

Fall 2018

# Balance and Imbalance: The Necessity of Natural Disasters in Balinese Hinduism

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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Balance and Imbalance:  
The Necessity of Natural Disasters in Balinese Hinduism

Lorin Foster DeMuth

Advised by Yudhistira Kazuhiro Budiono

SIT Study Abroad Indonesia: Arts, Religion, and Social Change

Fall 2018

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To all three families I stayed with in Indonesia, to Ibu and Bapak Nengah, to Ibu Anik, to Ibu Wayan, and to each and every individual who allowed me the opportunity to enter their world. The overwhelming presence of family allowed me the freedom to learn as well as the support to make mistakes. I hope that this paper reflects the respect I have for Indonesia as it has given more to me than I could have possibly imagined.

### **Field Methods**

All research done for my Independent Study Project (ISP) was done in compliance with SIT Study Abroad rules and guidelines regarding interviews and field research. My research was conducted throughout Bali including but not limited to Tabanan regency, Klungkung regency, Bangli regency, Karangasem regency, Denpasar, and the island of Nusa Penida. My primary focus in conducting this research was to learn about the relationship between natural disasters and Balinese Hinduism.

This field study project was conducted through primary interviews, secondary research, and personal observation. From Monday, November 5<sup>th</sup> through Monday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> I conducted 16 primary interviews as well as approximately 20-30 informal conversations with individuals regarding my topic. All informants were completely aware of my intention to interview them and provided their written and/or oral consent to my interview. All informants were specifically made aware that they could withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer a question at any time without any sort of repercussion. All of the informal conversations held with individuals included in this paper provided their oral consent to be included. Some of the names in my paper have been slightly altered at the request of the individual to not be identified.

All interviews conducted in Indonesian were either translated by myself or with the assistance of SIT teachers Kazu, Sani, Dian, or Pak Yudi. While I have spent much of my time learning and practicing Indonesian over the last three months, the language barrier that inevitably arose in conversations was a large obstacle to my study. In any case, it is important to remember that my translations as well as interpretation of words and ideas is subjective simply by the nature of the differences between English and Indonesian.

### ***Melukat*: Statement on Respecting Balinese Hinduism during ISP**

Before I begin my paper, I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to study such sacred topics. Out of respect for Balinese Hinduism and for the safety of myself, I was advised to participate in a purification ceremony before beginning my research. On Saturday November 3<sup>rd</sup>, myself along with three other SIT students participated in a purification ceremony known as *Melukat*. The purpose of this ceremony is to clean oneself spiritually. This ceremony can occur anywhere so long as a priest is present with holy water. In Balinese Hinduism, *Melukat* is most often performed when someone feels unclean or is engaging with sacred topics. In my case, the purification was suggested as a message of respect and safety in my pursuit to study natural disasters and Hinduism, two very holy and powerful topics.

Walking along the black sand beach of Kelating beach, the priest informed me that we must clean our souls similarly to how we must clean our bodies. The purification itself lasted approximately 20 minutes as we moved through a series of prayers and sprinkling of holy water. Finally, the priest retrieved water from the ocean with a bucket and blessed the water. One by one each of us drank a small amount of the water then washed our mouth, nose, eyes, ears, hands, and feet. We then bowed before the priest washing our bodies as he dumped the purified ocean water over our heads. Finally, the priest's wife came to us with uncooked white rice known as *bija*, the seed of life. We placed it on our foreheads, at the base of our throat, and ate one piece to represent good thoughts, good actions, and good words or *tri kaya parisudha* in Balinese term.

## Introduction

“Hinduism is founded on the belief that there is order in the world, that the universe is not random... What Hinduism seeks is an equilibrium, a balance between these two forces or tendencies [disorder and order]” (Eiseman I, 1990, p.11).

Located directly along the Ring of Fire and the only Hindu majority island in Indonesia, Bali epitomizes the complexity of a society rooted in both geological significance and deep religious practices. Throughout my stay I was continuously struck by the role nature plays in maintaining balance in the lives of Balinese Hindus. While offerings made of pinned leaves filled with local flowers are used for daily prayer, nature is also the medium in which messages are passed from the god to human. At the center of Balinese Hinduism is the balance of god, human, and nature known as *Tri Hita Karana*. This concept describes balance within the three major aspects of the world and emphasizes a harmonious life. Natural disasters, conversely, represent moments of destruction and power, moments of imbalance. At the instant of a volcanic eruption or earthquake, humans are at the mercy of the power of nature. In turn, my research navigates the tension of the both the spiritual and geologic forces within a religion centered around balance.

Fred B. Eiseman Jr. explains this necessity of balance in his book *Bali: Sekala and Niskala: Essays on Religion, Ritual, and Art*; “Hinduism is founded on the belief that there is order in the world, that the universe is not random... What Hinduism seeks is an equilibrium, a balance between these two forces or tendencies [order and disorder]” (Eiseman I, 1990, p.11). This sense of balance manifests itself in three major categories, *Tuhan* (god), *manusia* (people), and *lingkungan* or *alam* (the environment or nature). Order is personified as the gods, *dewa* and *dewi* while disorder “is personified as the earth demons *Bhuta-Kala*” (Eiseman I, 1990, p.11). Balance, the process of seeking an equilibrium between order and disorder, is maintained

primarily through the use of ceremonies. Working within this understanding of balance, I will explain not only the significance of natural disasters in Balinese Hinduism but their necessity in maintaining this balance.

