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Self, Soul Loss, and Motorbikes in Modern Bali

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Spring, 2017

Abstract:

In this paper I argue that modernity has paradoxically led to a reinforcement of traditional Balinese ritual practices instead of its demise. Modernity in Bali has resulted in increased numbers of motorbikes on the roads and other factors which create dangerous driving conditions. Motorbike accidents, which can cause soul loss, are thus more likely to occur, causing Balinese people to more frequently seek out traditional practices as a way to remedy soul loss. Traditional rituals are also used to prevent motorbike accidents. Therefore, certain consequences of modernity reinforce traditional ritual and solidify Balinese conceptions of self.

Keywords: motorbikes, modernity, Bali, soul loss, soul retrieval, ritual, identity, self, tradition

Introduction: Soul Loss and Why Motorbikes Matter

“What does soul loss look like?” I asked Pak Ngurah on a muggy Balinese morning. He was a portly man in his early fifties, and waited a moment to respond as he drew in a deep drag from a cigarette. As the leader of his own Balinese Hindu religious sect, it was clear he was used to having people ask him spiritual questions, and did not seem fazed. He leaned back into the intricately carved wooden bench on the immense porch of his mansion located at the outskirts of Denpasar, Bali’s capital city, and moved his hand from his substantial belly to gesture with his face. He pulled his mouth down into a slack-jawed position, and let his eyes go unfocused. He stared with vacant eyes into the distance. “Like this,” he said, “blank.”

In Bali, soul loss is a spiritual, physical, and social condition that occurs when a person experiences a trauma or accident. The shock of the event causes the individual’s soul to break from their physical body, leaving it to remain at the site of whatever calamity took place. Though soul loss can occur in any kind of situation that causes fright or physical injury to the victim, all instances of soul loss which I encountered during my time in Bali were sustained from motorbike accidents.

Within the last twenty years there has been an exponential growth in the number of motorbikes in Bali. From 2011 to 2012 there was a 12% increase of registered motorbikes in Indonesia, bringing the number from 84 million to 94 million (Harvenda 2012). The World Health Organization (WHO) reported 104, 211,132 registered Indonesian motorbikes in 2013 (WHO 2015). Though these statistics pertain to the whole of Indonesia, Bali is one of the most densely populated islands in the Indonesian archipelago, and thus likely experienced the same, if not a proportionally greater increase in motorbikes. Furthermore this only accounts for registered motorbikes, meaning there are a substantial number of unregistered vehicles adding to the

congestion.

Rising numbers of motorbikes in Bali have led to a flood of accidents, which in turn result in more instances of soul loss. While some people in Bali recognize that physical forces cause motorbike accidents, many people believe deities and spirits cause them. This belief further entangles spiritual and physical aspects of life. The prevention of motorbike accidents is thus religiously entwined, and has spiritual and social repercussions that must be remedied through soul retrieval rituals, as they are the central way to socially, psychologically, and spiritually heal the victim of an accident.

Based on ethnographic research on soul loss due to motorbike accidents, I argue that modernity has paradoxically led to a reinforcement of traditional Balinese ritual practices instead of their demise. Motorbike accidents can cause soul loss, a dangerous condition that leads Balinese people to seek out and perform traditional rituals both to prevent motorbike accidents and for soul retrieval purposes following accidents. Therefore, modernity, far from eroding tradition, reinforces traditional ritual practices in Bali as a way to solidify Balinese conceptions of self.

The Ritualization of Life in Bali

Bali is a highly ritualized and intensely spiritual place, where 90% of the population practice Balinese Hinduism (Watson 2000). This religion is based on the fact that black magic, spirits, and the gods, are constantly influencing the human world. Balinese people accept this without question, and embrace it in their daily life. Each day is either auspicious or inauspicious, and children learn about the expansive and intricate ritualization they must perform from a young age. They are instructed to construct complicated offerings as homework, and are required to substitute their school uniforms on certain days for traditional temple attire.

Balinese ritualization continues to take place in exclusively Balinese spaces, but since the late 1970s Balinese identity and spirituality has also been proffered to tourists as a means to draw people to the island. Modernity and social change symbolized by motorbikes in this paper have taken place in Bali largely in the form of tourism. Over 50% of Balinese people work in the tourism industry, and “tourism has been viewed by many both inside and outside Bali as a profound economic miracle for the island” (Chiang 2012, 51).

Since Bali became an object of study, scholars of Bali have feared that globalization and modernization would diminish the rich ritualization there, and destroy what tourism websites and books still refer to as “the last paradise on earth.” However, the proliferation of tourism in Bali has bolstered Balinese practices, and solidified ritualization as a way not only to exhibit identity, but also to make money (Vickers 2011). Tourism in Bali is at a precarious point in its development. Balinese ritual practices and cultural traditions are undeniably the main underlying enablers of tourism, but they are also indicators of what it means to be Balinese. As Balinese people continue to walk the line between commodifying their culture and keeping it their own, intentional ritualization will only continue to grow in importance.

The Making of the Ethnography

I carried out research from late October to early December of 2015 in Denpasar, and Bedulu, Bali. Denpasar, the capital of Bali, has several universities and is the city with the largest population on the island. Many people live there to work at tourist destinations nearby. Bedulu is a medium sized village outside of what is known as the “artistic center” of Bali, Ubud. Both locations are in the southwest of the island.

