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Leadership and the limits of political control. A Balinese 'Response' to Clifford Geertz*

In 1840 several Dutch envoys were sent to South Bali to investigate the political situation on the island. Soon it turned out that the Balinese polity was a far cry from the western model of the state as a sovereign entity with well-defined border-lines, a bureaucratic administration, and a power monopoly at the centre. But what kind of political system the Balinese did actually have remained a mystery to the envoys. The reports they sent to their superiors reflect their confusion in this respect:

Since my first arrival here, I had given myself the task of gaining a picture of the relationships between the rajas [kings]... furthermore about the way of their government, their power etc. The more I learned about it, the more I noticed that I became entangled in a labyrinth of complex family relations and interests. All this became even more complicated by the divergence of information, which was given differently, as one received it from [representatives of various] royal lineage[s]... or anyone else.¹

Everything here is chimerical, nothing clear-cut; everyday the most blatant contradictions supplant each other.²

Similar problems were faced by nineteenth-century colonial officials elsewhere in Southeast Asia. They too had to cope with the complexities of local political systems with which they were not familiar. They were, in other words, not so sure what Southeast Asian 'states' were. At the same time, however, academic writings in Europe produced a facile picture of Asian states and empires. Obviously, Asia was 'non-European', but there were (or at least had been) strong states. In this respect the notion of 'oriental despotism' provided a simplistic but persuasive image of Asian empires in the past, characterised by despotic rule over village republics. This model helped to legitimise the colonial conquest of large parts of Asia as well: once the 'despots' were replaced by rational and benevolent colonial rule, the population was guaranteed an undisturbed life within the closeness of its traditional villages.

Asian history seemed of little relevance to the new white rulers because Asian

* This is a revised version of a paper presented at the EASA conference held in Prague in 1992. The discussion of the Kidung Nderet is part of a larger article on Balinese representations of the past, published in *Indonesia* (Schulte Nordholt 1992).

1 D. B. Schuurman, report on his visit to Bali in 1840, General State Archives The Hague, archive Nederlandse Handelmaatschappij. Author's translation.

2 Report H. J. Huskus Koopman 30-6-1840, National Archives of Indonesia, Jakarta, Geh.Besl. 5-8-1840-La K3. Author's translation.

society was characterised as static. Only in two respects a degree of historical change was thought possible. In the first place there was the cyclical pattern of the rise and fall of dynasties, but this, however, never produced structural change. Secondly, whereas western history became more and more synonymous with the ongoing evolution of western civilisation, the only long-term process which seemed to be fitting for Asian societies was a gradual and unavoidable process of decay. Somewhere in the past there had indeed been 'classical' states in Asia, but they had not been able to reproduce themselves, far less develop into political systems comparable to the achievements of western state making.

The irrelevance of Asian history was emphasised once again when colonial control gained ground. Not only the 'classical' Asian states but their history too was replaced by colonial rule. Although European historians studied the rise and fall of Asian dynasties they showed little or no understanding of the kind of kings and kingship they were looking at. Eventually Asian history was subordinated to the history of European expansion.

At the height of the late-colonial state the Dutch scholar J. C. van Leur (1955 [1934]) confronted the dominant colonial historiography with a new approach to Indonesian history. He rejected the Eurocentric periodisation and perspective of colonial historians. Inspired by the works of Max Weber, van Leur analysed the nature of political systems in Asia in sociological terms and emphasised the connections between economic and social structures, ideologies, and religion. Using 'universal' concepts like patrimonialism and patrimonial bureaucracy he demonstrated the fragmented nature of Javanese kingdoms. Lacking a stable power monopoly the royal centre was unable to exert direct control over the whole realm. Instead, the king controlled only a small domain while the rest of the realm was divided among regional lords who managed to develop a considerable power basis of their own. At the most, the king could exert some influence in the territories of these lords, depending on the extent to which they were willing to recognise his authority. 'Government' consisted in this context of a specific mixture of personal relationships between the king and his lords and a degree of bureaucratic administration, while a distinction between private and public interests was absent.

It was only after the process of decolonisation, when colonial historiography lost its hegemony, that the significance of van Leur was widely recognised. His work, and that of another remarkable sociologist, B. J. O. Schrieke (1955-57) marked a watershed in the study of Indonesian history.

Van Leur's work was, of course, criticised. His insufficient knowledge of historical sources and the way he treated Weber's ideal types, as if these concepts represented a historical reality, were major points of criticism (Meilink-Roelofs 1962). Especially the rather rigid application of Weberian ideal types had far-reaching consequences: ironically, van Leur's efforts to emphasise the autonomy of Asian history *vis-à-vis* European influences resulted in an essentially static picture of Indonesian society.

While during the 1950s Indonesian studies in the Netherlands experienced a period of crisis as a result of the decolonisation, and elsewhere in the world new centres of research were established, it was W. F. Wertheim who continued at the University of Amsterdam the historical-sociological approach of Indonesian society advocated by van Leur. Wertheim was, moreover, more successful in combining the use of sociological concepts with a perceptive understanding of historical change (Wertheim 1959, 1964). Wertheim's approach was a sound alternative to the simplistic

evolutionism prevalent in the 1950s and early 1960s, in which 'modernisation' was the key concept and the new nation-state the 'natural' setting for historical research.

Before long, however, historians of Southeast Asia turned away from the nation-state and leaders and institutions operating at the national level, and focused their attention on regional histories. By choosing the region they tried to discover the local foundations and cultural diversity of large political entities like Indonesia. Perhaps even more important was that this approach brought historians closer to what is, after all, the real issue: the people themselves. Only a local perspective could make the anonymous masses into actors on the stage of Indonesia's history.