I will begin with a simplified history of Balinese Hinduism emphasizing its connection to the natural world. I will then discuss the role of the environment in Balinese Hinduism leading into the geological context and presence of natural disasters. It is important to note that my research focuses on the most prevalent natural disasters in Bali, i.e, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. With this, I will then explain how natural disasters are seen as: a source of balance, a message, and a reminder for the intention of life.

### **Historical background to the introduction of religion in Bali**

Throughout history Hinduism has shown a unique connection to the land. Starting in the first millennium CE, “Hinduism came with the influence of Indian high culture into Indonesia, which brought three major gods: *Brahma*, *Wisnu*, and *Siwa*. Local Balinese beliefs were influenced over the centuries by South Indian priests and sages who visited Bali.” (McDaniel, 2013, p. 345). We are able to trace Hinduism's presence through the Kutai (or east Kalimantan), inscriptions throughout Java. These inscriptions include information on aspects of Hinduism such as caste systems and sacrifices (Ariati, 2008, p. 83). From approximately the 4th century CE through the 15th century CE Hinduism continued to blossom (Ariati, 2008, p. 87). However, with the introduction of the Islamic trading network came a shift in domination of power in Indonesia. According to Jude McDaniel, “When the Majapahit empire declined due to Muslim domination in the fifteenth century, writers, artists, priests, and musicians fled from Java to Bali,

bringing further Indian influence to the island.” (McDaniel, 2013, p. 345). Today Bali exists as gem of Hinduism sandwiched in a chain of Islam.

As Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati describes in her article *Hindu Rituals in India and Bali*, “Hinduism in Bali has developed into its own unique religion, which has undergone an amalgamation between Indian Hindu elements with indigenous Balinese elements.” To this point she continues, “although we both worship the same gods and goddesses, perform religious ceremonies devoted to those deities, and build sacred temples dedicated to their presence, there are some elements of the Balinese traditions that have been created based on local beliefs and traditions” (Ariati, 2008, p. 75). The role of the environment is emphasized in the mixture of Indian Hindu elements with indigenous Balinese elements. One major example of this is through Bali’s unique adaptation to the land.

### **The Role of The Environment in Balinese Hinduism**

Throughout various conversations and interviews, I found the significance of the natural world to hold a deeper personified meaning than what I originally perceived. The presence of rain, the falling of a tree, the movement of an earthquake, and the eruption of a volcano possess a deeply spiritual meaning connected to the unseen spirit known as *Niskala*. According to Eiseman, *Niskala* is understood as the supernatural, unseen, intangible spirit (Eiseman I, 1990, p.127). As Ibu Wayan of Balian village explained, sometimes the gods speak to us through the priest or the healer. “Other times, the message comes in the form of the rain, the ocean, the earth, and the mountains” (Personal communication, November 27, 2018). At the same time, prayers almost always incorporate materials native to the island. Daily offerings are delicately constructed from the leaves of the banana tree and local flowers. According to Bapak Wayan

Sujana, a *Pemangku* (or priest) from Institut Hindu Dharma Negeri (IHDN), the sacred Banyan Tree is wrapped in a black and white checkered cloth because it is seen as the carriage for the soul; a direct example of the religious significance of the natural world (Sujana, W., personal communication, November 19, 2018).

The various mythologies regarding the creation of the earth and natural disasters provide further religious significance in the natural world. According to Eisman, “Dragons *Naga Basuki* and *Naga Ananta Boga* rest upon the back of *Bedawang Nala*: the world turtle that supports the island on Bali” (Eisman II, 1990, p. 239). Bapak Jero Mangku, a priest at Pura Besakih, shared with me the mythological explanation of earthquakes and the creation of Mount Agung. As the story goes, there are three dragons that dwell in Mount Agung. *Naga Taksaka* lives at the top of the mountain, *Naga Ananta Boga* lives in the middle, and *Naga Basuki* lives at the bottom. If *Naga Ananta Boga* moves, the earth moves, and there will be an earthquake. While people often asserted these stories as legends, it is representative of the deep-rooted relationship between natural disasters and *Niskala*.

Similarly, many individuals shared with me the creation story of Mount Agung. The legend of Mount Agung begins in the Himalayan mountains of India. On the command of *Siwa*, Mount Meru exploded causing part of the mountain to travel to Java and thus creating Mount Semeru. Over time, the gods desired to stop the land of Bali from shaking. Thus, they caused the eruption of Mount Semeru and carried the top of the mountain over to Bali. Along the way mountains were created “pinning” down the island to stop it from shaking. This explains the chain of mountains stretching from Java to the largest of all the mountains, Mount Agung.

I want to emphasize the medium of communication used in connecting to and receiving messages from the gods. In these sacred conversations between human and god there exists the

presence of the natural world. Nature acts as the means of giving thanks, pacification, and worship. At the same time, nature is the source of reward, surplus, dissatisfaction and even anger depending on the satisfaction of the *Niskala*. These deeply sacred beliefs and ceremonies rely on the elements of nature. This connection acts in accordance with the historical role of nature in religious practices as aspects of the unseen world have been represented in nature for centuries. Thus, the importance of the environment derives from its role as a means of communication as well as representation of *Niskala*.