I was able to observe and participate in the Balinese lifestyle during my fieldwork, as I lived in Balinese households for most of my time in Bali, a period of about four months. I

became acclimated to the Balinese daily routine of making offerings, and was able to take part in Balinese ceremonies. I became close to members of my host family, and learned how to perform rituals correctly from them. I was helped by my two-year old host sister, who conveniently was learning many of the same basics that I was.

I conducted most of my interviews during November, 2015. I performed nine individual interviews, and one group interview with two informants, Surya and Dewi. They were both students at the same university and friends, so a group interview was most convenient and comfortable. The interviews were semi-structured and ranged from 20 minutes to two hours. They took place at a location of the informant's choosing. As I was enrolled in a study abroad program, I had opportunities to meet friends and family of the program staff who became my informants, and who then introduced me to others. All of my informants were people who had been in motorbike accidents, were family members of accident victims, or were respected people sought out after an accident had occurred.

Overall, the people I spoke to had diverse backgrounds, including socio-economic status and occupation. Most of my informants could be considered middle-class, but I did interview Wayan, a working-class shop owner who lived in an isolated village, and supported his own family on what he made selling snacks and cigarettes, and Pak Ngurah, who on the other hand, had his own large mansion and made money by selling materials pertaining to his religious sect. During my time in Bali, in addition to Wayan and Pak Ngurah, I interviewed three university students, a traditional healer, a professor, a Balinese Hindu priest and his wife, a policewoman (one of four policewomen in Denpasar), and a housewife who had previously been a nurse. The age of my informants ranged from 18 to mid-seventies. Out of the informants I interviewed three were women and eight were men.

All of my informants identified as Balinese Hindu. Indonesian citizens are required to identify as one of the six religions recognized by the country. A citizen's religion is written on all identification documents, and the absence of a proclaimed religion can cause problems with governmental authorities. The Indonesian government's relation to religion influences the way in which people claim their religious identity. Social and individual factors also influence religious identities, as can be seen in the case of Ibu Kartini, a woman who identified as Javanese, but who practiced Balinese Hinduism as she had been married into a Balinese family for many years. Like my other informants, she claimed Balinese Hinduism was a large part of her life since she adopted it through marriage.

For each interview I obtained oral or written consent. As my informants were discussing motorbike accidents and soul loss, events that can be particularly distressing, I tried to be sensitive to this during interviews. I made it clear to informants that they were not required to answer questions they did not wish to, and that they could stop their interview at any time.

Four of the interviews I carried out were in English, three were in Indonesian with native Indonesian speakers present to help with interpretation, and two were conducted in Indonesian without interpreters. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Due to my limited knowledge of the Indonesian language, during interviews carried out in Indonesian I was able to ask questions, but I was not able to aptly respond to informant's statements. In many ways interviews were a collaborative process between informants and myself that involved rephrasing and asking questions to make sure there was mutual understanding. Despite this, meanings of words and concepts may have been skewed.

A large part of this research is on Balinese selfhood. As an American undergraduate student, I tried to portray perspectives of the informants I spoke with, but this perspective is

ultimately my own. My position as a white foreigner certainly influenced the way informants interacted with me, and the responses they felt comfortable giving. Several times I was told, “you’re western, so you won’t understand.” As I am not Balinese, and was only in Bali for four months, it is possible I did not grasp certain components of Balinese Hinduism or Balinese identity. However, I did my best to be aware of my presence as an outsider, and as a student there to learn. I am very grateful that those who I met invited me to participate in practices, and allowed me to not only gain insight into the Balinese way of life, but gain friends as well.

The Search for Balinese Self

In order to discuss modernity, soul loss, and every other aspect of this paper, it is important to first understand the Balinese perception of self. Psychological anthropologist Naomi Quinn (2006) defines the self as an individually and socially defined concept. She writes that the self is comprised of both an individual self and a social self. The individual self understands and processes its own psychological, biological, physical and cultural processes. In contrast the social self is how society views the individual, and the way the individual internalizes this societal view and absorbs this as part of their own self conception.

Balinese self is very much enmeshed in the social self, what anthropologist Unni Wikan describes as a “standardized public identity.” Wikan writes:

With individuality locked safe away behind a shield of form pure and simple — a concern that for the Balinese is said to be an obsessing ideal, the fears of the Balinese would seem to remain only two: fear from metaphysical gods and spirits, and fear of themselves, of ‘stage-fright.’ This latter is glossed as fear that the personality of the individual will then break through to dissolve his standardized public identity (Wikan 1987, 338).

This statement emphasizes the importance of upholding a “standardized public identity” to keep the self definition of a Balinese person. The “standardized public identity” emphasizes both the

religious fear and social fear which motivates a self preserving composure. In many cases, this intense dictation of public identity overrides individual conceptions of self, and thus determines individual self perception. Because the Balinese self is very much dependent on the maintenance of a public identity, I will be using the words identity and self interchangeably throughout this paper.

In this statement I am not trying to remove individualism or autonomy from Balinese people; of course Balinese people are individuals and have the agency to form individual beliefs, behaviors, and operate independently in the world. I am only attempting to illustrate the immense importance of Balinese collective identity, and the way that this continues to shape the life of Balinese people in the modern day.

The Collision of Tradition and Modernity

Ibu Kartini is a skinny lady in her early seventies wearing a sarong and t-shirt. Her hair is piled on top of her head in a floppy bun. We are sitting on the tile floor of the porch of her home, drinking the tea that she had graciously prepared for me, Jo and Edo, two of the language teachers of my study away program who had come to help translate. Edo is casually looking through pictures on his phone, but Jo, a newer and less experienced language teacher is nervously and excitedly staring between Ibu Kartini and me. Ibu Kartini is Javanese. She moved to Bali when she was in her twenties, after falling for her husband, a Balinese man, who was a soldier at the time. He had gotten ill, and was treated in the hospital where she cared for him as a nurse. Ibu Kartini identifies as Javanese, but carries out Balinese rituals as a member of her Balinese family, even when she does not entirely believe in Balinese Hinduism. When I ask Ibu Kartini why people ride motorbikes, she says, “because it is the modern day, and because it is faster to ride a motorbike.”