The regional approach not only enabled Southeast Asian historians to fill in many gaps and uncharted areas in the history of the area during the colonial period, gradually they also entered the largely unknown but rich and fascinating world of pre-colonial Southeast Asia. Again, historical research was confronted with the question of what kind of political systems existed in that period. Instead of the static image of oriental despots on the one hand and village republics on the other, a much more dynamic picture of Southeast Asian politics emerged, emphasizing the interaction between leaders and followers. It turned out that the myriad of vertical personal linkages formed one of the keys to a better understanding of pre-colonial political systems (Reid 1988: 120-1; Tambiah 1985a: 268). In line with this is the approach by Lucien Hanks (1975), based on his research in Thailand. Hanks sketches a succession of configurations of central leaders and their entourages. The entourage is not a homogeneous group but consists of individuals each of whom maintains a reciprocal bond with the leader. Around this entourage there is the wider circle of persons who, via the members of the entourage, may be counted among the leader's followers, albeit less directly.³

At about the same time the image of the village as an autonomous entity was 'shattered' as well (see for Java, Onghokham 1975; Breman 1980; Kumar 1980). Instead of an agrarian society without history a much more diversified and turbulent picture emerged. The village as the cornerstone of rural order tended to dissolve and was replaced by phenomena like mobility, migration, landless labourers, slavery, bandits, and perennial warfare among the nobility. Taking the predominant role of conflict and violence in everyday life into account and pointing to the structural limitations of the pre-colonial polities, Michael Adas proposed the term 'contest state' to characterise the political arenas of Southeast Asia.⁴

3 Hanks' conceptualisation should be seen against the background of the so-called 'loose structure' debate concerning the Thai social order, which will not be elaborated on here. I believe that the notions of entourage and circle can be used in the Indonesian context as well.

4 'Central in this form of government is rule by a king or emperor who claims a monopoly of power and authority in a given society, but whose effective control is in reality severely restricted by rival power centres among the elite, by weaknesses in administrative organization and institutional commitment on the part of state officials, by poor communications, and by low population-to-land ratios that place a premium on manpower retention and regulation. These politics gave rise to policies in which there was a constant struggle between the ruler and the nobility, between factions of the elite at various levels, and between supra-village elite groups and village notables and peasants for the control of labour and the agricultural production which formed the basis of these predominantly agrarian states. Although the fortunes of the contending parties fluctuated greatly over time, their continuing struggle over revenue control and the inability of any of the parties to dominate the others decisively on a sustained basis suggest the concept of the contest state as a useful way to characterize this form of political organization' (Adas 1981: 218).

Once the dynamics of Southeast Asia's past were discovered, and instead of stable structures the fluidity of political relationships was emphasised, it became imperative to re-evaluate the nature of the pre-colonial political systems. Although patrimonialism remained a helpful starting point, it had by now become very doubtful whether the term patrimonial bureaucracy really helped to understand the vague and fluid relationships described in recent publications (Tambiah 1985a). One might even wonder whether the term 'state' is still appropriate. After a century of western academic discourse the image of the state in (Southeast) Asia has changed from despotism, via (patrimonial) fragmentation, into an elusive phenomenon: 'The closer one looks at any given state in traditional Southeast Asia, the more it seems to dissolve before one's eyes. Upon examination, it appears not to be 'governed' nor even 'administered' in any systematic way at all, and one is forced to ask just what it is that holds such a 'state' together (Gesick 1983: 1). The confusion on the part of western historians and social scientists summarised here, is at first sight rather similar to the observations of the Dutch envoys sent to Bali in 1840. In order to find a way out of this problem the analytical approach has shifted towards the realm of symbolic action. Instead of looking at Southeast Asian polities in terms of failing governments and imperfect administration, indigenous notions of hierarchy and circular conceptions of space, heavily influenced by Indian concepts, are explored (Gesick 1983).

The turn towards symbols involved a renewed interest in questions concerning the nature of kingship and processes of Indianisation of Southeast Asia. These questions are especially relevant for Bali, which is widely known as the last island in the Indonesian Archipelago where Hinduism withstood the sands of time. Bali became, moreover, inextricably linked with the concept of the 'theatre state' as launched by Clifford Geertz (1980). In his book Geertz proposes a new approach to pre-colonial 'states' in Southeast Asia by emphasising the central importance of symbolism as expressed in royal rituals. Geertz summarised his thesis in a powerful metaphor:

The expressive nature of the Balinese state was apparent through the whole of its known history, for it always pointed not toward tyranny, whose systematic concentration of power it was incompetent to effect, and not even very methodically toward government, which was pursued indifferently and hesitantly, but rather toward spectacle, toward ceremony, toward the public dramatization of the ruling obsessions of Balinese culture: social inequality and status pride. It was a theatre state in which the kings were the impresarios, the priests the directors and the peasants the supporting cast, stage crew and audience. The stupendous cremations, tooth filings, temple dedications, pilgrimages and blood sacrifices, mobilizing hundreds and even thousands of people and great quantities of wealth, were not means to political ends: they were the ends themselves, they were what the state was for. Court ceremonial was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state, but rather the state, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power. (Geertz 1980: 13).

Geertz rightly argues that western thinking about political power has moved in too narrow a framework since Machiavelli and that royal ritual is far more than mere decoration gilding the 'real' machinations of power (1980: 121-36).⁵ Nevertheless, his historical analysis does raise a number of questions.

5 Susan Hoeber Rudolph supports him in this respect. Referring to symbols and rituals she says: 'We underestimate the power and reality of these forces. It is a lacuna in our historical and theoretical imagination ... We must treat the symbolic as a phenomenon' (1987: 742). See also Cohen (1969, 1974, 1979), who pleaded for this from the point of view of political anthropology.