In conversations and interviews, people would often take the time to express their appreciation for the environment. Individuals expressed an obligation to acknowledge the environment's generosity before discussing its destructive capabilities. While I do not intend to paint the Balinese as insensitive to destruction and death, I do want to highlight a key cultural understanding that is necessary in understanding destruction. While death and disaster are undeniably tragic and horrific occurrences, there I found an overwhelming sense of acceptance and resilience within Balinese culture. As Ibu Oka described to me at the cremation of her cousin, "we are sad but we must let the spirit go. We all will die someday" (Ibu Oka., personal communication, November 4, 2018).

### **Geological Context of Bali and The Presence of Natural Disasters**

As part of the Ring of Fire, natural disasters frequent the island of Bali. The Ring of Fire is a string of volcanoes and sites of seismic activity around the edges of the Pacific Ocean (NGS, 2012, p. 1). The Ring of Fire hosts 75% of the world's active volcanoes as well as 90% of the world's earthquakes. Indonesia alone has more active volcanoes than any other nation in the world (Eiseman II, 1990, p. 4). In this section, I intend to lay out the basic science behind the

vast earthquakes and volcanic eruptions in Bali as a means to contextualize the religious beliefs surrounding natural disasters present in Balinese Hinduism.

To understand the geological activity of Bali, one must begin with the theory of plate tectonics. A modernized theory of Alfred Wegner's continental drift theory, plate tectonics describes that the outermost layers of the Earth (the crust and uppermost mantle) make up the brittle lithosphere of the Earth. The lithosphere is broken up into a number of thin plates, which move on top of the asthenosphere (middle mantle). Plate interiors are relatively stable, and most of the tectonic action (earthquakes, volcanism) takes place where plates meet – where they collide at convergent boundaries, move away from one another at divergent boundaries, or slide past one another at transform boundaries (Tarbuck, 2006, p. 216). As Mary Caperton Morton describes, plate tectonics are “a shifting puzzle of interconnected slabs of upper mantle and crust that collide and diverge, generating earthquakes, fueling volcanoes, opening ocean basins and raising mountain ranges” (Morton, 2017, p. 1). Thus, the high amount of volcanic and seismic activity in Bali is a direct result of the convergent Indian-Australian and Eurasian plate boundary.

According to an article published by National Geographic in 2017, Subduction zones form where two plates converge and one begins sliding under the other. This movement of earth's crust recycles lithosphere back into the mantle while new lithosphere forms in areas of spreading. Convection of earth's interior drives the movement of tectonic plates (National Geographic, 2017, p.1). Morton describes this process, “cooler, denser material sinking down into the mantle is thought to be the primary driver of circulation, while hotter, less dense material rising to the surface in the form of mantle plumes and upwellings provides a secondary driver” (Morton, 2017, p. 1). The forces that are generated by these vertical movements drive the

horizontal shifts of the tectonic plates. Thus, in the case of a convergent oceanic to continental plate conversion, oceanic crust with its higher density will plummet below the more buoyant continental plate.

In *Bali Sekala and Niskala Volume II*, Eiseman explains one of the major geologic features associated with natural disasters is Bali. The Benioff Seismic Zone “is the place of maximum shear and, not surprisingly, is the focus of many earthquakes. The point at which the two plates begin to overlap is called the *mélange* wedge, for the *mélange* of debris and material there has been scraped off the subducting plate” (Eiseman II, 1990, p. 5). Additionally, Eiseman describes the importance of subduction zone magma in volcanic eruptions in Bali. As he explains, subduction zone magma tends to cool quickly as it nears the surface. This causes blockage within the vents forcing pressure to gradually build until an eruption is triggered. The eruption is characteristically more aggressive and explosive than other sources of magma.

There are many active volcanoes in Bali including “Batukau (2,276 meters), Abang (2,152 meters), Batur 1,717 meters, and Bali’s highest mountain, Agung, 3,142 meters” (Eiseman II, 1990, p. 4). Stratovolcanoes are most commonly associated with the Ring of Fire, both the classification of Mount Agung and Batur. According to *Earth Science 11<sup>th</sup> Edition* stratovolcanoes, also known as composite volcanoes, are towering, steep sloped, and frequently symmetrical mountains. These volcanoes are often extremely dangerous and known for violent eruptions. The primary factors that determine the nature of volcanic eruptions include: temperature, composition and amount of dissolved gases it contains (Tarbuck, 2006, p. 260).

Mount Agung is the most active volcano on Bali. Located in the Northeast region, major eruptions have occurred in 1843, 1963, and recently in 2017. In November of last year, Mount Agung erupted five times with peak alert levels issued on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November (NGS, 2012, p.

2). While the eruption of 2017 relocated thousands of Balinese people from their homes and disrupted air traffic and travel, there were no reported casualties as a direct result of the eruption. Conversely, the eruption of 1963, is noted as one of the largest and most devastating eruptions in Indonesian history. It is estimated that over 1,500 people died from the eruption along with vast environmental effects such as air pollution from ash.

An earthquake as defined in *Earth Science 11<sup>th</sup> Edition* is “the shaking of the earth’s crust due to a release in energy” (Tarbuck, 2006, p. 254). An earthquake can result in major forms of destruction such as liquefaction, tsunamis, fires, and landslides. Earthquakes can occur from built up stress between tectonic plates, nuclear explosions, volcanic eruptions, or meteor impacts. However, most earthquakes are caused by slippage along a fault in Earth’s crust. As plate boundaries move past one another there creates a stronger sense of friction between the two plates. Earthquakes occur at the moment plate boundaries break and slide past each other. The result is the vibration of Earth produced by the rapid release of energy (Tarbuck, 2006, p. 259).