Though motorbikes may not be the root of change in Bali, their use for commuting long distances is an aspect of modernity, and the fast-paced lifestyle which comes with what Ibu Kartini calls “the modern day.” I asked my informants why people use motorbikes, and almost all of them said “*cepat cepat!*” which means “to go really, really fast!” The speed of motorbikes as a necessity is indicative of the recent occupational shifts that many Balinese have experienced and a lifestyle where speed matters more than it ever has before. Thus, going *cepat cepat* is both literally related to commuting long distances to work quickly, and related to the new fast modern lifestyle.

Motorbike accidents are undoubtedly a result of poor infrastructural maintenance and a growing number of motorbikes on the road, combined with the need to move quickly. Many of my informants claimed roads in Bali were dangerous and difficult to drive on. They often flood in the rainy season, dogs are notorious for running into streets, and there is no way to control congested traffic. Traffic lights and police officials have no effect on the weaving masses. Surya, a lanky, nineteen year old university student who seemed quiet and reserved until he was overtaken by random shocks of laughter, once told me that if a police officer stops you, it’s because he needs some cash. While many of my informants, especially those who commuted to Denpasar, said they would love a public bus or train system, currently there is no affordable transportation alternative to motorbikes, other than the cramped, sweaty, and doorless vans called *bemos*, which only travel from market to market.

W. Donald McTaggard, an Australian environmental scientist, corroborates that Bali has infrastructural issues. He writes about the economic neglect of Bali by the Dutch during colonialism. Infrastructure was stripped or non-existent as it was unnecessary in the colonial scheme. Since the Dutch colonial powers left Bali, the primary economic support of the Island

has been tourism. While tourism is what keeps the island chugging, Bali remains on the economic periphery of Indonesia as a whole, and does not have the resources or space to support new kinds of industrial infrastructure that would make it more economically prominent (McTaggart 1984). This leaves Bali in a position where it is financially independent and short on cash. Any money made by the island must go to supporting its inhabitants' basic needs, or to bolstering tourist destinations so that tourists will continue to come. This means that the roads used by Balinese people and foreigners alike are neglected and continue to crumble, and that motorbike accidents will continue to occur for the foreseeable future.

Motorbikes may not pose a threat to Balinese rituals and spirituality, but they are a symbol of the social changes at play. There are more and more obstacles and opportunities that challenge Balinese Hindu practices. Construction of hotels and golf courses threaten to destroy sacred Balinese Hindu temples. Growing numbers of Javanese immigrants are seizing jobs traditionally held by Balinese people, as Javanese people are willing to work long hours on auspicious days that Balinese people are unable and unwilling to work. However, the vibrant culture and ritual of Bali is what brings many tourists in, a strange and difficult conundrum to reconcile (Knight 1997). Change is unavoidable, but many Balinese people argue that change in Bali is happening particularly quickly. While it is possible that this change makes it more difficult to embrace traditional practices, I believe these are utilized now more than ever as a way to define and commodify Balinese identity. How Balinese must interact with the world is shifting. Many people now must leave their villages to work in the cities. Occupational and social roles, and thus notions of self are changing. Motorbikes are involved because they are the way to access new jobs, and in that way a new Balinese identity.

The practices of Balinese Hinduism are time consuming, but removal of rituals from

everyday activities is an unthinkable concept. Balinese Hinduism, a unique conglomeration of Animism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Hinduism, is a religion that has historically been affected by the non-Balinese cultures and religions with which it came in contact. That being said, the introduction of tourism to Bali in the late 60s and 70s has influenced the way that Balinese people carry out their traditions. Rituals are still performed for spiritual reasons, but there are increasing numbers of ritual performances for audiences. Some argue that performances for tourists affect the authenticity and spirituality of ritual acts (Pichard 1987).

Motorbike accidents can be understood as a material representation of change occurring within the life of many Balinese people. The physical crash of the motorbike is representative of the crash between the need to make a livelihood, and the need to maintain identity and self through traditional ritual acts. Approaching motorbike accidents within the context of traditional Balinese Hinduism may be addressing the larger issue of a changing spirituality in a way that offers control to the Balinese. Though modernity requires the need to speed up, ironically, the occurrence of motorbike accidents means that Balinese people must stop and slow down, to immerse themselves in tradition and perform soul retrieval rituals.

Ritualization in the Face of Modernity

On balmy Balinese evenings, Ibu Gede, my middle-aged Balinese host mother, watches dubbed television adaptations of Hindu epics while she deftly staples strips of palm leaf to make offerings. In an hour she can create a hundred offerings or more. Any time of idleness like this is filled with box cutters and palm fronds. Making offerings is a task for gossiping, watching TV, or just sitting around. Ibu Gede constructs these offerings almost every evening, and has been doing so since she was a small girl. Though she watches and giggles about the drama unfolding on the TV, she needs to make sure to keep a positive and gracious mindset so that the offerings

she makes can be given to the deities in good conscience.

