeavor. Specifically, central government and local control over so-called "tourist objects," issues of authenticity and preservation, economic values and cultural expressions.

My focus on Bali is timely. Most of you know about the bombing of the famed international resort area of Kuta Beach in October 2002 and the large commemoration service a year later, attended by some 2,000 in remembrance of this tragedy that killed hundreds and decimated the Balinese tourist industry. Tempting as it is to deconstruct the "pilgrimage" dimension of sites of horror and devastation, study of Kuta and religious expressions of healing and forgiveness on Bali remain to be undertaken. It is not the high visibility of Bali as another locale vulnerable to terrorism but the question of relationship between host culture and guest aspira-

tion for religious experience that I will be exploring with interest in generating discussion about “religious tourism” as distinctive travel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Some years ago, on a trip to Bali that involved study of life passage ritual, I saw a painting that amused me and shattered any notion that the Balinese were passive observers of the multitudes of tourists who traveled to the island long known as “paradise.” The painter, I Made Budi, represents the sightseeing tourist determined to record “traditional” life with the newest technologies of the gaze. I Made Budi’s painting prompted me to consider, each time I returned to Bali (sometimes co-leading a group of tourists studying art, culture and religion), questions of “whose gaze?” and “what tourist object who constructs the tourist experience? How is the experience of seeing religious ritual (especially cremation) interpreted by those guests who know little or nothing about Balinese Hindu religion? These inquiries and others have prompted me to read literature produced by scholars of tourism representing diverse disciplines. I will review at the conclusion of my presentation the methodologies that impress me as most helpful to those interested in religious expression.

This presentation follows a path beginning with a short introduction to the fundamentals of Balinese Hindu religion and culture. I will paint in broad strokes the significance of the temple complex Pura Besakih, coloring this symbolic center with distinctions between host and guest visitations. This provides a segue to a rather involved discussion of tourism and the problematic of authenticity — a central point of departure among students of tourism. I hasten to note, here, that I am persuaded by current studies of Bali which reject a simplistic rejection of tourism as destructive of tradition. Nor do I subscribe to uncritical appraisals of the effects of tourism as entirely positive for Balinese culture and society. My presentation concludes with an overview of these positions, especially in the context of methodological assumptions and practices. Further, I will draw some preliminary parallels between pilgrim and tourist, echoing the oft-quoted phrase from the Turners’ classic study: “a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist.” (V.& E. Turner, 1978, 20)

### ***Balinese Religious and Cultural Life***

The quote from Simonicca’s anthropological study of tourism (*Anthropologia del turismo*, 1997) informs the way in which I understand “religious tourism.” He writes that this type of tourist is partly or wholly motivated by religion, but travel is “connected with holiday-making or with journeys undertaken for social, cultural or philosophical reasons.” He adds that in Europe there are three sites: “pilgrimage shrines, cultural events and religious festivals.” (cited in Luigi Tomasi, “Homo Viator: From Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism, p.19) In Bali, the cultural and religious are interwoven and, according to Picard (the foremost student of Balinese tourism), “tourism in Bali cannot be conceived apart from Balinese culture.”(M.Picard, *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*, 1996) Cultural performances, such as dance and shadow puppetry, are the visible forms communicated to the world audience. But in Balinese culture the world is divided into visible (*sekala*) and invisible (*niskala*) realms that require ceaseless practices to keep them in balance. Tourists arrive anticipating the stunning beauty of the landscape. The visible drama of volcanic shapes and

terraced rice fields does not disappoint. However, tourists return home with little or no recognition of the religious significance of the sculptured irrigation pathways, mountains and craters, and the movement of water from high to lower locales.

In this condensed introduction to Bali, three elements of religion (*agama*) and custom (*adat*) are noted: 1) spatial/ geographic; 2) temporal/genealogical; and 3) actions/ritual. All of these elements are salient to the discussion of Pura Besakih, the “Mother Temple” and the thousands of other temples on Bali. (Please note that the term “pura” means temple.) Briefly, the paired relationship of high/low, under/above, upstream/downstream govern ritual life of the Balinese Hindu believer. Rather than reliance upon four cardinal directions (north/south, etc.), the Balinese identify the height of the mountain top (*kaja*) and sea level (*kelod*) as critical directions, the former associated with purity and sacredness; the latter, with disease and spiritual pollution. Mt. Agung, the highest volcano on the island — and the location of Pura Besakih — is one of three active volcanoes, and the streams originating on the mountain are considered to be holiest the further upstream their location. Thus, it is understandable the religion of the Balinese is called *Agama Tirtha*, translated as the religion of holy water, and that all ritual includes its use for blessings and purification. Another directional duality critical to Balinese cultural and religious activity refers to the sun’s movement from east to west. Every village situates its three temples according to this cosmic path: only the *dalem* temple associated with death is found on the western side of the village. Ancestors become deities after an elaborate series of ritual and are honored in family temples, as well as in the Pura Besakih complex.