Major earthquakes in Bali were recorded in 1917, 1976, as well as 1979. In all cases there was a mass destruction of buildings, homes, and the relocation of thousands of people. In 1976 around 500 people were reported dead while in 1917 the death toll reached well over 1,000 lives. (NGS, 2012, p. 2). While these major earthquakes have caused the most destruction to the island, minor and midrange earthquakes are still a common occurrence. For the purpose of this paper, I am mostly interested in the beliefs surrounding earthquakes and volcanic eruptions without the consideration of magnitude and amount of destruction.

### **Personal Perceptions of Natural Disasters**

I often found myself engaged in conversations with people about how they felt during natural disasters. Are they scared when they hear of activity within the volcano, and do they run when an earthquake wakes them up? In speaking to well over 30 people about this, I was surprised by their acknowledgment of the danger of natural disasters, but also their overwhelmingly apathetic attitudes. Natural disasters are simply a part of life they would share. Generally, individuals felt a sense of helplessness and acceptance of both earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. When asked how he feels during earthquakes, Agastya, an 18-year-old student at IHDN stated “I feel scared. I know that there could be eruption or tsunami, but I also know that it just happens” (personal communication, November 3rd, 2018). Ibu Rika, a housewife from the Tabanan Regency, described “that if the eruption were to happen I would absolutely be afraid, however, it is just god's will” (personal communication, November 3rd, 2018). During the 2017 eruption of Mount Agung, Bapak Jero Mangku, prayed to the mountain saying, “you may erupt but after that please overcome and be good again and make sure our people are still safe” (personal communication, November 11, 2018). Bapak Pasek, another member of a small village in Tabanan, described walking very slowly from the District Office to his home during the 1963 earthquakes that preceded the eruption of Mount Agung. He later added, “We slept in the street for seven days after the earthquake to be safe” (Bapak Pasek., personal communication, November 3, 2018). Surya, another tourism student from IHDN, when speaking about his experiences with earthquakes, humorously described running away to open space and yelling at his sleepy brother to wake up. While he did state “earthquakes can be scary,” he continually repeated that “they just happen” (personal communication, November 3rd, 2018). Collectively, these interviews represent natural disasters as fearful and dangerous, but just

part of life in Bali. While these interviewees are clearly aware of the destruction and death that comes from natural disasters, there is simultaneously a sense of apathy as to when or where they will occur.

The message that natural disasters are just a part of life echoed in my conversation with Ibu Dayu. “In Balinese culture, when there is an earthquake we say *hidup...hidup*. It means “life”. When there is an earthquake we all say *hidup, hidup* as a reminder that we are alive. Earthquakes are a message and we say *hidup* when we receive it” (Ibu Dayu., personal communication, November 13th, 2018). To Ibu Wayan, earthquakes are a message from *Niskala* and we need to respond by making human energy more present, more powerful. *Hidup* acts as an acknowledgment of this message.

### **The Necessity of Balance**

The necessity of balance in Balinese Hinduism was prominent in almost every conversation I had. Some would point to the balance of positive and negative energies while others would directly address the presence of balance in nature. Guiding these aspects of balance were the philosophies of *Tri Hita Karana*, *Rwa-Bhinneda*, and the importance of direction including *Kaja* and *Kelod*. Looking through the perspectives of these frameworks, the presence of balance and harmony in nature becomes evident in various ceremonies. Ultimately, these philosophies will provide the basis for understanding the necessity of both the positive and negative in the world.

The concept of living a harmonious life is most commonly understood as the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*. *Tri Hita Karana* is derived from the word of “*Tri*” meaning three, “*Hita*” meaning happiness or prosperity, and “*Karana*” which means the cause or manner. Therefore,

*Tri Hita Karana* loosely expresses “Three causes of happiness or prosperity”. While *Tri Hita Karana* is “a philosophy born of the cultural exchange between Bali and India over the past 2,000 years” I was informed that the actual title of *Tri Hita Karana* was only coined in the last 50 years. In the article titled, *Why Do the Balinese Make Offerings?*, the three elements included in *Tri Hita Karana* are *parhyangan*, which refers to a relationship with god, *pawongan*, which refers to a relationship with other humans and *palemahan*, which refers to a relationship with nature (Fox, 2015, p. 37).

In addition to *Tri Hita Karana*, the concept of *Rwa-Bhinneda* or “two in one”, expresses the necessity of opposites within the universe. Fred B. Eiseman Jr. explains this necessity of balance through the necessity of good and evil. He states, “evil is part of the whole, and good is part of the whole. Neither can exist without the other” (Eiseman II, 1990, p. 4). This concept was often explained to me through the example of good and bad actions. While both examples can exist separately, they simultaneously exist as one. A single person is capable of both good and bad action, but the actions belong to the one person. The importance of this concept exists in the necessity of opposing yet balancing sides as part of the whole.

One of the most significant examples of balance in life exists in the importance of direction. *Kaja* and *Kelod* represent the two variable directions of facing towards the mountain or towards the sea. In the article entitled *Kaja and Kelod*, the sacred mountain of Agung is described as “the dwelling place of the gods. Whether north or south it is always up, the sacred direction towards god.” Conversely, *Kelod*, directing towards the sea, is considered the least sacred direction. In addition to *Kaja* and *Kelod* is the importance of the nine *Nawasanga*: the four cardinal points of the compass, the four intercardinal points, and center. *Nawasanga* act as a guideline in daily life as well as spiritually (Eiseman I, 1990, p. 46). As Bapak Arta Widana

explained, “In each of these nine directions dwells a separately-named aspect of god, each aspect having its associated color and characteristics.” One will of course build their family temple in the most sacred direction of their compound, north and east, while their garbage will most likely be put in the south or west area of the compound. Houses generally include a space for the gods, a space for the humans, and a space for nature—all of which are necessary for harmony in daily life (Widana, A., personal communication, November 19, 2018). Thus, the importance of these directions and our existence in space is not only tied to the connection of direction, landforms, color, and deities, but necessary for a harmonious life.