Rituals, such as making offerings, pervade almost every aspect of Balinese life. Clifford Geertz refers to Bali as “perhaps the most richly stocked lumber-room of gracious and beautiful magical beliefs and practices in Southeast Asia” (Geertz 1973, 174). Geertz also acknowledges that constant participation in ritual practice is such a large part of the Balinese schema, that the larger reasoning behind performing ritual is not ever questioned:

The Balinese, perpetually weaving intricate palm-leaf offerings, preparing elaborate ritual meals, decorating all sorts of temples, marching in massive processions, and falling into sudden trances, seem much too busy practicing their religion to think (or worry) very much about it (Geertz 1963, 175).

My informants affirmed this sentiment as well. Many said that they would feel incomplete if they did not perform rituals, one even mentioning an “emptiness” at the thought of neglecting daily offerings, but when asked why they performed rituals, they would respond, “it’s just what Balinese do.”

Today performance of ritual is still a large part of Balinese identity, and affirms a person as Balinese. Rituals infiltrate every aspect of Balinese life, and also absorb components they did not previously include. Though there may be a clash between some aspects of modernity and the traditional Balinese way of life, motorbikes have been assimilated into Balinese practices and ritual. While Balinese rituals remain predominant in the life of many, the modern day has not left Bali behind.

It has been easy for motorbikes to be assimilated into Balinese culture as an object that requires ritual recognition. In fact, there is even a specific auspicious day, *tumpek landep*, in which offerings are made to metal tools. While in the past this meant tools for rice farming, today this auspicious day celebrates cars and motorbikes as well. On *tumpek landep*, individuals cover their vehicles with offerings and invite priests to their homes to sprinkle the vehicles with

holy water and rice. This action placates the soul of the bike, and creates a spiritual barrier to prevent demons or black magic from attaching to the bike and causing a negative effect.

The rituals one must participate in are vast. There are minor rituals, such as making offerings, which happen several times daily and during meal-times, when people put small amounts of food on the ground to occupy demonic spirits before they begin to eat. There are also major rituals, such as temple ceremonies, compound birthdays, and auspicious and inauspicious days where specific deities and spirits are celebrated. These events happen in relation to the cycling of a three part calendar, which dictates which day celebrates what. Balinese people are always preparing for the next auspicious or inauspicious day. The shared knowledge of the ritual schedule, as well as the shared participation in ritual events solidifies community and the individual's role in the Balinese system, and a concomitant sense of self.

During my research, I found myself being ethnocentrically skeptical about young people's participation in rituals and their belief in Balinese Hindu spirits and deities. I wondered if they participated in ritualization because they really believed, or just to accommodate older members of their family. During my group interview with Dewi and Surya, I asked Dewi, a college student, if she believed that the soul would physically leave the body during soul loss, and if the ritual worked to physically get it back. She said yes, both she and her family believed in the ritual. Framing her belief within the context of her social group, her belief in these concepts is what solidified her position as a young Balinese woman, despite growing up in a globalizing Bali.

I then turned to Surya. Surya had an uncle who was a traditional Balinese healer, or *Balian*. This meant that his family was particularly concerned with doing rituals correctly and frequently. Surya also wore not one, but three *tridatu* bracelets, bracelets made of black, white,

and red string representing the three main deities of Balinese Hinduism. These protected him from black magic and malevolent spirits. Most people I met only wore one, but Surya wore three, as he and his family feared members of their community might curse them if his uncle gave unfavorable diagnoses or treatments. I assumed that Surya would have a similar response to Dewi, especially since his family was so religiously involved. But Surya laughed and said “nah, the soul doesn’t really leave the body, that stuff doesn’t really happen, we have to do the rituals, but the soul doesn’t really break off.” “But Surya,” I said, “you said that your mom got into an accident and had a soul retrieval ritual, you said that she needed the ritual performed.” “Oh yeah,” he said, “yeah, she did, she needed the ritual, but souls don’t really break off.”

This contradiction was expressed to me by not just Surya, and other young Balinese people, but by older adults I spoke to as well. They would posit that the soul does not *really* break off, but then they would follow directly with an example of someone they knew who had experienced soul loss, or give an example of a time they had been diagnosed with soul loss. Everyone had participated in the ritual somehow, despite their apparent lack of belief. In these situations my position as an outsider and an undoubtedly opinionated westerner may have influenced the responses that my informants were willing to give. Perhaps they would have felt more comfortable discussing their beliefs with someone who shared them. However, I believe that Surya’s statement shows he has his own beliefs, but that he still practices Balinese Hindu rituals, because it connects him to others, and affirms his Balinese identity. As a young man whose family is intimately involved with the spirit world, it was important that Surya participated in rituals that connected him to his family, despite his personal beliefs.

Solidifying Self and Balance in Bali

In the context of this paper, it is not only important to consider how ritual shapes and

affirms the social self, but how ritual shapes the individual's own self perspective. The individual has ritual responsibility outside of large ceremonial events, in the form of making offerings.

Offerings dominate the Balinese schedule and the physical world to the point where it is impossible to walk through the streets of Bali without sidestepping *banten*, offerings composed of woven palm leaf, rice, flowers, and betel. Inadvertently destroyed by both tourists and chickens alike, these offerings are a daily gift to gods, ancestors, spirits and demons. They are meant to placate, please, ensure that the deities are kind, and that demons stay away.

