Lessons from a Small Island – Density, Spatial Development, and Identity

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Abstract. Below we explore the relationship between culture and urban design in order to situate why this important interaction remains a somewhat vexed issue, one somewhat unexplored in the urban design literature. Our chosen site is the tropical paradise of Bali, a world renowned island famous for its culture and environment. Being physically isolated both geographically and culturally from the rest of Indonesia, Bali provides a unique opportunity to advance our knowledge of relationships critical to an urban design awareness. On the surface, urban density, a defining quality of cities is a central focus, round which issues of cultural identity revolve. In contention is the fact that the density of built form across the island is controlled by a single regulation, with the justification that it protects Balinese traditional culture. The following paper reveals not only that this relationship is illusory, but also that ideology is critical to our understanding. Traditional ‘cultural’ explanations are insufficiently encompassing. An archaeology of other factors that affect local culture interact in complex ways – a violent recent history, economic exploitation, global tourism and identity. Standing well outside the vocabulary of mainstream urban design yet formative of urban culture, these forces must be paid homage. They also exist within the realm of ideological formations suggesting that the culture: urban design relationship must be contained within a general acceptance of ideology as formative in urban space, since they bridge the gap between culture and the material base of Balinese Society

Keywords: design, density, culture, ideology, development, hegemony, tradition

1. Introduction
In 1969 Amos Rapoport wrote a seminal work entitled House Form and Culture. Since then, architects have been used to the idea of a homology between architecture and cultural space. In contrast, the relationship between urban design and culture remains a somewhat vexed issue. Superficially the reason is simple – that urban development and design are not merely architecture at a larger scale. The public realm which lies at the core of cultural expression cannot be reduced to an architectural logic, and issues of economics, politics, and social structure come into play. In this arena, how economic relations create spatial structures is well understood. But we are only beginning to appreciate how culture and ideology enter the equation as templates for understanding design issues. Below we use the island of Bali as a manifestation of this problem.
Throughout the world, the Island of Bali has been celebrated for the integrity of its culture, the beauty of its landscape, and the friendliness of its inhabitants. Globally, the word Bali is synonymous with Paradise, in reality, an experience not visited on most Balinese either historically or today. For nearly a century, the Island of the Gods has been increasingly a focus of global tourism, a phenomenon generating wealth and conflict in equal measure. Bali’s population was over four million in 2017. The Bali Tourism Board has projected 6.5 million foreign tourists to arrive this year (2018). Consequently the progressive impacts of global tourism are generating development pressures in the major cities, with cumulative effects on urbanisation and local culture. The capital Denpasar has a greater metropolitan population of roughly 2 million persons. Other centres include Ubud, Gianyar, Klungkung, Tabanan and Singaraja, and a development bonanza is now ongoing. The existing airport is being expanded, a new international airport is planned for the North, and another has recently opened on Lombok, an island easily accessible from Bali. A railway to circumnavigate the province has also been speculated. A new toll road has just been opened to the Nusa Dua Area, a project where the opportunity for massive land reclamation has been consciously created. Most of this justified on the basis of international tourism arrivals which are expected to double in five years.

In this context, it is extraordinary that development densities across the island are controlled by a single regulation, given the complexity of planning controls elsewhere. Building height limits are constrained to be ‘no higher than a palm tree’ or no more than four stories. On the surface it would seem that this is merely a bureaucratic device to control speculation on land. But its fundamental raison d’être as we shall see, has been in defence of local culture, a ploy supported by the state and public alike. But in linking development to an abstract and indefinable process of cultural conservation, the regulation effectively diverts attention away from the real problem that of economic development, breach of regulation and inefficiency. In this regard, concepts of culture are notoriously difficult to define and there is no general agreement among scholars as to what it is. More importantly, ‘culture’ can frequently provide an appropriate cover for other agendas that would prefer to remain hidden. So in linking development densities to cultural conservation in Bali, the definable has been linked to the imponderable.