### **The presence of Balance in Balinese Ceremonies**

Relationships between *parhyangan*, *pawongan*, and *palemahan* are constantly being maintained through the use of offerings, rituals, and ceremonies dedicated to the various gods, goddesses, and events in life. Ida pedanda Ketut Sidemen, a High Priest from Geriya Taman in Sanur divides Balinese rituals into five different types cited by (Ariati, 2008, p.68):

*Dewa- Yadnya* (ceremonies dedicated to the gods)

*Pitra- Yadnya* (ceremonies dedicated to the ancestors)

*Bhuta- Yadnya* (ceremonies dedicated to the Bhuta-Kala)

*Resi- Yadnya* (ceremonies for the initiation into priestly study)

*Manusa- Yadnya* (human life-cycle ceremonies)

This classification of ceremonies represents the five major ways Balinese Hindus attempt to maintain balance in their lives. With each ceremony comes a different god, goddess, or being to appease. Further, these ceremonies represent the various manifestations of god known as *Sang Hyang Widhi*. The different characteristics humans envision as god are expressed in the form of different deities. As Bapak I Nengah Sidanta explained, “to connect to the energy of creation we visualize *Brahma*; to connect to the energy of preservation we visualize *Wisnu*; and to connect to

the energy of destruction we visualize Siwa.” Beyond *Brahma*, *Wisnu*, and *Siwa*, *Sang Hyang Widhi* manifests in a multitude of other deities. For example, the negative aspects of *Sang Hyang Widhi* are expressed through the demonic spirit known as *Bhuta-Kala* (Sidanta, N., personal communication, November 30, 2018). Ultimately, the various manifestations of *Sang Hyang Widhi* represents human connection to god in his/her many forms while also exemplifying *Rwa-Bhinneda*, as even god is subject to both good and evil.

The importance of balance was demonstrated to me in one of the first ceremonies I attended during my ISP. On Saturday November 3rd, I attended a ceremony known as *Manca Wali Krama*. This ceremony occurs every five years in the Batur region with the intention of connecting the mountain, Mount Batur, with the ocean – a symbol of linking the father, the mountain, and the mother, the ocean. The night before the ceremony Bapak Nengah Suryadi sat across from Maggie, a fellow student, Putu, our driver, and I describing the events that would occur in the coming days. Comically, he described that the ceremony should happen every five years, but it had been nine years since the last ceremony, “a lot of work” he chuckled. For the next 15 days thousands of people from all of Bali will venture to Mount Batur to participate in the various ceremonies.

On November 3rd, Maggie, Putu, and I began our journey starting at *Pura Ulun Danu Batur* which is the largest temple surrounding Mount Batur. We proceeded from the temple as part of the procession to the ocean otherwise known as *Melasti*. We followed more than 5,000 people and 700 cars to Watu Klotok beach in Klungkung regency then walking one kilometer towards the ocean. Thousands of offerings were placed all over while families sought shade in anticipation for the later events. In the afternoon, Bapak Jero Gede would bath in the ocean and bless buckets of holy water for all those to pray.

I returned to Batur region by myself for the largest ceremony on November 7th, *Pekelem*. I stood in the corner of the entrance to *Pura Jati Segara Ulun Danu Batur* as thousands of people made their way in and out of the temple. The area surrounding the temple was alive with traditional Balinese dancing, cockfighting, conversing, and praying. While I stayed at the lake in anticipation for the sacrifice, around 50 people hiked mount Batur to pray for the protection and safety of the village. Throughout the day I asked security guards, families, and *warung* owners their thoughts on the ceremony. One man described his excitement for the vast number of people and two billion Rupiah price tag on the ceremony. Perceptions of what the ceremony was for varied on an individual to individual basis, however, the general consensus dealt with the linking of natural elements. One man I talked to explained that the ceremony was for safety and protection from natural disasters, while another woman said it was for the air, water, and earth. Many shared with me the significance of going from mountain to ocean back to mountain or *Nyegara- Gunung*, as the most important part of the ceremony.

Sitting on a bed of jagged volcanic rocks jabbing me through my *Pakaian Adat*, I awaited the largest event of the day: the sacrifice for the lake. In every direction I was being shoved and pushed as processions of men holding large offerings walked through. One by one the animals were brought down to the floating dock. First the two cows, then the pig, the goat, the ducks, goose, brown dog with black snoot and finally the chickens of five different colors. I watched as the animals were blessed and brought onto the five different boats. Then, to my complete surprise, the floating dock in which at least 20 people stood, began floating away powered by two motor boat engines. As all the boats made their way to the center of the lake, I could see from a far each animal be pushed or thrown into the water, sacrificing the animals to the lake.