Offerings are given twice a day, shortly after the sun rises, and shortly before the sun sets. Both men and women wear sarongs when presenting offerings. The offerings are placed in strategic and significant places around the family's compound, on vehicles, in the family temple, and at places of business. Daily prayers and rituals are seen as a way to keep people from harm. When I asked my informants for ways that they kept safe while riding motorbikes, most of them mentioned prayer and giving offerings. Ritual methods for insuring motorbike safety were offered in the same breath as using helmets and being aware of other drivers on the road. These statements make it clear that ritual is a solidly incorporated part of Balinese life. Performing offering rituals is a constant individual responsibility, because the individual must do it correctly and regularly to be effective. The positive effects of performing offerings can impact both the individual and the individual's family, but the negative repercussions of mis-performing rituals will impact the entire family as well (Eiseman 1989, 216).

Social anthropologist Leo Howe (2003) discusses the possibility that rituals will result in what he deems "ritual risk." Howe describes how Balinese rituals have intrinsic risk, despite the fact that they are meant to protect the performer, because mis-performed rituals can result in negative repercussions from the spiritual world. Howe writes, "if a household is beset with

misfortune it is not unusual for a medium to reveal that ancestral spirits have been angered or offended by ritual omissions, inaccuracies, or other mistakes” (Howe 2003, 69). Situating Balinese ritualization in the context of ritual risk places importance on the personal responsibility of the individual when performing rituals, and the serious repercussions of an individual not fulfilling their responsibility in the ritual and thus their role in the community.

One function of rituals, and responsibility of individuals, is to ensure the balance between the spirit world, the human world, and the natural world. This necessary balance is called the *Tri Hita Karana*. Pak Mangku, a calm and knowledgeable Balinese Hindu priest who lived in Bedulu, explained the *Tri Hita Karana* and its importance. We were sitting in his home, listening to the wails of his newborn twin grandchildren when he said, “not just houses have souls, but plants also have souls, because in Bali we have the *Tri Hita Karana* concept, people must coexist with people, humans with gods, and humans with nature. Those all must be in harmony.” In the Balinese Hindu understanding, all objects have souls that interact with one another, and all these souls must be doted on and cared for accordingly. If this is done correctly, there will be a balance between all things which keeps individuals happy and safe.

Lene Pedersen (2006), an anthropologist who studied modern ritual and politics in Bali, writes about how the performance of the *Sideman Maligya* ritual (a Balinese cremation ceremony) positions participants not just in relation to ancestral spirits, but within their social world. The *Sideman Maligya* has specific roles organized in a hierarchy, which are then translated into everyday life to show individuals how they are expected to relate with others in their community. This is an example of an effort to maintain the human to human third of the *Tri Hita Karana*, as it prescribes an individual their social duties. If they carry out their roles appropriately, the community will be both peaceful and productive.

This idea is developed by Howe when he writes “ritual actions...work not only on the level of meaning but also emotionally and socially, the events of any particular occasion being conditioned by many factors other than the prescribed rules” (2003, 63). Thus the social interactions that take place during a ritual not only prescribe what happens during the ritual, but are intertwined with the identity and position of the person outside the ritual context. Participating in rituals is a way for individuals to practice and learn about their position and identity, and claim their social self.

Neglecting the balance of the *Tri Hita Karana* will give you bad *karma*, bad spiritual energy that can result in harmful events. *Karma*, which can be both positive and negative, is not attained just through physical actions, but through attitude as well. Pak Ngurah, as a Balinese Hindu religious leader, told me that energy, both *karmic* and otherwise, can make good or cause distress. The result of energy depends on the mindset of the individual who gains and uses it. If a person is happy and thankful he will have good energy, while negative thoughts and feelings bring bad energy.

“It can be that the person speaks bad about something, and because of the *loh* (energy), if you think bad, bad things may happen. If you speak bad, or do bad, more bad energy will come that will materialize into the accident or disease. It can be because of spiritual and also physical reasons.”

In this sense, the individual is responsible for their own happiness, not just on a physical, but also on a cognitive level. A person must make sure that even their thoughts remain positive, or they will suffer spiritually inflicted consequences, such as poor health or bad luck. Thought in this way relates to both the human world and the spiritual world. You must have good thoughts and intentions for your fellow human beings or you will reap the *karmic* consequences, and you must maintain a pure heart when making offerings so as to maintain balance with the deities.

Today in Bali people must fight for well paying jobs, to keep their farmland, and to get

support from the government. It is possible that the stress in Balinese life is creating more bad energy, and thus an increase in motorbike accidents. The need to maintain good energy is described in Unni Wikan's book, *Managing Turbulent Hearts* (1998). In this book, Wikan gives the example of a young Balinese woman, and this woman's need to "keep a bright face" in spite of the death of her fiancé. Wikan explains the Balinese taboo of expressing grief, noting that this woman felt grief at the unexpected death of her fiancé, but was unable to express it in a social space. Additionally, the family of this woman would not allow her to go to Lombok, an island off the coast of Bali, because it is associated with black magic. The family feared that the distressed state of the woman would draw bad energy and evil spirits to her, causing her and her family harm.

Wikan demonstrates the difficulty of "keeping a bright face" by describing the continuing private frustration and grief of this woman as she deals with her fiancé's death, and her need to hide what she is experiencing. Wikan also notes the woman denies her true emotional self by maintaining an inauthentic emotional composure. Her idea of self was disrupted and pulled apart by the need to perform happiness. Many of the people whom I spoke to in Bali also expressed the need to perform happiness even in times of distress. It was very common for teachers, students, and host family members I met to say, "act happy, and you will be happy too."