‘...an essentialist philosophy promoted the reactionary idea that culture was basically fixed and that a return to origins was possible as a method of exorcising history. This way ignored the all-important fact that culture is a dynamic state, and even the most intractable cultures are subject to change [44:17].

Under these circumstances it is difficult to claim that ‘Balinese culture’ is being preserved by this process. Moreover, there is no clear logic that justifies building height controls as an appropriate method of cultural conservation. Therefore the essential question remains – ‘If the height limit does not protect local culture, what does?’ So debates over preserving Balinese culture quickly descend into a miasma of ideological confusions, personal opinion and anecdotal evidence. The issues are emotionally charged because there are a plethora of causes represented, deep seated resentments are suppressed and capital formation is threatened. So Bali is a locale where the culture: urban form dilemma looms large, with global tourism impacting indiscriminately on many other paradisiacal islands that litter South East Asia and beyond (Langkawi, Penang, Phuket, Hainan, Mindoro, Hawaii etc.). But in the collision between global culture, local culture, and development, we discover that the narrower questions of ‘culture’ rapidly become subsumed on the one hand, to a search for identity, and on the other to the material basis for the economy.

Since the late sixties Bali has struggled to accommodate tourism on a variety of levels, from urban planning and hotel development to the clash of cultures and behavioural norms. Tourism is seen as vitally necessary to the Balinese economy, allowing investment opportunities, tax revenues, improved infrastructure and facilities, support to small businesses, arts and crafts and other activities. It has reinforced the resource base of many traditional banjar (communities), enabling money to be spent on upgrading temples and providing funds for support to gamelan orchestras, ritual performances etc. But
for others tourism is perceived as a threat to environment and traditions. Hence, modernity appears as a force to be resisted, the association with village life representing origins rather than the city (kota). Issues related to state legislation outlined above must also be added to the mix. The question of what type of tourism, in which locations and under what circumstances has dominated the continuing discourse on cultural conservation. So the following paper does not attempt to be prescriptive. It confronts neither ‘planning’ or ‘urban design’ directly, regarding the immediate problems of both fields – design projects, land use, development control, design control, conservation, pedestrianisation etc. These are subsumed (though not ignored) in order to examine something more fundamental, namely how urban form and urban culture interact, and the dilemmas exposed by such analysis. What is revealed is the complexity of the culture: development: design scenario which ranges here from personal identity to nepotism and global tourism. In order to do this we adopt the following format.

Firstly we address some of the theoretical issues surrounding the investigation of culture, ideology and space, with the objective of stressing the relationship between them. We do this both from a more general theoretical perspective, and secondly from the viewpoint of urbanisation in Bali. Secondly we investigate the role of hegemony as an important ideological vector influencing culture and tradition. Here dominant influences include dictatorship, national policy and local politics. Third, customary law and the perspective of traditional cultural practices regarding space are brought into focus, revealing a process that is seriously opposed to market economics. Next, the impact of globalisation on local culture is investigated in order to expose where some of the actual conflicts exist as opposed to those that are assumed. Finally resulting changes to Balinese identity are examined, changes which involve traditional culture as well as the impact of ideological practices that are currently modifying identity, and culture alike.

2. Theory, culture and ideology

Mainstream urban design has always recognised culture as a key design vector. But we could go further and suggest that urban form and culture are inseparable rather than being independent agents. Nonetheless this critical relationship is infrequently interrogated, and we have argued elsewhere that despite such apparent commitment, cultural definitions, practices and theories do not loom large in the urban design consciousness. There are few available strategies in the literature to assist such analysis, and no easy prescriptive solutions for practitioners of urban development and design. While the word ‘culture’ has been mentioned frequently within texts, nonetheless, it has adjunct status rather than centre stage. There are no easy formulae that can translate cultural mores into urban design concepts and strategies. A search of Amazon’s booklist also demonstrates that there are no current texts dealing with urban design and culture, and culture is only indirectly inferred in other sources. Arguably the closest we get is in ‘The City Cultures Reader’ [1].