While I was not able to return for the other major portions of the ceremony, what I was able to observe expressed to me the deep importance of keeping balance between various elements of the earth, and the intricate relationship between god, human, and the environment. Different individuals had different ways of expressing the meaning of this ceremony, but the general importance of was to connect the mountains and the ocean, to give thanks, to ask for safety and protection, and to show respect to the gods. No matter if this is seen as a linking of the ocean and the sea, or of the connection between water, air, and earth; god, human, and environment are linking through the medium of nature.

### **Ceremonies for Natural Disasters**

Individual responses regarding natural disasters varied depending on where they were from as well as their occupation. While I was given the privilege to speak with many priests and knowledgeable Balinese people, I am in no way fully knowledgeable on the plethora of ceremonies and rituals that relate to natural disasters. In any case, I asked each respondent to describe any ritual or ceremony they are aware of that intends to prevent natural disasters from occurring. Respondents from Tabanan regency often expressed apprehension in directly linking ceremonies to natural disasters. For example, Surya responded, “No. We just think good thoughts” (personal communication, November 3rd, 2018). According to Ibu Rika “There are no rituals that could avoid natural disasters because that is god's will” (personal communication, November 3rd, 2018). Agastya shared a similar perspective by stating “We cannot do anything to make these things not happen” (personal communication, November 3rd, 2018). All three of these perspectives echo one another in that they do not believe ceremonies or rituals have a place in the prevention of natural disasters. However, Bapak Pasek recounted a sacrifice known as

*Mecaru* in the wake of the Mount Agung eruption in 1963 accompanied by strong earthquakes that damaged a few buildings in his village including temples. This sacrifice was done in response to a gate that had fallen in one of their temples, *Pura Dalem*. As the *Kelihan Adat* (Customary Village Head), Bapak Pasek sacrificed a grey duck to “pacify the demonic spirit.” After one month passed and the earthquakes were over, the community performed rituals in three places in the village: at the head of the village, the crossroad, and at the tip of the village. In sum, four rituals were done in response to the fallen gate. From the perspective of Bapak Pasek, “There are ceremonies for safety of Bali and the universe,” but there are not rituals done to prevent natural disasters (Pasek., personal communication, November 3, 2018).

However, when asking individuals from the Batur and Karangasem Regencies (regencies of where the mountains located), individuals were generally more knowledgeable of ceremonies for natural disasters. For example, Bapak Nengah shared that in fact “When we have earthquake there are different ceremonies. If we have earthquake we have different characteristics of the ceremony. I do not know the meaning, only the highest priest knows the meaning, but I know that they look at the *Lontar* to see it” (Suryadi, N., personal communication, November 8th, 2018).

This message was echoed during my trip to Kertha Gosa in Klungkung Regency. Erected in the 17th century, the Kertha Gosa palace was a part of the Klungkung kingdom. During the Dutch colonial conquest in 1908, however, most of the palace was destroyed because of the conflicts between the Dutch and Chinese merchants on the opium trade. There are two major structures that previously served as the traditional justice palace. Today, these structures act as a tourist attraction for the elaborate paintings covering the interior ceilings. The painting “Kamasan” tells the story of Bima Suwarga, a journey of Bima, the strongest son of Pandawa

brothers, to hell and the karma he receives and the punishments befallen to the souls who have done bad things in mundane world during their life-time. In the very top of the ceiling at Kertha Gosa pavilion, there are several paintings that provide meaning to *palelindon*, earthquakes depending on the time of year it occurred. For example, if an earthquake happened in February good things were to come for the rice fields in the coming months.

In my interview with Bapak Wayan Sujana from IHDN, many ceremonies were explained to me in association with natural disasters. According to Bapak Sujana, the ceremony *Pemahayu Gumi or Pemahayu Jagat* is the umbrella term for any ritual to restore the balance of nature and human. As he explained, “*Pemahayu Gumi/Jagat* is a ritual to pray for the safety of the universe because of natural disaster. It only occurs in extreme natural disasters or phenomenon.” When asked which *dewa* or *dewi* he prays to during these rituals, Bapak Sujana responded, “it is part of the five rituals and this one is for the lower spirit because the imbalance of the gods is represented by the imbalance of the ground. We take so much from the universe so we must do something to restore the balance” (Sujana, W., personal communication, November 19, 2018). This explanation for the ceremony not only describes a clear overarching reaction to large natural disasters, but additionally links them to the concept of *Tri Hita Karana* through the emphasis of restoring balance. *Pemangku Jero Mangku Syasa* also mentioned *Pemahayu Gumi/Jagat* as well as the ritual of *Caru* intended for the demonic spirit. In further interviews I found that the *Caru* ritual intends to pacify the demonic spirit and transform its energy back into the positive—another direct example of *Sang Hyang Widhi’s* metamorphic capabilities. According to Ibu Nengah, a resident near Mount Agung, the ceremony “*Pangelempana* is for the balance of nature and earth. When the eruption in 2017 started there was a *Pangelempana* ceremony. After the eruption we have *Pamlepeh* which is ceremony that is for the aftermath of a

natural disaster. We need to apologize to the gods” (Ibu Nengah., personal communication, November 7th, 2018).

Ceremonies directly for natural disasters were expressed more directly from those living near Mount Batur and Mount Agung as well as priests. While this variation represents the importance location and occupation have in knowledge of ceremonies, it also represents variation in perceptions of ceremonies. As most informants agreed that ceremonies must be done in the event of a mistake, this variation potentially shows different understanding of the reasoning behind natural disasters. Meaning, if an individual felt that natural disasters’ occurrences had nothing to do with their religion then a ceremony for such event is not applicable. This variation in attribution of natural disasters, especially within younger communities, is grounds for further research.