At the core of the Balinese *negara* Geertz places the king and his court as the exemplary centre: 'the court and the capital is at once a microcosm of the supernatural order ... and the material embodiment of political power ... It is the state' (1980: 13). Through this construction of an exemplary centre and in observance of royal ritual, the 'state' was given shape, modelled primarily after a supposedly superhuman, cosmic order. Implicitly, Geertz refers here to the theory of Robert Heine Geldern (1942), who states that the cosmic order was reflected in the earthly order in which the king was to mediate an equilibrium between macrocosm and microcosm. On Bali the enduring divine order was copied in, for instance, the architecture of the royal centre and in ritual. Geertz's interpretation, however, suggests too close a parallel between the divine order as imagined and the political practice of the people. The latter falls short of the ideal model and the former is open to more than one interpretation to start with.⁶ Another problem is that Geertz makes it look as if the royal elite and the people lived in worlds that were almost wholly separate, even to such an extent that 'culture came from the top down, while power welled up from the bottom' (Geertz 1980: 85). This would mean that the nobility was preoccupied with the ritual expression of status differences and the imaginative construction of the divine order, while the population gave shape to daily life in locally organised frameworks characterised by a 'pluralist collectivism' (Geertz 1980: 48). Geertz attaches even greater significance to this distinction between nobility and commoners by linking it with the distinctions between theatrical expression and instrumental government, between culture and power, and between religion and politics. Stanley J. Tambiah is right in saying that this sort of approach leaves us with an almost completely disconnected society where elite and populace can hardly engage in vital interaction (Tambiah 1985b: 319). Moreover, the 'power' which upheld the splendour of the theatre state remains an enigma: Whence does it emanate, how is it organised, who controls it?⁷ Just as Geertz's distinction between elite and people seems artificial, so also the analytical distinctions between power and pomp, between politics and religion, between 'the cultural forms of the divine king cult and the social paradigms of royal authority' (Geertz 1989: 125) seem untenable.⁸

Finally, the concept of the theatre state leaves little room for the conflicts and the violence inherent to Balinese society.⁹ Geertz tends to picture a Balinese king as 'an icon, a figuration of the sacred, in itself sacred' (1980: 108). In so doing he underestimates the part played by central leaders, which was necessarily a very active one. As I will show, the more successful Balinese rulers were anything but anonymous objects of ritual, they were evident leaders who survived by personally commanding the

6 Geertz implicitly agrees with the ontological explanation of this model given by Heine Geldern (1942). Presumably, a 'cosmic conscience' once gave rise to the macro-microcosm relation. The 'ratio' of the model remains obscure (Tambiah 1985a: 256-7).

7 Walters (1980) pointed in this respect to the fact that the importance of power relationships is generally underestimated by Geertz and those who apply his interpretive approach.

8 In this connection A. M. Hocart's *caveat* should be taken to heart: 'How can we make any progress in the understanding of cultures, ancient or modern, if we persist in dividing what people join and in joining what they keep apart?' (Hocart 1952: 28).

9 Tambiah 1985b: 324: In a number of places Geertz does prove to be aware of the discrepancy between the ideal order as imagined and the harsh political reality (see for instance 1980: 18). But these are unconnected remarks, hardly or not at all brought into the purview of his major thesis.

respect of their environment. And if they didn't their realm was soon threatened by chaos and decay as will be shown below.

Here I will not discuss the very important questions regarding the symbolics of power, the power of ritual, and the nature of the Balinese 'state', which had to secure the continuation of life. Instead I will concentrate on the pragmatics of politics and power in nineteenth-century Bali.¹⁰ I want to show a picture of Balinese politics which contrasts sharply with the image of the theatre state. Moreover, this picture represents a Balinese view on the dynamics of power relationships and the fragility of royal authority.

Before I give a summary of this local perspective on power and politics I must briefly introduce two different textual genres, by which Balinese represented their past.¹¹ The first is the genealogical narrative, or *babad*, in which the origin and descent of a particular (noble) clan is revealed. These genealogical narratives emphasise in the first place continuity and can be considered as 'state-making' texts, in the sense that they formulate and explain a hierarchical order, the leading role of a ruling clan and the divine origin of its power. Next to the *babad* there is another genre of texts: the 'songs of destruction', or *uwug*, which should be read as intermezzo's within the larger framework of the genealogical narratives. To this genre belongs the *Kidung Nderet* (Song of Nderet), which will be discussed in this article.¹² The *Kidung Nderet* is part of a larger genre of poems, called *gaguritan*. The stories told in these poems are located in the world of commoners and elaborate on moral issues in the relationship between villagers and those in power. As far as we know at this moment the *uwug* appeared shortly after 1850. Some of these texts describe the military confrontations with the Dutch, often in combination with internal conflicts, while others concentrate on internal wars. It is not unreasonable to suppose that there was a direct relationship between the increasing pressure from the Dutch colonial state on Bali during the second half of the nineteenth century, which intensified internal warfare, and the emergence of the *uwug* in which these developments were in a way evaluated. It seems to me that there may have been an awareness among Balinese leaders that they were threatened by new external dangers which not only caused considerable internal tensions but were also beyond their control. The awareness of this problem may have led Balinese writers to create the *uwug* in order to record and interpret the crisis with which they were confronted. Although the crisis which is described and analysed in the *Kidung Nderet* occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century, I think that the major themes fit very well within the atmosphere of the late nineteenth century when the poem was composed.¹³