Energy can make a large difference in the safety of individuals and those they care about. Performing daily rituals and making offerings is central to ensure that the souls of objects, deities, and demons have what they are entitled to, so that they will respond with kindness. Howe (2003) calls this a kind of reciprocity between deities and humans. If the *Tri Hita Karana* is thrown out of balance, everything else is as well. When individuals do not give offerings and maintain good energy, the reciprocity between deities and humans is not equal. Deities and

spirits have the power to grant good favor to people, or cause bad things to happen, but this is only if they get the respect and recognition that they deserve. Individuals who do not carry out their reciprocal duties are in danger of backlash from gods, spirits, or souls who will be angered, and may cause an accident as a consequence.

Stories of Soul Loss and Soul Retrieval

Pak Made has just gotten out of a faculty meeting and agrees to meet me in his office at a university in Denpasar. He is a history professor in his mid-fifties with gray hair that sticks up straight from the top of his head, and huge, thickly framed glasses. He keeps smiling with all his teeth and gesturing wildly as he tells me about the tantric energy healing practice he has been using to fix his wife's sore ankle after a motorbike accident. He adjusts his chunky glasses and leans back into his chair. I ask him if he performed any Balinese rituals for this accident, and he says yes. "In Balinese tradition if you have an accident you need to do a ritual." "Do you believe that this ritual works?" I ask him. "Oh yes I do, because I had an experience earlier," he says, leaning in:

"A long time ago when my second son was maybe 9 years old, he was riding a motorbike and fell off in the drainage, and came back home like a lunatic, speaking like here or there. He was able to speak and walk, but it was like a lunatic person. So my wife was bathing him, because he was dirty, but he kept talking, like unconscious talk. And then at that time I went to the place where the accident happened. I sat a moment and prayed to god and prayed to the spirit residing in the area, and I asked please, whomever is residing in this area, if the soul of my son is here, please return it, it is the soul of my son. And then I visualize taking the soul of my son, and I go back home, and I put it on his head [the soul], and then it's normal. I mean psychologically. Of course he still has wounds. So this was a long time ago, my son is now 26. It was when he was nine, so it was a long time ago."

Soul loss can manifest in different ways, such as unconsciousness, a kind of blankness, or erratic behavior. The accident that causes the ailment can be minor or severe, but the diagnosis of soul loss is usually dependent on the level of shock of the individual, and the way they behave.

While soul loss is widely recognized as a spiritual issue, the expression of belief in the literal aspects of the condition vary based on age, participation in traditional practices, and whether or not an individual has seen soul loss occur.

Dewi is sitting a few feet away from a cluster of whispering girls in a blazing hot college classroom. She's tall and thin, with huge eyes that focus on your face and then dart away when she notices you're looking at her. I'm sitting across from her with my recorder precariously balanced towards the back of one of those desk-chairs hybrids which is not only a standard classroom fixture in the United States, but in Bali as well. Surya is sitting at a desk beside me, eyeing the recorder that looks like it could slip at any moment. Dewi's hands are folded in her lap when she begins speaking; in a small voice, she recounts a motorbike accident that happened six months before. She was driving home from school when a dog darted in front of her, causing her to fall from her bike into a ditch.

She shows me a picture of her leg from a week after the accident on her iPhone. Her leg is mottled with a hilly scape of bruises, and her skin puckers around a large gash leading from her knee to the back of her lower calf. "It was really bad" she says, "I wasn't allowed to walk on it for two weeks after the accident." "How did you feel when it happened?" I ask. "In shock, I didn't want to use the motorcycle for three days because of the accident, but my father said I had to use the motorbike to go to school. I was afraid that the accident would happen again, but you have to use it, there is no choice but to use it."

Dewi's soul loss manifested in a feeling of shock, and due to her soul loss Dewi was pulled from the routine and social role she was expected to fill. As a student Dewi needed to commute an hour everyday to the university. However, the soul loss she experienced prevented her from being able to operate in society, as she was too shocked and scared to travel

independently. Though Dewi's life is largely influenced by her need to travel to school to earn her degree studying English, her instance of soul loss necessitated that she abstained from her everyday life, and become reliant on a traditional Balinese ritual to restore her soul.

Dewi's conception of self was also potentially undermined by her motorbike accident. As discussed earlier in this paper, maintaining the *Tri Hita Karana* is a personal responsibility that reflects on the spirituality of the individual. It also influences the larger social perspective of a person and thus their social self. In Dewi's case, the occurrence of her motorbike accident could imply that she neglected a ritual or spiritual duty which resulted in spiritual anger and her misfortune. Though Dewi didn't seem to internalize her misfortune as her own fault (she blamed the dog) others in the same situation would have. Pak Made alluded to this potential sentiment when he told me, "Balinese people, we accept that something happened as the cause of *karma* that we have to undergo. This might make you feel comfortable, yeah this is the *karma* I should undergo." In this sense, good consequences will affirm the goodness of an individual, while bad *karma* will do the opposite. Dewi's soul loss was more apparent as a form of shock, but it is possible that the shock of soul loss can be reinforced by self-deprecation in response to spiritual neglect.

Additionally, the health of the soul is conflated with physical and social self. During a conversation with Pak Mangku Alit, a traditional Balinese healer, he explained:

"We shouldn't need medicine to be happy and live life, we should be happy and take care of ourselves with living well. You need to strengthen your inner power, if your spirit is strong your body will be strong, and you will not get *sakit* (sick or hurt) easily."