### **Mount Agung and *Pura Besakih***

I asked home stay owners, GrabCar drivers, people at *warungs*, almost every person I encountered what they think is the significance of Mount Agung. Most shared with me the importance of its height and position in the north-east of Bali. Mitha, a tourism student from IHDN explained that “it is the tallest at where *Pura Besakih* is, that is why it is the most sacred place in Bali” (Mitha., personal communication, November 3rd, 2018). Bapak Wayan Sujana, told me that, “Mount Agung is a place to worship and also a place to maintain the relationship between human and the environment. A key place to maintain *Tri Hita Karana*” (Sujana, W., personal communication, November 19, 2018). For Ibu Wayan, Mount Agung is an essential part of every Hindu’s life. She emphasized the importance of its height and volcanic capabilities. She further described that “for Hindu people, each one must go there at some point in their life. Everyone feels like they need to. If you do not you just feel like something is missing” (Ibu

Wayan., personal communication, November 27, 2018). As Ibu Nengah concisely put it “Mount Agung is where we face to pray, where the gods meet the earth, where we get reminders of our mistakes. It is very, very sacred and we must always attend to it” (Ibu Nengah., personal communication, November 7th, 2018). Throughout all the people I had the privilege of speaking to, the message remained consistent. Mount Agung is not only the tallest volcano in Bali, it is a deeply sacred and important part of Hinduism.

Along the slopes of Mount Agung hidden within the fog of elevation exists the largest and the most important temple in Bali, *Pura Besakih*. In an interview with *Pemangku Jero Mangku Syasa*, he explained “this temple is the source of prosperity for Balinese and we must pray to it. The forest here gives us oxygen for example, it gives us water, it gives us life” (Mangku, J., personal communication, November 11, 2018). Located at 1,000 meters above sea level, *Pura Besakih* hosts over 86 temples including three main temples. *Pura Besakih*'s importance was demonstrated not just through its location and size, but also through its connection of heaven and earth. As Ibu Anik explained, “When a body passes away, the soul goes to all the temples and then goes to *Pura Besakih* last” (Ibu Anik., personal communication, November 11th, 2018). This, she elaborated further, was because *Pura Besakih* is the meeting point of heaven and earth and the place of all of the ancestors together. The mountain is where the spirits that have passed dwell to be closest to the connection of the gods.

In my interview with Bapak Jero Mangku he described that at *Pura Besakih* “we pray to all three gods. *Siwa* is the center of this temple because *Pura Besakih* is the center of everything. Every god has their own direction: East is *Iswara*, South *Brahma*, North is *Wisnu*, in the middle is *Siwa* and this is the middle” (Mangku, J., personal communication, November 11, 2018).

For some, Mount Agung carries a deeply personal meaning. Ratna Puspita describes that Mount Agung is extremely special to her. When she was younger she chose to hike Mount Agung with her friends. Along the way Ratna became disconnected from her friends finding herself alone and in the dark. As the fear of her aloneness set in, Ratna recounts a moment in which a presence came over her, a presence she perceives as god. “It was if the gods were saying “you are alone but it is okay you are protected and should just keep going,”” Ratna described. As she preceded on the hike she was met with an overwhelming sense of power and strength—a feeling that has followed her since. “Mount Agung was the place that made god real and taught me to be strong and persevere” (Puspita, R., personal communication, November 12, 2018).

During the eruption of 2017 Ratna and her family were forced to relocate away from the mountain. Cramped into a house with her large extended family, Ratna wished she could return to her home, closer to Mount Agung. “I was never scared because I felt the mountain say that even though it was erupting we would be protected.” Ratna felt that mountain just needed to erupt stating, “it is healthy for it to erupt so it must” (Puspita, R., personal communication, November 12, 2018). Ratna references the mildness of the eruption in 2017 as gift from the gods. In fact, many people I spoke with believed that because Mount Agung could have erupted in a much more aggressive matter, the gods were praising them. The eruption therefore, was just necessary for the health of the mountain and the maintenance of balance.

During my interview at *Pura Besakih*, *Pemangku Jero Mangku Syasa* told me of the largest ceremony in Bali: *Eka Dasa Rudra*, a ceremony dedicated to the eleven demonic form of Rudra, the terrifying form of Siwa. Held every one-hundred years, the intention of the ceremony is to drive the evil forces into the eleven direction of space. As described in *Sekala and Niskala*, *Eka Dasa Rudra* derives from the Sanskrit expression for eleven, *eka dasa*. The ceremony

“intends to pacify evil represented as Rudra, the stormy side of *Siwa*. *Rudra*, loosely translated as “howler,” is a god who represents wildness and can be traced back to pre-Hindu Vedic days. The ceremony is often represented as an exorcism, in which evil, incarnate as *Rudra*, is driven to the 11 (*eka dasa*) directions of space- the four cardinal points of the compass, the four intercardinal points, up, down, and center.” In essence, *Eka Dasa Rudra* attempts to strike a balance between the positive and negative energies of *Siwa*. Originally, *Eka Dasa Rudra* was intended to be held in March of 1963, however, the mountain erupted leaving “thousands dead and hundreds of thousands homeless” (Eiseman II, 1990, p. 236). Thus, the ceremony could not continue and was instead held in 1979 when the eruption had ceased. During the eruption in 1963, *Panca Wali Krama* was also supposed take place. According to Bapak Jero Mangku, “the people at the time wanted to go forward and do the ceremony because they thought it was their duty, but they could not continue because of the eruption.” However, Bapak Jero Mangku said that nothing ended up happening to the temple during the eruption, again “a sign and demonstration of the power of the gods.”