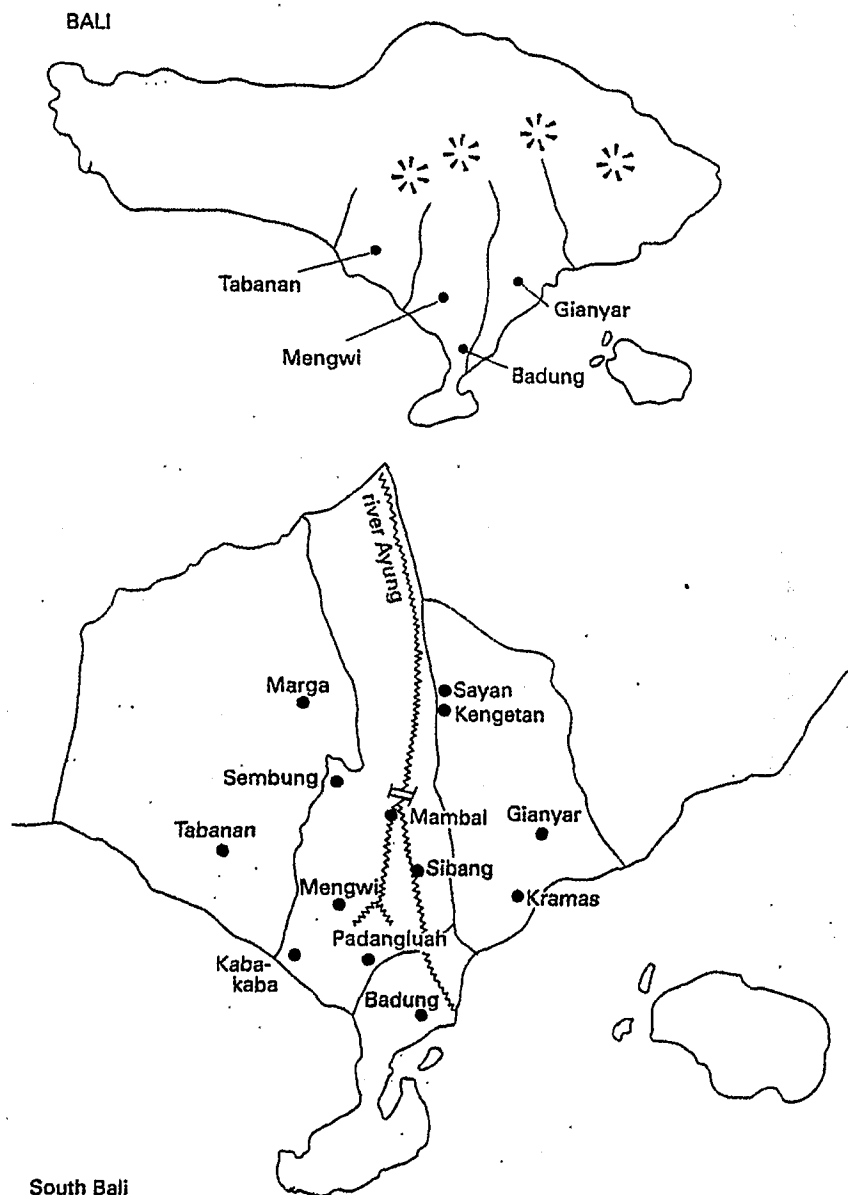
In this respect Vickers (1991) has made a valuable suggestion why *uwug* texts were written in the form of a *gaguritan*. He argues that this genre is concerned with emotion and crisis. More particularly *gaguritan* contain 'a discourse of emotion in which happiness and confusion as mental states feature most prominently', while 'forgetting

10 See for a discussion of the Balinese 'state' Schulte Nordholt forthcoming, ch. 5. Eventually the pragmatics of power, which are elaborated in this paper, and the symbolic conceptualisation of the state must be brought together within a single analytical framework, otherwise both the 'pragmatics' and the 'symbolics' of power cannot be properly understood.

11 These genres are analysed in more detail in Schulte Nordholt 1992.

12 *Kidung Nderet*, University Library Leiden, Oriental Manuscripts Or. 15.102.

13 The authorship and possible reason why this *kidung* was created will be discussed below.



South Bali
 FIGURE 1 Map of Bali identifying South Balinese locations mentioned in the text

and confusion are clearly part of the same moral problem'. Taking this argument as a point of departure I will not concentrate on 'mental states' as such, but try to elaborate the aspects of confusion and forgetting within the wider context of nineteenth-century Balinese politics.

The *Kidung Nderet* is a beautiful song about a major crisis in a particular Balinese kingdom, Mengwi, located in the southern plain of the island. The text gives a lively

picture of Balinese politics around 1820, and provides valuable information about the relationships between kings and lords, and between lords and followers, about irrigation, taxation and trade, about intrigues, strategies, misunderstandings and the chaos of warfare, but above all about the nature of leadership. In the song all these issues are intertwined and together they are put in motion through the narrative in order to demonstrate the limits of royal power. As such the text reflects the complexities as well as the logic of political processes in nineteenth-century Bali. I will argue that the main theme of the text is about loyalty which formed the backbone as well as the Achilles heel of Balinese politics. When old bonds of loyalty were forgotten and leadership proved to be weak, continuity and order were gone. Instead confusion prevailed and princes and peasants faced the threat of destruction.

Here follows a summary of the *Kidung Nderet*:

Under the rule of the famous ruler, Cokorda Munggu [who ruled in the second part of the eighteenth century], Mengwi prospered. After his death, his widow Sayu Oka was in power, but when she grew old things went wrong. Her son, Gusti Agung Putu Agung, is now the king of Mengwi. He is weak, and the *Kaliyuga* [time of confusion] is near.

The old entourage of followers, who had proven their loyalty on the battlefield, was replaced by new and inexperienced favourites of the king. One of them is Sagung Nderet, a refugee from Kramas [a noble house east of Mengwi], who has become the leading figure in the royal centre. He supervises the collection of taxes. He doubled the taxes, does not allow delays of payment, and demands that everybody pay in cash. He also levies taxes on trade, cash crops, and pigs, and has a virtual monopoly on the sale of opium.

As 'major domus' Sagung Nderet takes good care of himself and has become a rich man. He is jealous of Made Tibung, a local lord who controls a large amount of people and rice fields south of Mengwi in the area of Padangluah and who was allowed to keep the taxes for himself.

Sagung Nderet convinces the king to withdraw the privileges granted to Made Tibung's family by the former ruler of Mengwi, and now he has to pay tax. Made Tibung considers the decision of the king to be unjust. 'Has the lord forgotten the grant of the old days?' He knows that Sagung Nderet is behind this action. Although he is only a refugee without a firm power base in Mengwi, Nderet is respected because he has direct access to the king. Made Tibung goes to Sibang to complain about his situation. But lord Kamasan [leader of a powerful royal lineage cum satellite of Sibang] cannot help him. 'Yes, when they are in trouble in Mengwi I am the second in rank, but when all goes well I have to clear off.'