Today, cultural studies have enormous scope, and only a few details can be addressed here, specifically those that are relevant to this paper. Readers might wish to consult some of the better overviews of the subject e.g. [2], [3], [4]. Since 1950, cultural studies has deployed a variety of theoretical approaches, the more important of these being political economy (Sahlins), human ecology (Park), feminism (Millett), linguistics (Barthes), and the exercise of power (Gramsci), none of which are likely to appear in any urban design curricula. Traditional cultural analysis focussed on kinship, family and ethnographic studies, e.g. Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinofsky, Clifford Geertz, Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Marshall Sahlins, and more recently, in ‘Custodians of the Sacred Mountain’[5]. But by 1964, cultural studies had morphed into a distinct intellectual field, one consolidated in the foundation of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964, with a defining contribution by Stuart Hall taking over as director in 1968.

Many definitions of culture abound. Arguably there are too many. Fifty years ago in The Silent Language (1959) [6], E.T. Hall suggested that culture is communication, decomposing it into ten primary message systems which he considered had universal application (see also Hall 1969, 1976) [7] [8]. It remains one of the few useful tools for planning and design suggested in the last fifty years,
offering a matrix of culture which designers can define and interpret [6]. By 1973 Clifford Geertz a renowned cultural anthropologist had written a seminal text called ‘The Interpretation of Cultures’ [9]. In contradistinction to Hall, it is notable that he used the plural term, indicating that general rules might be somewhat difficult to establish. He refers to Clyde Kluckhohn’s book ‘Mirror for Man’ where eleven definitions of culture are worked through in a single chapter, including ‘the total way of life of a people, ‘a storehouse of pooled learning,’ and a ‘precipitate of history’ [9:4]. All are sufficiently opaque to be useful in design. Notably, E. T. Hall’s - communication is culture was recently restated [10:6]. So there is clearly some circularity to the debate. Hobart suggests that culture can have at least three different responses – as a frame of reference, as a paradigm, or ‘a way the world is’ [10:14]. Basically the first 53 pages of his book are taken up with trying to define culture. In addition to the five definitions he uses in his introduction to After Culture, he suggests an additional fifteen in his text.

It is therefore unsurprising that he asks ‘Does the idea of culture serve a serious intellectual purpose anymore?’ suggesting that perhaps the answer is ‘no’ [10:34-35]. So it appears that joining some endless quest for a general definition of culture is somewhat futile, one almost meaningless in the Balinese context. Paradoxically, this must be seen as a positive outcome since the alternatives then become more relevant. Instead, what we should be seeking is an understanding of a particular culture as a totality, embedded in the political economy of its creation e.g. such as Bali at the beginning of the third millennium. It is therefore within the realm of ideology that a more integrating vision of culture may be found. Since it is clear that all definitions of culture have to be seriously qualified, we adopt Stuart Hall’s definition as most suited to the conditions we experience, and his view of culture is close to the analytical method we adopt below.

Hall takes the relationship between ideological and material forces as a dialectical one between social being and social consciousness. Culture here is close to ideology, which represents the imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence [10:7]. Cultural studies aims to intervene, if not remove distortions in consciousness, and to show them publicly for what they are. Culture no longer serves, as for Parsons and Geertz, to integrate society, but emerges as a site of conflict.