When soul loss occurs it can mark an individual as being weak, as their soul was not strong enough to withstand the impact of the accident. Getting sick physically or emotionally suggests poor moral fiber, and shock causes irrational or hysterical behavior, which is socially

stigmatized, and is not what Balinese do. It removes the individual from the group, and can attract potential danger, and also demonstrates that the individual is not strong enough to maintain their own well-being and emotions. In this sense, soul loss is a big threat to an individual's understanding of self. Wikan discusses the soul as "the mainstay of health", claiming,

... the spirit ... forms the mainstay of health and happiness according to the Balinese. It is the vital force which keeps all else going... health, which depends on a tenuous condition of balance (*seimbang*) in the body and soul, is vitally affected by the strength or steadfastness of the spirit.

In Dewi's case, like all cases of soul loss, the absence of her soul put her physical and mental health at risk. *Ngulapin* and *nebusin*, the two halves of the soul retrieval ritual, serve different purposes in the soul reunification process, and needed to be performed so that Dewi could return to normalcy. *Ngulapin* is the calling back of a soul from the site where it was left, and *nebusin* is placing the soul back in the body. Until her soul was reunited with her body, all aspects of Dewi's self, the physical, mental, and social would be damaged.

When I asked Dewi how she felt after the soul retrieval ritual, she said, "I felt better, more confident, I felt my soul was back, like peaceful. You can just feel it, you feel the confidence after the ritual, and you feel you've gotten better." The confidence she felt after the soul retrieval ritual allowed her to ride her motorbike and return to her life. Her need to utilize traditional practices was only emphasized by the fact that she had to return to her modernity influenced everyday life. In the fast paced Balinese society of today, it is even more important that soul retrieval occur, so that people can resume their allotted roles and support themselves and those they care about.

Pak Made, the professor, is munching on the round buttery cookies I brought him to thank him for agreeing to meet with me. Tiny crumbs are tumbling from his mouth and landing

on the table, which he brushes off occasionally. He is exuberant as he recounts accident after accident, and how each was remedied by the ngulapin and nebusin rituals. “What would happen if somebody gets in an accident, and they don’t do the ngulapin?” I ask. He says:

“Some people who don’t believe in that [soul retrieval rituals], will not be affected. But as Balinese, who have already received all that information about that [soul retrieval rituals], will feel uneasy for all of their lives, even if you don’t realize. If it is affected by soul loss, the wound stays, like three weeks. But after the nebusin, it is soon recovered. Then our beliefs get stronger.”

“So do you think the reason things don’t heal is spiritual or psychological?” I say, trying to pinpoint the soul loss experience. “I think it is both spiritual and psychological” he replies. And then adds:

“You remember the *balian* [traditional healer] I went to with my wife earlier? He was visiting a patient, who had fallen unconscious, I heard he [the patient] was two weeks in the emergency department ... The *balian* visited, and he asked the family of the patient if they had done any ritual for this, and they said not yet. And this Balian went to the site and did the same thing as I did to my son. In fact I copied what he did when my son was nine, what he did to that patient. So he closed his eyes for a moment, and he was like taking the soul to bring back to the emergency department, and he put it here, [he says bringing his fist to his forehead] Exactly as I did for my son, later, after him. And soon the patient was opening his eyes, looking around. At that I thought it is rather spiritual while also physiological, because physiologically he was not aware yet! It could be spiritual, was my conclusion, the spirit is taken back home to the cage! If the person is still conscious, I might think it was psychological. But he was not conscious, so I think it was spiritual, either spiritual or psychological, either way.”

This conversation with Pak Made touches on many important components of soul retrieval. Soul loss affects all aspects of the self, and so does soul retrieval. As discussed earlier in this paper, soul loss manifests itself in different ways, some of which are more mentally or spiritually present, and some of which are more physically influential. Despite the way that soul loss manifests itself, in all instances of soul loss, the individual will not be able to heal if their soul is not returned to their body. This means both mentally and physically. For example, when Surya was a child, he had a minor motorbike accident that a soul retrieval ritual was not

performed for, as he seemed fine other than a small scrape on his knee. However, after several weeks his scrape was not healing at all. After consulting his traditional healer uncle, they found that Surya had actually experienced soul loss, and this was preventing his knee from healing. They immediately performed the *ngulapin* and *nebusin* rituals, and shortly after his knee began to heal, and the wound was completely gone in no time at all.

Soul retrieval rituals are necessary to restoring self through physical, spiritual, and social means. Physically, soul retrieval rituals allow a person to heal. They can also, as was exemplified in Pak Made's story about the young man who was treated by the *Balian* he knew, revive someone from unconsciousness. The ritual itself is not very complicated, and can be done by religious practitioners or by people like Pak Made who feel comfortable enough to carry it out. Like all other Balinese rituals, there is a degree of risk. If the ritual is not performed correctly, the soul will not be retrieved.

In cases where the soul is not successfully retrieved the accident victim is not only left soul-less, but errant souls can haunt the site of the accident, causing general shenanigans. To retrieve a soul, the accident victim if able, the family of the accident victim, and a Balinese Hindu priest, go to the scene of the accident. If the actual site is too far away they will go to a crossroad as a proxy. The family members, victim, and priest say prayers and make offerings, each part of which placates a specific deity or spirit. A young chicken is sacrificed. The soul of this chicken serves as a replacement for the soul of the person in the accident.

After offerings are made, the soul will return to the body of the victim if present. If not, a tiny bit of dirt will be gathered from the scene and placed in a coconut shell, and brought to the victim of the accident. The dirt can either be understood as containing the soul, or as representing the soul. The priest will then pray over the person, sprinkling them with holy water, and will

touch the forehead of the accident victim, physically placing the soul back in their body.