In Mengwi there is however a man who is brave enough to inform the king about the negative effects of Sagung Nderet's policy. That is I Kemoning, an old servant. He tells the king that people outside the *puri* [royal palace] complain about the greediness of Sagung Nderet. I Kemoning warns the king not to listen to Sagung Nderet, for it is wrong to replace old and loyal followers. 'This will be the end of Mengwi.' He reminds the king of the old days, when Badung [a kingdom south of Mengwi] tried to conquer the rice fields of Padangluah on a day when the people of Padangluah went out in order to repair the dam Gumasih. When the news of the attack reached Mengwi the alarm blocks were beaten, and Queen Sayu Oka came out of the *puri*. She wept and asked her followers what to do. The brave men promised her to fight, and seated on a palanquin she went with them. The people of Padangluah were glad that the army of Mengwi came to rescue them. Together they fought against the invaders, and in the darkness of the night the troops from Badung were forced to flee in sheer chaos. Those were the good old days. The king does not know what to say; he is embarrassed.

A certain I Linggar overhears I Kemoning's story and goes to Sagung Nderet who decides to ask the king's permission to kill the old servant. And again the king listens to Sagung Nderet and concedes to his plan. Later that night I Kemoning is arrested and taken to the cremation place. I Kemoning knows in advance that he is going to be killed, but he does not want to betray his loyalty to the old king [Cokorda Munggu]. He is dressed in beautiful clothes and wants to dance

once more a scene from the *Gambuh* in which he metaphorically honours his ruler, Cokorda Munggu.¹⁴

This last request is granted. Then he is stabbed in the back and dies.

Meanwhile the people of Padangluah are in trouble. Their irrigation water does not flow any longer from dam Gumasih to their area. Due to neglect by Sagung Nderet the dam broke down and during the next five years the rice fields are dry.

The people from Padangluah go to Made Tibung and complain about their situation. What are Made Tibung's plans, why does lord Kamasan of Sibang not help him? Why does no one try to kill Sagung Nderet?

Made Tibung decides to go to Mengwi in order to ask the king to respect the old privileges and to send Nderet away.

Accompanied by his men Made Tibung leaves Padangluah, but when they arrive in Mengwi the place is deserted. The king does not appear, pretending to be ill. Finally the people of Padangluah return to their homes. They are angry. Made Tibung says: 'Now the time has come that Mengwi will be vanquished.' Gianyar, Badung and Tabanan [neighbouring kingdoms] are all enemies of Mengwi and willing to attack.

Made Tibung sends a messenger to Badung to ask for help and to offer his loyalty to the king of Badung. The king accepts the offer and promises to help Padangluah.

However, one of the old and experienced lords of Badung, Agung Kaleran, hesitates. Suppose this is a trick and Sagung Nderet is behind it. Perhaps we will be ambushed as soon as we enter Padangluah. The king answers that he has already given his word to Made Tibung; he has to keep his promise.

No problem, says Agung Kaleran, there is in Badung a group of worthless people: Buginese.¹⁵ Five hundred Buginese will go in front, followed by troops from Badung. If the Buginese are killed, bad luck; if they win, Badung will take over the area of Padangluah.

The Buginese men are mobilised and given *genje amuk*¹⁶ which has an immediate effect: they scream, dance and consider everybody who comes near as the enemy. More or less in trance they run to the north, to Padangluah.

Meanwhile the people of Padangluah are waiting for their allies from Badung. Towards the end of the day a bunch of wild-eyed Buginese fall upon them, attacking without a moment's hesitation. The leaders of Padangluah try to defend themselves while the panicked population flees in all directions. Made Tibung dies. Utter chaos prevails when dusk sets in and friend cannot be distinguished from foe.

Confusion and panic peak during the night. When the Buginese return home from the bloodshed they had inflicted, they run into the lords from Badung with their troops. Surprised by this new 'resistance' they run forward, while the people from Badung are convinced that they have marched into a Mengwi trap ...

Dawn brings at last to light who has been slaying whom. The bodies are buried in a large pit, and one of the Badung leaders laments the death of so many Buginese: his income [from trade] is now much reduced. But the benefits are clear: 'Don't worry, let us look for taxes in Mengwi.'

Shocked by the sudden invasion, unable to mobilise troops, and left alone by its major satellites, the royal centre is paralysed. Badung conquers the area of Padangluah, Tabanan attacks from the west. Gianyar attacks the eastern satellite of Kengetan and the lineage of Sayan. Dead bodies are not buried and soon an epidemic causes even more panic; food is extremely expensive.

14 *Gambuh* was a form of royal theatre, through which issues related to kingship and the moral behaviour of the nobility were elaborated; cf. Vickers 1986.

15 The Buginese come from South Sulawesi and were known as traders all over the archipelago. There was a Buginese trading community in south Badung.

16 Probably cannabis. According to Reid (1988: 125) 'Opium or cannabis was often used to inspire ... a warrior to defy death.'

Those who are still alive flee to Mengwi; among them is one of the leaders of Kengetan. Although he is a coward, he is sent to the north to Sembung, where he has to defend the northern part of Mengwi against attacks from yet another enemy, namely Marga. Perhaps the new leader of Sembung can attack Marga [here the story ends]

The contrasts between this song and the genealogical narratives (*babad*) are obvious. The *kidung* is not primarily concerned with matters like origin or descent; it has no genealogical framework, and does not refer to a distant past. The only reference to the past consists of a 'flashback', in which I Kemoning reminds the king of the good old days when leaders took care of their people, promises were kept, and bonds of loyalty withstood the threat of disorder. Towards the end of the story the contrast between the old days and the present chaos is emphasised when the war with Badung is lost.

The story focuses on a specific sequence of events which is narrated in chronological order. It presents the precise minutes of a process of decline, forgetting, loss of confidence, confusion, misunderstanding, treason, chaos and defeat. The logic of this chain of causes and effects is emphasised through a well-balanced composition of extremely realistic scenes which must have been very familiar to nineteenth-century Balinese. The *kidung* reads like a modern filmscript in which the story is played by a few key characters in different places, as a result of which we see the unfolding of the drama from various, but related perspectives.

Whereas the characters of the *babad* lack any personality since they represent basically ideal types (cf. Worsley 1972), the leading figures in the *kidung* are in the first place individual human beings who try, refuse, or simply fail to live up to their (political) responsibilities. Within its genre the *kidung* does indeed elaborate human emotions in terms of anger, honour, fear, and so on.