Investigation of traditional Balinese culture while extensive, has had a limited focus on village culture and the arts with studies of ceremonies, cockfights [11], painting [12], dance [13] and village life in general. The transition from villager to urban dweller, one that constitutes a massive shift both in development, but also in cultural orientation - is seldom addressed, and the implications for culture were that it had little to do with urban life. Even within traditional village life, ethnographic interpretations have proven insufficient in explaining e.g. the ideology of Dutch Colonial rule and its reinforcement of the existing system of social classes. Nonetheless, Balinese culture had been consolidated as the ritual practices and production of everyday village life. Hence the intensity of Bali studies tends to be sacrificed to the idea that culture is an independent factor in urbanisation. In reference to the work of renowned Clifford Geertz’ research for example, Robinson remarks that in his three chapters on Bali, only one sentence is devoted to the massacres of 1965-66 [9]. Similarly in his acclaimed work Negara, Geertz first addresses the question of the local state in Bali, but stopped at the point where the Dutch imposed colonial rule in the south. After that date, he seemed to imply that the discussion of Balinese politics would take one beyond the realm of the ‘authentic’ or original Bal, and into the sordid modern world of automobiles, tax officials, poverty, and political conflict....he conspicuously avoided even the faintest allusion to the transformation of the state in Bali after 1906............Important as they were as anthropological studies, to a political historian, these early post-war years are remarkable for their lack of attention to time, place, or historical and political context beyond the village level[14:9].

Three observations follow from this. First, it would seem necessary to expose the processes of social production upon which urban culture is erected, although Manuel Castells has stated that even
this idea is problematic. Once again ideology provides the clue, for ‘the fact remains that urban culture as it is presented is neither a concept nor a theory. It is strictly speaking a myth, since it recounts ideologically the history of the human species’ [15:75]. Second, we find that mountain and lowland, urban and rural people exist. Four distinct groups then emerge that constitute distinct geographic entities currently homogenised as ‘Balinese’. So even the term the Balinese is somewhat imponderable, since it is the beliefs and situated practices of each Balinese that are important – or following Stuart Halls lead, their ideological orientation towards their own conditions of existence. Vickers insightful remark also prevails: ‘Ultimately there is no single “real” Bali. When the package is unwrapped, we are left with something of a Pandora’s Box of political struggles, individual glory and suffering, optimism and frustration – in short, both a nightmare and “a day dream of a summer’s afternoon’ Vickers [16:23].

Third, reduced to essentials, culture cannot be treated as somehow ‘floating above it all’ as in an orthodox Marxian analysis. Within the development process, culture plays a multitude of roles, including that of economic development, and it is clear that commodity producing culture and its ideological base are eroding the traditions of centuries [17]. Paradoxically, suggesting that the terms culture and the Balinese are rather useless analytical categories does not deny that culture exists. Undeniably Balinese cultures exist, but they cannot be assumed from prevailing definitions or focussed studies. Alternatively, in a globalised world, village life cannot be abstracted away from society as a whole. Arguably the complexity of geography and population make it impossible to generalise about ‘Balinese culture’, which not only varies in the intensity to which it is practiced, but also considering the impacts of a partially commodified social life.

Under these circumstances, culture morphs into urban life in the manner suggested by Stuart Hall - as a site of conflict. Therefore the real problem is how to expose the intertwining of mythology, culture and ideology that began with Dutch Imperialism. Recent history however dictates Particularly germane however has been the process impacted post 1946 by the Suharto Dynasty. In revealing the hegemonic rule of this latter period, the role of culture in Balinese society can be more clearly understood. The role of the local government, recently freed from the shackles of oligarchic rule as recently as 2000 nonetheless remains in a transitional state. Its own policies to land development are somewhat at odds with traditional culture, a subject to which we now turn [18].

3. Hegemony, development and the state
In Bali, the indiscriminate killing and abuse of the poor by Suharto before taking power just after the mid- sixties, claimed as tacitly supported by British and American governments whose interests were predominantly focussed on keeping any communist tendencies out of reach of Chinese and Soviet influence, to which the prior president, Sukarno had been inclined. Between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people were needlessly massacred in the interests of cleansing ‘communism’ from the country. Bali was a major target, with the murder upwards of 80,000 men women and children [19]. [20]. [15].

‘The death of the former Indonesian president Suharto at the age of 86 reminds us that even the most stubborn of dictatorships come to an end. Despite predictions by his ruling clique that he would lead Indonesia into the 21st century, his term of office, which began with bloodshed in 1967, ended equally bloodily in 1998’ [21].