Some informants spoke of an immediate change in their state at the moment the soul was returned to their body. This had been Dewi's experience. This immediate change can also be seen in Pak Made's story in which the young man literally came into consciousness when his soul was returned. These situations show the ritual serves to immediately return selfhood. In Dewi's case, the return of her soul allowed for her shock to dissipate. It made her feel comfortable enough to begin to ride her motorbike again, so that she could continue her expected role in life. In Pak Made's story, selfhood was restored through the actual presence of the person in the conscious world. Immediate influence on the soul would obviously be a preferable choice in the modern day, as it allows people to resume their normal course of activity in the rapidly moving world.

On the other hand, soul retrieval is just the initial step in a process of restoring selfhood. Surya is adamant that soul retrieval rituals do not result in immediate change, but rather start a slower course of action that eventually results in a confident and restored self. Though he believes that soul retrieval does not result in instant change, self is still eventually restored. The individual is not cured, but is able to begin the healing process, and eventually become well.

Though this does not affirm self with the same speed, the eventual return of the individual to normalcy is still an affirmation of the effectiveness of the rituals and thus the Balinese system of belief. Though doubt does overhang some Balinese people, when traditional rituals continue to have tangible results, it shows the importance of Balinese rituals, and intensifies their use. Despite modern influences and innovations, the reliance on ritual as something that Balinese people "just do" and the effectiveness of ritual, ensures that these practices will not be lost. When rituals are performed, not only is the individual's soul returned,

but the success of the process itself reaffirms a social self and identity as a Balinese person, which stands strong in spite of external influences.

Conclusion: Why Modernity Matters

Despite modernity and globalization, ritual remains a way to cement identity and solidify self for the Balinese. At the same time, regardless of the continuing strength of tradition, Balinese life is heavily influenced by both global and Indonesian political and economic forces. Motorbikes are just one example of the changes to the island that have come with modernity, which cause both physical and spiritual harm to Balinese people.

Tourism is the most prominent force of globalization and modernization in Bali, and its presence on the island, though essential, is also damaging. Economically motivated projects, such as the Nusa Bena project, a plan to dump sand into Bali's Bena Bay to create artificial islands on which to build a tourist resort, amusement park, and "Bali Culture Museum," value potential revenue over Balinese culture and tradition. In order to complete the Nusa Bena project, sacred temple grounds, shrines, and important fishing zones will be dug up, or covered with sand. Not only would this cut off a major source of income and food for fishermen who live in the Bena Bay area, but one can also imagine the likely spiritual havoc that might occur in response to this desecration.

When considering the large-scale changes in Bali which stomp on traditional Balinese culture, it is not surprising that the spirits might have reason to be angrier and more wrathful than they were in the past. Perhaps this mounting spiritual and godly anger is instigating increasing numbers of motorbike accidents. Though Balinese people largely do not neglect rituals or spiritual obligations, temples and sacred areas in Bali are increasingly being destroyed in order to create more space for tourist destinations and resorts. Though not done maliciously, tourists

unintentionally step on offerings or enter temples without the appropriate temple attire. These behaviors might incite rage from spirits, despite the fact that tourists are ignorant of their actions. Tourists and tourism are an integral to the economic survival of Bali, but they also contribute to the desecration of land that has historically been dedicated to religious practices. Tourists tend to be ignorant actors in a sea of ritual risk and obligation.

This dichotomy is very important to consider as Bali continues to be heralded as one of the top travel destinations in the world. The spiritual and social effects of tourism should be further studied. Tourists will continue to stream into Bali and thus hotels and attractions will continue to be built on the small island. The environmental and spiritual distress that tourism causes needs to be confronted in Bali, before the island becomes buried in trash or devoid of sacred space. In addition, there are few studies on modernity in Bali as whole, not relegated specifically to arts. Modernity would be a valuable thing to study from a wider variety of perspectives. Balinese people remain rooted in traditional beliefs, but this does not stop both cultural and physical aspects of Balinese life from changing in response to the globalizing and modernizing world. While spirituality is important, physical issues of health and safety posed by modernity cannot be ignored.

Infrastructural concerns in Bali need to be addressed. Roads need paving and proper drainage to limit the number of motorbike accidents. While money in Bali is often poured into tourist ventures, improving quality of Balinese infrastructure would improve the tourist experience, and make the island safer for those who live there. While motorbikes continue to be used as the main form of transportation in Bali, education on motorbike safety, such as wearing helmets and following road rules, should be shared either through schools, or through Balinese community organizations. Soul loss should also continue to be accepted as a health condition,

and soul retrieval should concurrently be accepted as a way to remedy conditions of shock (as it is now, soul retrieval rituals are allowed and sometimes even encouraged in hospitals).

In conclusion, though much has changed, I believe that this statement from Clifford Geertz about spirituality and life in Bali still holds true:

Its approach to the problems of meaning remains implicit, circumscribed and segmental. The world is still enchanted and (some recent stirrings aside for the moment) the tangled net of magical realism is almost completely intact, broken only here and there by individual qualms and reflections (Geertz 1963, 175).

Despite all external influences, Bali is still an island rich with spiritual practices that prescribe identity and reinforce notions of Balinese self. When I asked Pak Ngurah “why do people in Bali perform rituals?” he answered, “because rituals in Bali, it’s outside of you. You need money, but you need things outside your life in modern life. Without ritual people do not really feel completely. They are not confident in their selves, maybe it’s from ancestors, maybe tradition, something like that.” This quote summarizes it all. Though Balinese people continue to face obstacles of modernity from motorbikes to money, ritual defines what being Balinese is. “Without ritual, people do not really feel completely.”

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