Conventional historians, in search of 'hard facts' will certainly like this story for its 'realism' and use it without further modifications. However, in that case the moral dimension of the story, which is enacted by the main characters, will be neglected. Whereas the *babad* creates a story about origin and descent in order to make it real, the *kidung* uses reality in order to discuss the moral problems which have to do with leadership and loyalty. The realistic nature of the story made the moral issues which are raised virtually inescapable: this is not just a story in which ideal models were enacted; it is real and imminent, and so are the issues.

In order to illustrate to what extent these moral issues are wrapped in reality, I will compare the story with information from other sources.¹⁷ The crisis which is evoked in the *kidung* took place between about 1820–1823, and the leading characters of the *kidung* are, as far as I know, based upon historical persons. There are no indications that certain figures, or even scenes were invented for the sake of the story.

Sayu Oka was the *padmi* (or primary wife) of Cokorda Munggu and dominated Mengwi after his death as queen-dowager. She came from the strong noble house of Kaba-Kaba and her power was not only based upon an alliance with this satellite, but also on landholding and followers under her personal control. The king, I Gusti Agung Putu Agung, was probably a grandson of Sayu Oka.¹⁸ Pierre Dubois, who

¹⁷ See for more details Schulte Nordholt forthcoming, ch. 3.

¹⁸ As a son of a *selir*, or secondary wife of the king, he was later adopted by a primary wife (who was also from Kaba-Kaba) of his father in order to raise his status and to become king.

stayed on Bali from 1828 to 1831, reports about this king that he was indeed a rather weak person. His most humiliating experience occurred in 1823. When Mengwi was invaded from all sides he had to surrender to the king of Badung.¹⁹

Also Agung Kamasan could be identified as a historical person who ruled the satellite of Sibang around 1820.²⁰

With respect to the trusted followers of the old order who were replaced by new favourites, it was possible to identify at least some of them. They belonged to families whose leaders had accompanied the second king of Mengwi during his campaigns to East Java in the first half of the eighteenth century and who were rewarded with privileged positions in Mengwi.²¹

It was also possible to identify Made Tibung. He was a descendant from an *anak astra* – a boy conceived by a commoner woman and recognised by the noble father – of Cokorda Munggu, who had given the area of Padangluah to this son. His descendants were willing to show me their babad in which a part of the story is told from their point of view.²² Combined with a lot of interview material it became clear that around 1820 the leader, Padangluah, was killed in a war with Badung. Local stories, moreover, reveal that the conflict described in the kidung, was in fact much more complicated, since there was also an internal feud between the two lineages of local powerholders in Padangluah. One faction led by Made Tibung offered its loyalty to Badung, whereas the other faction remained loyal to Mengwi. This information strongly suggests that the conflict of 1823 actually consisted of overlapping arenas in which at least three conflicts tended to reinforce each other: the first between the two local factions, the second between Made Tibung and Mengwi, and the third between Mengwi and Badung.

Finally Sagung Nderet could more or less be identified as well. According to genealogies found in Kramas and the Mengwi area, the house of Kramas was defeated by an emerging dynasty of Gianyar towards the end of the eighteenth century. Part of the Kramas family took refuge of Mengwi and was given a house in the village of Mengwi (that is in the ward (*banjar*) Alangkajeng, most of the inhabitants of which belonged to the entourage of the royal puri).²³ Like Made Tibung, Sagung Nderet is not remembered under that name, nor did anybody know a story about a major domus who was involved in a conflict with Padangluah. The genealogy of the descendants of the family from Kramas does however indicate an intimate relationship between the royal kingroup and the newly arrived refugees: a boy from the Kramas

19 Letters by P. Dubois, Royal Institute of Linguistics, Leiden (KITLV) Western manuscripts, H 281.

20 There were a lot of Agung's Kamasan, but an interesting detail is that Agung Kamasan says to Made Tibung that he has no sons. The genealogy of puri Sibang mentions a leader who had no sons and lived around 1820.

21 Schulte Nordholt forthcoming, ch. 2. When I learned about the existence of the kidung during my fieldwork in 1983, I showed a copy of the text to several informants in Mengwi and the area where Padangluah formerly was located. To my surprise no one knew this text, nor had anybody ever heard about Sagung Nderet. On the other hand many people knew stories about the war(s) between Badung and Mengwi. The problem was however that stories about wars in 1780, 1810, 1823, and 1885–91 were easily mixed up, so that it was not clear (which fragment of) which story had to do with the war of 1823.

22 I.e. the *babad* Meliling, Leiden University Library, Oriental manuscripts, Or. 16.902.

23 In Kramas the family had the more prestigious title *Gusti Agung*, but after the arrival of the refugees in Mengwi, they were degraded to the level of *Si Agung* (= *Sagung*).

family was adopted by the emerging royal lineage of Mayun.²⁴ Whatever the precise nature of this adoption may have been, it is possible that this boy was Nderet and that he started his career from within the royal entourage.

So far, this evidence about the main characters and events is circumstantial. Another aspect of the *kidung* is that it provides rather unique 'referential information' about Balinese politics, which fits very well in with data from other sources. I cannot discuss these in detail here, but I will mention a few points.

The first concerns the nature of leadership, and the relationships between centre and satellites and between leaders and followers. Reading the *kidung* it becomes evident that the political system in nineteenth-century Bali depended to a large extent on the public manifestation of leadership. See for instance the sharp contrast between the active role played by queen Sayu Oka in the 'flashback' and the passive attitude of the king when Made Tibung went to see him in Mengwi. The queen went together with her trusted followers to rescue the people of Padangluah, but when the people from Padangluah wanted to ask the king to do justice to them, he pretended to be ill. He was invisible, hiding himself behind the walls of his *puri*. Whether the weak and invisible king tried to live up to another role – that of an icon, a ritual object (cf. Geertz 1980) – is not mentioned in the *kidung*. Although public rituals were extremely important in order to enact the *negara*, the enactment required at least a group of people who believed that it was worthwhile making the authority of their king manifest. Under the conditions which prevailed in Mengwi in the early 1820s it was obvious that the staging of rituals was impossible and even irrelevant.