I have indicated that the religion of the Balinese is either identified as *Agama Tirtha* or Bali Hinduism. The latter identification requires clarification. The content and devotional character of Balinese religion differs from that found in India, in spite of the fact that classic texts of the latter tradition (e.g., the Mahabarata and Ramayana) dominate cultural performance. In addition to belief in Brahma, Siva (Siwa), and Vishnu (Visnu), the Balinese worship Widhi Wasa (or Tjintia), an indigenous pre-Hindu deity unifying the three and represented as an androgynous figure; Widhi Wasa has been absorbed by one Siwa sect. Without rehearsing the historical context of Hinduism — its reception and transmission on the island of Bali centuries ago with the expansion of Javanese Hinduism — it is important to note that the official designation of Balinese religious identity is “Hinduism.” Only five religions are recognized according to Indonesian law, and Bali Hinduism is not one of them. (A number of political subtexts follow from this fact, including Jakarta’s control of religious life and the scope of inclusion under the national ideology of absolute monotheism). Further, students of Bali emphasize that Hinduism as practiced is not monolithic. Barth’s serendipitous phrase is worth repeating: Bali is a “luminous mosaic.” (F. Barth, *Balinese Worlds*, 1993) He refers not only to the rich and diverse expression of Bali Hinduism but to the religious contribution of the other 5 percent of the religious landscape (Muslims, Buddhists and Christians).

Ritual activity reflects layers of temporal order governed by several calendars. In addition to life cycle ritual (from birth to death), the prevalent 210-day calendar dictates when village members mark the annual anniver-

sary of the purification of the temple (known as *odalan*). This is a time when the deities are invited to descend in order to receive homage. This ubiquitous ceremony is also conducted at Pura Besakih by Balinese pilgrims observing their respective ancestor deities at this holiest of sites. Remarking on the symbolic character of the “Mother Temple” on Mt. Agung, Hildred Geertz writes: “This temple in important ways represents Bali to its inhabitants and is considered by some to encompass the whole society.” (H. Geertz ed., *State and Society in Bali*, 1991)

### ***Pura Besakih***

All Balinese recognize the inextricable sacred character of Mt. Agung and the temple complex of Pura Besakih. Visibility of the former, except for its peak when under cloud cover, is ever present and acknowledged as the residence of Siwa, who descends along with other major deities and the many royal ancestral deities associated with origin narratives of the area surrounding Pura Besakih at certain auspicious times. It is recognized as the temple for all, representing the orientation point (*kaja*) for all Balinese Hindus. According to scholars who have published the best accounts in the English language (see Lansing and Stuart-Fox, both 1991; and I Gd. Pitana, 2002), this complex pre-dated the coming of Brahman Hindu priests to Bali (from Java) but has long been associated with the authority of high priests and the royal kingdoms that ruled before Dutch colonial governance. Limitations of time preclude my review here of the compelling thick cultural and political description attendant to Pitana’s assertion that temples are both sites of worship and “sources of power.” (Note: His analysis of “status struggles” among the Brahman priests of tradition and those high priests who have not inherited this position for participation at Pura Besakih provides ample material for another study of temple culture and political authority.)

Situated on the southern flank of Mt. Agung, the complex requires a good deal of physical exertion for ascent to the site of more than 80 temples. Pilgrim and tourist climb a steep hill en route to the complex and then many stairs and terraces before reaching their respective destination. For the tourist, a form of ascending and descending is undertaken as well as the encircling of the 86-temple complex, with many opportunities for viewing and photographing the splendid surroundings. The pilgrim, accompanied by many others from the village, descent or occupation group attend to worship at one of the appropriate sites. The main sanctuary represents the symbolic center (*Pura Penataran Agung*) with nine pagoda-like towers (the largest in Bali). There are also three “chairs” for each of the three Hindu Gods. Four classifications order the complex: public (open to all Balinese Hindus), ancestral, village and occupational. Throughout the calendar year, groups of pilgrims, bearing offerings for worship, come to mark some auspicious time. Brahman high priests (*pedanda*) officiate at six of the more than 70 rituals conducted over the 210-day year at Pura Besakih. *Pemangku* (village priests) are the principal leaders of worship in the many other ceremonies. General support has long been a source of tension, and, historically, the cost of maintenance has shifted from kingdoms, to the colonial power, to regencies, to state authority. Currently, the official Hindu association of Bali (Parisada Hindu Dharma) has authority over the site, with the considerable involvement of both the local provincial and central

Indonesian bureaucracies.