While Suharto was forced to resign in 1998, his rule terminated partly by the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and by the deaths of six students by the security forces. He remained singularly influential until his death in 2008. His era was indeed one of the great heists of the modern era, with Suharto’s wealth estimated at his retirement by Forbes Journal at US$ 46 billion [22]. Given his centralisation of the state apparatus, urban planning simply became another tool to concentrate power and amass personal fortunes. The ideology of Planning was fairly straightforward if somewhat unorthodox. Given Bali’s capacity to generate foreign capital, the Suharto oligarchy invested massively in Bali, with land upon which the hotels and other developments sit allegedly stolen under ‘compulsory purchase orders’
made by Suharto's Government with the original Balinese land owners then murdered to prevent claims in the future [24], [48], [49].

The material rape of national resources was beyond comprehension, all of which affected Bali. Past history dictates that the fear attached to the Suharto oligarchy remains both omnipresent and influential. In turn, any significant incorporation of cultural conservation into planning policy remains subject to big capital not being threatened i.e. it is subsumed in the extent to which the ideology of big capital influences the local state, particularly urban planning. As we shall see below, this influence still prevails. Accepting this context, serious obstacles therefore remain to any realistic consideration of culture and its conservation.

Given that Balinese culture involves long standing traditions – in religion, language, dance, art, theatre, painting, sculpture, silversmithing, wood carving and a myriad of other art forms, it seems that while the height regulation implied some control over culture, legislation to do so was pathetically insufficient. While this might be interpreted as a deliberate strategy to resist culture dictating government policy, realistically it was more likely that nobody really knew what to do in the face of centralised bureaucratic control in Jakarta. At the institutional level, the trilogy of the state, the private sector and labour are in varying degrees of conflict as to how exactly development should be controlled. The state naturally supports the legislation, because it is one of its own creations. It is also axiomatic that to release the plot ratio would create total chaos in the absence of an alternative strategy, as well as an administrative nightmare for local government. The private sector supports the need for increasing the height restriction, or indeed, eliminating it entirely, preferring instead Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand of the market’ to allow free reign over development profits. So private capital simply works around the legislation, and rules are broken or manipulated without redress, due to a singular lack of planning law enforcement, corrupt practices and the abuse of power. As for the people, there is no general agreement as to which process to support, largely due to the confusions surrounding the constitution of culture, lifestyle, identity, the concept of right, and resistance to unrestrained authority, all of which impinge substantially on development and design issues.

So as late as 2009, Bali’s House of Representatives (DPRD-Bali) confirmed that there would be no change in the permitted maximum building height in the new provincial zoning law (RTRWP) reinforced by Vice-Chairman of the DPRD, Ida Bagus Suryatmadja Manuaba who stated that ‘Our first consideration is the view; people approaching the island from the sea should immediately see rows of coconut palms’ and that ‘Buildings can't be built higher than 15 metres; that's a do or die proposition’ [25]. Despite such commitment, last year only 40,000 persons arrived by boat from Java against 3.15 million foreign tourists at Ngurah Rai Airport.

While the rule of 4 stories was largely maintained on flat land, the simplest way around the regulation was to build down a variety of coastal areas onto the beach, with only four stories remaining above the datum. Hence many large hotels have breached this rule raise questions in regard to law enforcement, conformance with legislation, and forms of sanction. Despite such flagrant exploitation of the basic rules, Vickers is of the opinion that Balinese culture is not only intact, it is thriving - ‘Balinese culture is strong because of tourism, not despite it. Tourism defines what Balinese culture is in a context where such definitions have hitherto not been needed’ [16:270]. Needless to say, this viewpoint clashes with the idea that in postmodernity, we can no longer speak of culture, but of cultures. In addition, the idea of resistance to certain forms of oppression need to be aired, and it is clear that within Balinese society, conflict as well as traditional attitudes to space need to be added to qualify the undiluted hegemony of tourism.