One of the negative judgements about Sagung Nderet in the *kidung* concerns the fact that his position in Mengwi is not based upon a decent following. He has, in other words, not demonstrated that he actually deserves to be an influential leader. His power is, instead, based purely on the fact that he has access to the king, and that he, the outsider, has appropriated the king's voice.

On another level the role of Made Tibung, caught between the 'forgotten' royal privileges and the material interests of his own men, illustrates the difficult position of local leaders. His decision to forget about his loyalty to the invisible king and to turn to Badung for help is not condemned in the *kidung*. On the contrary, it is seen as the logical result of the king's inactivity. His tragedy was, however, that he was going to be cheated by the lords of Badung. There were not at all interested in his problems. None of them bothered about his death; they were just after the money.

The lord of Sibang represents another kind of local leader. He does not want to get involved, despite his sympathy for Made Tibung and his aversion to the royal centre. The cynical attitude of Agung Kamasan towards Mengwi summarises nicely the very uneasy relationship between the royal centre and one of its main satellites which emerges also from other sources. The passive attitude of Agung Kamasan differs from the irresoluteness of the king, because the first and foremost interest of Agung Kamasan is to protect his own domain. He succeeds, for Padangluah is ruined, whereas Sibang stays out of the war.

A second point concerns the very interesting information about irrigation in

24 His name was Sagung (or as the genealogy now says: I Gusti Agung) Made Kajeng. The adoption is not mentioned in the genealogies of the Mengwi dynasty, but many adoptions were not mentioned. Moreover, it is not clear what adoption actually may have meant. Perhaps the boy of Kramas became a kind of *parekan* (favourite servant) of the leader of the lineage of Mayun.

connection with trade and taxation. It was possible to locate dam Gumasih just north of the village of Mambal; a small temple near the river Agung is called *pura* Gumasih, while one of the wards of Mambal has the same name. The reason why Made Tibung came to see Agung Kamasan was that the dam Gumasih was at that time probably located within the domain of Sibang.

The *kidung* makes clear that irrigation in nineteenth-century Bali was not just a local affair. Local irrigation was often part of a larger system which depended on a central water supply, for which higher levels of (noble) authority were responsible. Without noble protection at these higher levels, there was no water at all. As long as Made Tibung was not required to pay tax to the king he had maintained the dam and the conduits himself. When Made Tibung was obliged to pay tax to the king, Sagung Nderet became responsible for the irrigation system in his capacity of major domus, but he ignored his responsibilities.²⁵ Irrigation formed, in other words, not a separate domain which belonged to the world of villagers as Geertz (1980) seems to suggest, but consisted of several interconnected levels as a result of which the interests of the nobility and peasants were often intertwined. There are reasons to suppose that fertile rice fields in South Bali became a bone of contention at the beginning of the nineteenth century. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries trade in slaves (and from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards in opium) had formed the major source of income for the Balinese nobility. Due to changes in trade patterns in the archipelago, as well as the gradual abolition of slavery, Balinese powerholders had to look for other ways to obtain wealth. They proved to be flexible and perceptive, because within a few years slaves were replaced by other export items. Large quantities of rice, 'second (cash)crops' and pigs were exported by Chinese, Buginese and a few European traders to Java, Singapore and China.

'Money is the nerve of power,' wrote Dubois in one of his letters. The *kidung* illustrates that, as a consequence of the changes in the external trade, rivalry among the South Balinese nobility extended, more than before, to control of the fertile plains and eventually irrigation systems.

The *kidung* also provides some information about taxation. Sagung Nderet had not only tried to increase the taxation on rice fields, but he had also ordered the peasants to pay in cash. He introduced, moreover, new taxes on second crops and pigs while he tried to monopolise the opium trade as well.

The *kidung* does more than provide valuable factual information. It also offers a very perceptive analysis of the dynamics of nineteenth-century Balinese politics. Different aspects of the political system are brought together in a coherent analytical framework. In order to understand this I will now turn to the moral nature of the story.

It is obvious that the *kidung* depicts Sagung Nderet in a very negative way. He is pictured as a selfish person exclusively out to line his own pockets, and his behaviour

25 With regard to the damage done to the central water supply as a result of which the rice fields in Padangluah fell dry, I found an interesting story in the village of Gerih, near Mambal. Oral tradition has it that the main tunnel leading the water from dam Mambal/Gumasih to the south once collapsed. Right at that spot stood a temple of a clan of local notables, which went down when the tunnel caved in. Such an accident would have created an additional complication, because in order to repair damage done to a tunnel, outside specialists had to be contracted, but Made Tibung had no money to pay them.

is seen as one of the main sources of instability and chaos. A different reading of the text leads however to an alternative judgement. The overall economic changes in the archipelago during the first decades of the nineteenth century affected Balinese exports thoroughly, and left their mark on local politics. From the available data one gains the impression that the nobility played an active role in the transition from the slave trade to the export trade of agricultural products. There are no indications that something like a separate export – or ‘plantation’ – sector came into being. This implied that powerful lords sought to derive export surplus from their own domains by means of raising production and taxes. Further, royal centres made attempts to increase control over the mercantile activities in their satellites. In this context Sagung Nderet could be evaluated as a man who was attuned to the shifting times. Perhaps he was aware that his royal centre should make an effort to increase control over the changing market and fertile rice fields. Maybe he was a tough and loyal ‘royal manager’ who tried to impose central control on a booming economy. As a result the Mengwi dynasty penetrated deeper into local society than before, and this, in turn, led to opposition. Probably Sagung Nderet’s reputation as a scoundrel rests primarily on his inadequate authority. In people’s minds he remained a foreigner who fled from Kramas, a coward and an undeserving favourite of the king. Moreover, the old and trusted entourage of the king who were pushed aside, now stood on the sidelines watching Sagung Nderet amass his fortune. More particularly the conflict between Sagung Nderet, the ‘manager’, and Made Tibung, the representative of the old order in which privileges tended to fragment the system, is illustrative of central attempts to monopolise taxes and trade.