There is no ostensible blurring of identity between pilgrim and tourist at Pura Besakih. Although each approaches the site in the same way — by some form of vehicle — the pilgrim's community reflects, except for exceptional religious events, everyday relationships (association with the village, occupational group or descent community) and is accompanied by representatives of the priestly strata. Tourists, similarly, may arrive with a group — companions on the tour, “package” associates for the day or the entire stay in Bali. Both pilgrim and tourist witness the striking vision of towered structures and magnificent vistas. But, the pilgrim has ritual “work” to perform.

The tourist generally ascends the steep hill to the complex on hired motorcycle, often descending from the site with an interest in browsing and shopping in some of the innumerable tourist stalls arrayed along both sides of the road leading to and from the complex. Bali Hindu pilgrims experience a sacred encounter, honoring deities and ancestors and believing that their acts of propitiation will grant health and prosperity.

The visitor to Pura Besakih is rarely at the site for more than two hours, ushered to the grounds by a tour guide responsible for a schedule of tourist sites. Once at the first level of the complex, the tourist joins others of the same language group, to be escorted by an official guide who will provide abbreviated descriptions of some of the temples. The visitors, who have done some preparatory study, are likely to make inquiries about the ritual performances and or architectural characteristics of the complex. Information is superficial. As one tourist from whom I secured a response about the experience observed: “The local guide was engaging but not very good. I was frustrated over not beginning to comprehend what this place truly means to local people.”

All tourists must respect the dress code required at all temples: legs covered, often by means of an inexpensive Bali-purchased sarong, and waist bound with a scarf. This conformity to appearance is a minimal requirement the host tourism authorities have put into formal place in order to provide a respectful presence at places of worship. Clearly, it represents a small gesture of deference to the host community's expectations of temple appearance, a far cry from the temple dress of the Balinese Hindu.

In the course of my study of religious tourism, I have initiated a preliminary inquiry about tourist experiences at Pura Besakih and Borobodur. Although the sample of responses is small, two tentative conclusions emerge: 1) Pura Besakih offers stunning views that assure an aesthetic experience and, 2) the spiritual/religious significance of the temple complex remained elusive, but the monumental and historical character impressed the observer. Most notably, comments suggested a problem with “being there” and what MacCannell refers to as the quest for “authenticity.” (MacCannell, *The Tourist*, 1999) One respondent wrote of his sense of being an “interloper.” Another considered her lack of participation in “the religious heritage” that imbued a sacred site with spiritual significance.

## *Balinese Tourism*

It should not come as a surprise that much has been written by anthropologists about Bali and, more recently, about the implications of tourism for the island noted for its welcome climate, rich culture and “exotic” religious expression. What is distinctly surprising, for me, is the general assessment that tourism has not been the principal cause of cultural erosion and social destabilization. Observers conclude that shifts in “tradition” are associated with modernization and globalization. Tourism is a derivative of these powerful changes and has seriously challenged land and people with undeniable negative consequences of the inequitable income distribution, imbalance in occupational patterns, a significant drain on water resources and the disruption in what had been relative homogeneity of the population. Yet, tourism has led to a cultural revitalization, including substantive increases in pilgrimage activity to Pura Besakih undertaken by locals. In short, the encounter of guests from abroad with the host community point to “mixed” reviews, compounded by recent crises in Indonesia and, particularly, Bali. A recent study released by the World Bank reports as much regarding the status of the Balinese economy post the Kuta bomb tragedy. (See Oct. Report of World Bank, AID, et al)

Picard, whose well received study of Balinese tourism by intellectuals of the Balinese community, approvingly quotes the former governor of Bali’s view: “Tourism is for Bali, not Bali for tourism.” (Picard, 1991) In this mantra-like statement, one can discern the ambivalence of the Balinese, suggesting concerned stewardship over boundaries between guest desires and host control, between accommodation for successful tourist revenue and preservation of the very “tradition” that calls tourists to Bali. It reflects, as well, the issue of control – a vastly complicated and volatile issue, catalyzing local divisiveness and suspicion of central authority and international organizations. From this “thick” reality of economic needs, decentralizing patterns and cultural expressions, certain conclusions are warranted. Given limitations of time, I will offer these in outline as follows, indicating the theoretical and methodological approaches that have infused my understanding of tourism in Bali.