4. Culture and space
Traditional culture in Bali enshrines an entire history of customary law and ritual practices in a system called Adat, almost all of which are in conflict with state planning policies [18], [26], [27]. The result is a continuing tension among and between tourism, development agendas, urban politics, traditional
customs and land rights, and cultural conservation. While Bali has a social system underwritten by hundreds of customary laws in proportion to the complexity of its traditions, it also has one of the strictest systems of development control of any region worldwide whose objective is cultural conservation [45].

Figure 1. A typical modern Balinese house with the family shrine raised to the second level

In this context, a Balinese colleague made a simple but revealing comment, that the height limit did not bother the Balinese, since it was ‘outsiders’ that were the main problem. Three major observations surround this simple statement. First, the Balinese have a height prohibition of their own derived from their traditions and beliefs. Second, rules of inheritance also mitigate against high rise development. Third, adat land held in common is constrained by the same restrictions where building and space are considerations. Fourth, Subak (irrigation for rice cultivation based on an hydraulics society) is inseparable from Balinese culture, and preservation of subak implies land conservation over wide areas of the island.

Taking these in turn, the spiritual dimension that infuses Balinese culture in its various incarnations implies a spatial hierarchy, with the sacred above and the mundane below, a widespread social practice in Bali called Leteh. Leteh reflects a basic principle in the Balinese cosmology where a hierarchy of space is prominent and where the highest spaces are reserved for the gods, and the lowest for evil spirits [28]. This becomes manifest in the religious prohibition that no building should overlook a temple precinct, in the same manner that in ceremonies, no person should be placed higher than a priest. Nor can any part of a building be higher than the family shrine, the resting place of the ancestors [46], [47]. So in a two storey building, the shrine will automatically be elevated to the upper floor (see Figure 1). Therefore for most Balinese, single storey buildings are preferred, with a maximum of two storeys [29]. In this manner tradition actually constrains height limitations to two stories rather than four. Importantly, ‘this hierarchy is manifested in all kinds of environmental planning and architectural design, ranging from regional planning to interior and furniture design’ [30:39].

The second observation is related to this general principle. The traditional Balinese courtyard house has specified relationships between its pavilions based on the principles of a grid of nine squares, with eight of these related to the cardinal compass points and one at the centre. In addition, each has a relative degree of sanctity based upon its position. The family shrine is therefore located in the north east quadrant (highest ranking) with the toilets, septic tanks etc., located in the south east quadrant. In addition, it must be recognised that the Balinese do not claim ownership over their property under
such circumstances. They recognise that they are merely custodians of their ancestral shrine. Occupants have use values as long as they are alive, but a family shrine will never be sold. Given the chosen architectural form of such homes, they also represent a significant barrier to any construction over two stories. Hence while capital accumulation clearly occurs, use values, or more accurately, spiritual values, significantly limit land development in terms of use, density and urban form [26], [31], [32].

Third, land held in common is subject to traditional rules unless the state chooses to intervene when its interests need to dominate, and the conflict between the state and the various Banjar is a continuing site of oppression/resistance [23], [33]. This is due to the problematic of clear ownership through legal title that permeates many quasi—medieval social systems. In such circumstances, it is common for the state to claim ownership and sell the land to developers, opening up the possibility for serious graft, corruption and the undermining of cultural values. The practical effect of this situation is that the entire envelope of traditional Balinese society forms a barrier to capital accumulation from land, since many buildings and much land are not commodified on market principles. The corollary of course is that the free operation of the market requires these values to be undermined in one form or another, and this is slowly taking place.

Fourth, the traditional system of agrarian based society dominated by the rice farming and founded by an irrigation system of subak - one of the key cultural icons that regulations were presumably meant to protect, is being continually eroded, and development has proceeded virtually unchecked since the seventies. Paradoxically, while enforcing a strategy to preserve their culture by imposing a uniform height limit, the city elders have merely allowed development to accelerate horizontally,swallowing up one million square metres of agricultural land per annum [34].

