



A Global and Local Narrative Collide: Traditional Distribution of Land Rights in the Contemporary Cultural Landscape of Bali

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The southern portion of Bali has been characterized by rice-terraced landscapes for centuries. This part of the island has had a long and conflicting tradition of intensive agricultural land-uses coupled with high population densities (Vickers 1996). The picturesque qualities of southern Bali's landscape have increasingly trumped the productive capabilities as land owners are able to make a better income by selling or leasing their land, investing the proceeds and living on the interest, than by growing rice (MacRae 2003). This is all compounded by the soaring international real estate market that has been a de facto step toward facilitating the systematic transfer of land from adat control to that of formal tenure ship (Basiago 1995). Thus, as land uses change and customary land tenure gives way to market pressures, development remains central to local Balinese concerns.

Prior to President Suharto's New Order government, Bali flourished under a traditional land tenure system, albeit complex, that was held relatively intact even after Dutch colonization in 1908 (Tsing 2005). This traditional tenure system is an intricate agreement between the visible and invisible, the social and political, and the ecological and economic that is typical of the Balinese relationship with any systemic organization (Matthews and Selman 2006). To understand these relationships it is important to explore two intertwined narratives specific to the island of Bali. The first narrative tells the story of internal or local forces that have shaped the land tenure system over the past 100 years. The second narrative is the elaborate tale of the external or global forces that have shaped the image of Bali during roughly this same 100-year period. Aligning these two narratives reveals the surprising intersections when the narratives collide in contemporary Bali, where both the local tenure system and the global image of Bali have contributed to the development pressures on the island's landscape.

As Bali grapples with the prospect of becoming an international piece of real estate in the face of globalization, many of these forces are no different than during the Dutch period of colonization, the scholarly and artistic explosion during the 1930s, and the ramifications from the New Order government from the 1960s onward. Thus, the island's contemporary development pressures beg the same question as each preceding historically-significant period: Can Bali's cultural landscape survive amidst these development pressures? It is precisely this question that contributes to the image-making process where Bali is seen as a paradise. Yet images of paradise are not that unless they teeter on the verge of loss. At each historically-significant intersection of local and global forces at work amidst the colonial/post-colonial transition in Indonesia, the image of Bali has been cast in relief against a fragile landscape. Deconstructing how this image of Bali was created and how this landscape has come to be conceived as fragile is best understood by layering the economic, ecological, social, and religious functions protected and promoted by the adat tenure system with the economic, ecological, social, and religious meanings associated with this landscape.

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