1. The host culture is never passive. The Balinese have responded to incursions from tourist development that promote mass tourism as distinguished from cultural tourism. Two recent contestations regarding pilgrim sites provide support for this position. The first emerged from a large hotel conglomerate’s plans to build adjacent to the world famed temple of Tanah Lot. Locals organized and used media to build solidarity against capital interests, perceived as disrespect for the active presence of a worship community as well as the centuries-old temple, saturated with sacred symbolic geographic significance. These resistance efforts failed to prevent the construction of the hotel but did accomplish two long-term results: a) restrictions on the height and proximity of hotels for sacred sites; and b) the awakening of many Balinese to the fragility of their environment and opportunities to act with a sense of empowerment over their land and culture. The second case, not expressed as a popular resistance movement but more successful in effort, was the rejection of a move to declare

Pura Besakih a UNESCO preservation site. In this instance, the Balinese Hindu community refused to relinquish its authority over this symbolic center, fearing the good intentions of the World Heritage site project might impugn their jurisdiction over practices and care of Bali's greatest pilgrimage site.

2. Tourism is a system of exchange values, an instrumental relationship involving internal resources and external values. The cultural "capital" (Picard) of Bali entices guests/tourists to seek experiences "away from home." In Bali, this exchange has had the beneficial consequence for the host community interpreting the guests' enthusiastic gaze as one that attests to cultural worthiness. This circularity of recognition serves as stimulus for locals to take greater interest in traditional cultural performance and preservation. Such mutual engagement of host and guest cannot be reduced to mere economic value. Picard asserts that when this occurs boundary maintenance is blurred, what he terms "touristification" displaces or throws out of balance cultural values. In effect, pilgrimage sites and religious ritual in Bali become products, commodified tourist objects that are pre-packaged excursions for the guest. This eroded exchange has the consequence of contributing to the loss of an authentic cultural expression.
3. In addition to an internal/external tension between host and guest, the Balinese context raises the question of power and the insider/outsider relationship. Understood as the relationship between locals of the periphery (Bali) and the central bureaucracy of Indonesia, the discussion turns on the question of policy and power. Picard asserts that tourism has been an "imposed" reality that had its origin under Dutch colonial administration and became a major developmental interest of the Jakarta administration and its commitment to mass tourism. Ida Ayu Agung Mas, one of the island's most important social critics, decries the Jakarta government's exploitation of Bali as its "milking cow." (In Panji Trisna and Urs Ramseyer, 2002) In short, a second colonization continues to date and has expanded to include global economic bureaucracies such as IMF and the World Bank. Over a century of tourist activity focused on economic marketing of the cultural life of the Balinese, according to Picard, who have seen the implications of weak planning from the host community's standpoint: ecological jeopardy and inequitable distribution of material benefits, causing imbalances between the substantial service sector and the village economy. (With the decimation of the tourist industry after the Kuta bombing, NGO, government and local activists have begun discussion of alternatives to mass tourism.)
4. Bali, the tourist destination of thousands, commencing in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to date, is a construction in large measure based upon the appealing trope of paradise. Evolving from a notion of a "last paradise" that outsiders might visit before the serenity and romantic ease of a simple lifestyle disappeared, to a recent metaphorical call to the "lost paradise," Bali is cast in mythic terms. This invention of place and people belies MacCannell's understanding of the tourist as a seeker in the quest for authenticity. Cast in Tomasi's language of the contemporary religious tourist, "what was the

supernatural in the past... is now the cultural-exotic, but also the sacred.” ( In Swados and Tomasi, 2002). There are at least two subtexts to this constructed motif: a) authenticity is gained by the tourist matching prior images, gleaned from tourist guide books, postcards and other ephemera, with the experience of sightseeing and b) paradisaical Bali has long been exported as exotic which, in turn, is experienced as sacred in its otherness. In any case, image production of “paradise” is a compelling enticement and, obviously, holds some possibilities for comparison between the pilgrim and the religious tourist.

5. The tension between monument or mall – that condensed understanding of sacred site and market/commercial opportunity — cannot be analyzed without interdisciplinary theories and methodologies. Tourist and pilgrimage studies require an openness to art history, landscape architecture, history of religion, ethnography and international economics and governance. Clearly, teamwork and close collaboration will yield better understanding and concrete goals designed to preserve the vulnerable cultural landscape of the world’s people.