5. Ideology and Balinese identity
While the question of identity does not seem to possess any significant implications for urban space, in promoting a revanchist ideology of Balinese culture, the real forces behind change in Bali are hidden with commitment to a movement that does not reflect the actual conditions of existence of Balinese people and the ideologies that affect their culture. In the aftermath of the Bali Bombings in October 2002, every community on the island went through special cleansing ceremonies to rid themselves of the ‘bad karma’ that they had accumulated. Blaming themselves for the tragedy, a retreat into ritual practices took place. With it came a resurgence of commitment to the traditional way of (village) life. This overall feeling of self-inmolation culminated later in the movement to conserve the Balineseness or Balinese Identity - Kebalian. The question remains, ‘What does it mean to possess Kebalian?’

For the moment we must stand outside local opinion and look inwards to get a different perspective on the problem. History dictates that a fundamental principle of capitalist development in the accumulation of any surplus is the increasing commodification of social life. Or stated more succinctly ‘The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole’ [35:86]. This remark has singular relevance for Bali, and we will argue that Balinese culture is part of the above process, that is towards a more, unified manufactured phenomenon, along with the buildings and spaces that reflect it. Prior to the deepening of capitalist social relations around 1970, one could say with some risk that the Balinese had no culture at all. Of course this does not mean that the Balinese did not have a vibrant social life filled with ritual and ceremony. What it does suggest is that the very concept of having a culture was one imposed from the outside by capitalist development, a culture successfully marketed and sold by big capital.

The process is a fact of life that has been embedded in Western societies for some 150 years. Nor did the Balinese have ‘art’, ‘religion’, ‘architecture’ etc., which constituted the necessary features of a self-conscious culture, - one to which commodification was implicit. In contrast, the Balinese lived their lives as an unselfconscious process, where rituals, religion, craftsmanship, and their own sense of
space – time were enacted as integral to their sense of being. One idiom accorded to the Balinese says this much more simply – ‘We have no art (culture) - we just do everything as well as we can’. From the above we can speculate that the commodification of a Balinese culture and the accelerating exploitation by big capital were synonymous events. This process was in fact fuelled if not initiated by the crony capitalism of the state and its apparatus started from the era of President Suharto and a new round of imperialism post 1966.

Crudely stated, in order to further the interests of the oligarchy of investors whose investments in Bali rocketed after that date, Balinese society had to be commodified in line with cultural tourism. For this to happen, the island had to be packaged for sale – its traditions, ceremonies, sacred sites, architecture, performances, ritual objects and even the landscape. Only then did the Balinese people realise they had a culture, something that could be adapted and sold to the international community – or as Michel Picard acknowledges-

‘What happened is that the focus on ‘cultural’ tourism convinced the Balinese people that they have a ‘culture’, something precious and perishable that they perceive as a capital to be exploited and as a heritage to be protected. As it was being manipulated and appropriated by the tourism industry, their culture became not only a source of profit and pride, but also a cause of anxiety for the Balinese, who started wondering whether they were still authentically Balinese. (36:155).

In other words, the reality was that kebalian no longer existed. Bali had become modern, part of commodity producing society where resistance was possible, but one where traditional culture had clearly been unable to withstand a hegemony imposed by the Suharto regime, over a forty year period [37]. Clearly the mantras surrounding height restrictions and debates over kebalian created unwitting smokescreens for big capital, whose interests in exploiting Balinese society and culture were driven firstly by politics, and second by investment, although during his government these distinctions were difficult to maintain separate.

6. Redefining culture

Noted economist Professor Ramantha of Udayana University in Bali, recently stated that increasing the building height requirement to 33 meters is an idea that will hurt the working capital of tourism (i.e. culture). This is not merely one man’s opinion, and changes to the regulation ‘are gaining virtually no support from Bali religious leaders, academicians, social commentators and tourism figures - all united in their opposition to the proposed building code change’[38]. While this is no doubt true, a carefully worded argument as to why this is the case is nowhere to be seen. The same article also remarked that any modification to existing rules, even for special categories such as hospitals, universities and public buildings would open the floodgates for all other uses.