The outcome of these conflicts made clear that the centre’s bid failed. This was partly due to the weak central authority. More important was that the royal centre simply lacked the means to effectively establish centralisation. Actually Sagung Nderet achieved the very opposite of what he intended, for, rather than attaining central control, the centre lost its grip on the kingdom when the crisis reached a climax after 1820.

It was the fragmented nature of the political system which prevented the negara from becoming something that vaguely resembled a state. Instead, the negara displayed its characteristic pendulum movement: one driving force was the ambition to found a realm with royal grandeur, but, time and again, this ideal kept colliding with an obstinate praxis in which the forces of fragmentation continued to reduce the king to the level of a chief, or baronet. It is within this context that one should understand the moral issue presented in the kidung.

The disruptive forces causing confusion and disaster come, according to the kidung, from the outside. The opening lines announce the *Kaliyuga*, the time of confusion which will lead to *Pralaya*, the time of destruction. Like a natural disaster, such a process – whether or not inspired by divine will – is beyond human control, and morally neutral. But the next step is that this notion of fate is embodied in human beings and realised in social action. Here again the main characters are outsiders. One of these is Sayu Oka, and she is in two respects an outsider. In the first place she does not belong to the Mengwi dynasty since she is from the noble house of Kaba-Kaba. Secondly she is a woman. Although Sayu Oka was a powerful queen – in fact a large part of South Bali was reigned by women at the beginning of the nineteenth century – several sources depict such powerful women in negative terms, because female rulers were totally unpredictable. When Badung invaded Padangluah for the first time, Sayu

Oka wept and was close to a nervous breakdown, but thanks to the loyal support of the old entourage – which actually belonged to her husband – she resumed the (male) role of the leader and the invaders were beaten. Two other versions of the babad Mengwi offer a much more negative judgement about her. One states bluntly that under Sayu Oka's rule the Kaliyuga came over Mengwi and that she personified this evil.²⁶ The second text relates that she fell in love with the ruler of Gianyar, who was said to be an excellent Gambuh dancer. As a result she was no longer in control of herself and her realm.²⁷

Besides Sayu Oka, Sagung Nderet was the second outsider who bred evil in the centre of Mengwi authority. Nderet's role is contrasted with other characters: I Kemoning and Made Tibung. The death of I Kemoning represents nothing more than the deliberate assault on the old order. I Kemoning was innocent and prepared to risk his life in order to warn the king against Nderet. He is the ideal loyal follower: even in the very moment before his death he paid homage to his king. Whereas I Kemoning had only a moral point to defend, Made Tibung had also material interests and followers to look after. His position was based on old privileges on which he had built his career. When these privileges were withdrawn, and the royal centre ignored its responsibility to take care of a decent supply of water, and the king refused to see him, Made Tibung had no other choice but to turn to Badung in order to serve the interests of his own people.

Badung can be seen to be yet another external force which threatens Mengwi. The invasion by Badung is however not seen as a source of evil, but the normal consequence of the confusion and neglect prevailing in Mengwi. The cold calculations of the lords of Badung are reported in neutral terms. They would have been fools if they had missed this opportunity. Warfare was, at least in this case, not a semi-ritual display of prestige, but consisted of tricks and treason and did inflict death and disease. For the leaders of Badung, the loss of a couple of Buginese was, after moments of uncertainty, compensated by the acquisition of large tracts of fertile land.

Despite the emphasis on outsiders, the kidung does not conceal the fact that the main weakness rested in the very centre of the Mengwi dynasty. The final judgement concerns the king. He was the one who authorised Sagung Nderet's decisions; he forgot the old privileges of his loyal followers, and he knew very well that he did so!

One of the central themes of the kidung is that the negara rested in the very first place on personal bonds of loyalty between the centre and its satellites, and between the leader and his followers. In order to maintain these relationships they had to be remembered, and commemorated, in texts, in temples, on the battlefields, and in rituals. Underlying the ritual enactment of the negara was a complex and hierarchical network of loyalties which had to be preserved and reinforced by visible leaders who were to be trusted. Perhaps the most important political activity of these leaders was to remember. The moral lesson of the kidung is that it shows what happens if a leader starts to forget: the negara simply falls apart. Remembrance formed one of the basic 'institutions' of the nineteenth-century Balinese negara.

According to the late G. Ng. Ketut Sangka the kidung was composed by (or on account of) Cokorda Agung, king of Tabanan, who ruled from 1843 till 1903. When he

26 Samboengan Babad Mengwi, General State Archives, The Hague, Colonial Archive V26-4-1940-9.

27 Babad Arya Mengwi, University Library Leiden, Oriental manuscripts Or. 16.047.

was young there must have been eye-witness accounts of the events described in the kidung. When and why he composed this story is not known. In general Balinese writers start to write when they are at least middle aged. This leads to a date somewhere after 1850, and perhaps even close to the end of the nineteenth century. After the middle of the 1880s warfare swept over the large parts of South Bali due to the gradual expansion of the Dutch colonial state in the archipelago. I would guess that the king of Tabanan might have chosen the crisis of the 1820s in Mengwi in order to contemplate the present crisis. The text foreshadows moreover the fall of Mengwi in June 1891, which was a kind of 'remake' of the crisis described in the kidung.²⁸ The kidung is focused at the 'middle-level' of Balinese politics, that is between centres and satellites, where political concepts had to be realised in action. This perspective makes the kidung so interesting, for it illustrates in detail the dynamics of Balinese politics. As a text the Kidung Nderet is a good example of a 'thick description' by a Balinese. It reveals the 'local knowledge' of a leader about leadership and loyalty; it shows how fragile leadership is and demonstrates that forgetting leads to confusion and destruction. As such the kidung is a meaningful 'wink' at the concept of the 'theatre state'.

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28 See Schulte Nordholt forthcoming, ch. 6, on the fall of Mengwi.

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