Professor Dr. Ir. Wayan Windia, also of Bali’s Udayana University supported Professor Ramantha’s position in an article that first appeared in the Bali Post, titled "Let’s Destroy Bali?”In the context of the whole spatial plan for Bali, his argument was that tradition should be placed above practical considerations when rules are made to protect Bali’s culture. ‘Clearly, the transformative process of change cannot be avoided. Nonetheless, the fundamental principles, realities, substance and essence known to the world as Bali must still be protected’. What is this essence of Bali which must be preserved at all costs? Professor Windia suggests that ‘In the pawongan or social environment - the organizational structures of the subak water management systems, traditional village structures and provincial regulations must be visited to preserve Bali’s culture. Finally, in the parahyangan or spiritual realm, attention must be given to community values of harmony, cooperation and spirituality’ [39]. Clearly Balinese ‘urban’ culture has little place in the overall scheme of things.

In addition to these protests, some bordering on the xenophobic, tourism is frequently attacked more directly as being responsible for many of the islands problems. The ideology that tourism is to blame runs so deep that the Chairman of the Bali Tourism Board, Ngurah Wijaya recently stated that
‘when they (tourists) come we have serious problems of traffic and waste. The island becomes dirty’ [40:2]. The corollary of course is that if the tourists did not come, then everything would seemingly be nice and clean, with problems extinguished. The state’s responsibility for e.g. waste disposal did not seem to arise as an important dimension of the problem.

Nonetheless, the overwhelming impression one distils from the prevailing responses to Bali’s control over building heights is that the regulation was set in place as a method of cultural preservation, and only indirectly one of development control, a process barely mentioned. For example a local activist, Putu Juliadi, ‘condemned plans to change the height restriction as not reflecting the Balinese people's love of culture, art and religion’ [41]. More importantly, it was pointed out that ‘changes in the current rules, he insisted, would only serve special segments of society at the cost of Bali’s future.’ So thirty years after the legislation was first installed, the idea still prevailed that these three major components of Balinese identity could be protected by building height controls. Nonetheless, in the typical Indonesian method of inference rather than direct attack, Juliadi indicated certain ‘special segments of society’ as having responsibility, without mentioning who they are, a demonstration in itself of the prevailing anxieties over authority and untrammelled power still circulating within the Balinese community.

7. Conclusion

Urban development and design have had an ongoing debacle for over half a century with the concept culture and how it should be represented in built form [32], [42], [43]. Even lessons from a small island suggest the enduring complexity of culture and the conflicts that arise from its various manifestations. Here we find that globalisation qua international tourism demands commodified cultures, objectified, displaced and saleable. This remains a dominant issue within modernity, but also within traditional cultures such as Bali, one that still clings to quasi-medieval social relations, language and traditions. But rather than isolating traditional culture as a discrete set of circumstances, we argue that explanations of Balinese urban culture and its relationship to ‘traditional’ culture belong in the same basket. So instead of defining Balinese culture from the inside, it seems more productive to adopt the idea that culture is best viewed as a part of the overall ideological constitution of society. Such a definition tends towards hegemonic control and exploitation, a perspective enduringly appropriate to Bali, and one that simultaneously combines political, economic and so-called cultural factors. Because culture today is an integral part of production, it cannot be considered an independent factor in urbanisation, and battles over ‘culture’ such as occur in Bali, tend to divert attention from the real issues of urban development. To a degree, culture, identity and lifestyle focus on conflicts arising between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ environments, a distinction which Castells notes as having no real meaning within capitalism. Hence false consciousness takes the place of logic. The idea of conserving kebalian, arguably the main source of resistance to cultural erosion, while well meant, constitutes a nostalgic and revanchist attempt to recoup history, rather than a revisionist attack on the realities of globalisation. With the best of intentions, conserving kebalian unwittingly supports the hegemonic practices of state and capital that actually undermine its objectives for a more traditional Balinese culture rather than reinforcing them, while concentration on building height limits diverting attention from the real nature of urban development locally.

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