Mount Agung and *Pura Besakih* epitomizes the connection of religion and nature, as well as the connection of harmony and destruction. While Mount Agung has caused damaged to the environment, displaced families, and killed thousands of people, it is home to the most important temple in Bali. As the connector of heaven and earth and the source of mass destruction Mount Agung metaphorically embodies *Rwa-Bhinneda* and the presence and balance of both positive and negative energy.

## Conclusion

I began this paper with the connection of Hinduism to the land of Bali and the role the environment plays in Balinese Hinduism. This is exemplified through both the use of nature to connect to *Niskala* as well as a means in which the gods communicate with human. After contextualizing the natural world from a scientific perspective, I turned to the mythological explanations of natural disasters. Informants unique emotions of apathy yet trust in nature exemplifies larger philosophical frameworks in Balinese Hinduism including *Tri Hita Karana*, *Rwa-Bhinneda*, and the importance of direction. The undeniable gravity of balance appears in the most basic aspects of life to the largest ceremony held in Bali. Finally, through discussing the tension between Mount Agung, the most active volcano in Bali as well as the meeting point of heaven and earth I exposed both the strong sources of positive and negative energy within the mountain, a direct example of *Rwa-Bhinneda*.

Natural disasters in Bali have caused destruction, relocated families, disrupted travel, damaged homes, schools, and temples, and have killed thousands of people. However, these facts are not emphasized by the Balinese Hindu. Instead, there is an emphasis on the balance it provides to the earth, the presence of the gods, the benefits it can provide for the land and society. In the wake of 2017 eruption, there is an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the mildness of the eruption—it could have been worse I was reminded. Likewise, the fact that the eruption did not affect *Pura Besakih* in 1963 is seen as a demonstration of gods power. These examples and other statements alike represent the extreme value placed on balance not only between god, human, and nature, but between god's benevolence and malevolence.

What I have found in the presence of natural disasters is not just the anger of the demonic spirit or negative energy. I have found the opportunity for creation. *Rwa-Bhinneda* is part of the balance in life. To have the beauty and positive energy of nature, the negative energy of disasters

must occur. As the essence of *Siwa* may cause the destruction of the natural world, the energy of creation, of *Brahma* is now given the opportunity to create again. This is seen and understood in the prosperity of the rice fields after an eruption or the sand that is used for construction. It is necessary to have the destruction in order for creation to arrive and prosper.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

My recommendations for further study are as follows:

A deeper look into the specificities of past eruptions and earthquakes in Bali. This could include information on lasting effects from these disasters, accounts from families effected, and a deeper look into the scientific reasoning behind these disasters.

During most of my interviews I was advised to learn more about *Lontar*. While I was not able to arrange a meeting with anyone to learn more specifically about *Lontar*, it is said that these sacred inscriptions contain information regarding ceremonies to perform in the event of a natural disaster.

While I was able to gain an initial understanding of the ceremonies dealing with natural disasters, there are a countless amount of tangential ceremonies that have a clear relationship to the subject of natural disasters as well as the environment.

**Glossary:**

Adat - Customary or traditional

Agama- Religion

Bapak (Pak) - honorific for men (similar to Mr)

Bhuta Kala - demonic spirits

Brahma- God of creation

Caru – blood animals sacrifice to the Bhuta-Kala

Dewa and Dewi - gods and goddess

Hidup- Life in Indonesian

Ibu (Bu) - honorific for women (like Mrs)

Kaja - the direction towards the mountain

Kelihan Adat - Customary Village Head

Kelod - the direction towards the sea

Lingkungan or Alam - the environment or nature

Lontar - palm leaf manuscripts of sacred writings

Manusia- people

Melasti- Procession to the ocean

Melukat - Purification Ceremony for cleansing our body and soul

Niskala - the unseen spirit

Nyegara- Gunung - the process of going from the ocean to the mountains and back to the ocean

Pakaian Adat- Traditional clothing worn at ceremonies

Pemahayu Gumi or Pemahayu Jagat - the umbrella term for any ritual to restore the balance or nature and human

Pemangku - priest of the commoners caste at a specific location

Pura - general term for temple

Sang Hyang Widhi- the one ultimate god in Balinese Hinduism

Sekala- the seen

Siwa- God of destruction

Subduction Zone – form where two plates converge and one begins sliding under the other

Tri Hita Karana- the balance of god, human, and nature

Tuhan - God

Warung- street food style places to eat

Wisnu - God of preservation

### Sample Interview Transcript

1) *Siapa namanya, Berasal darimana, berapa umurnya?*

What is your name, where were you born, how old are you?

My name is Jero Mangku Syasa, from Besakih area and I was born here. I am 52 years old.

2) *Kapan anda menjadi pemanku? Mengapa?*

When did you start being a priest? Why?

I have been a priest here since 1988. I inherited being a priest so when my father died in 1982 I started being a priest soon after. Originally, I did not want to be a priest I wanted to be a guide here. But I am really grateful for what god has given me.

3) *Apakah anda selalu mejadi pemanku di Pura Besakih?*

Have you always been a priest at Pura Besakih?

Yes.

4) *Tolong ceritakan tentang sejarah di Pura Besakih?*

Could you please tell me about the history of Pura Besakih?

There are 22 other temples in Besakih. There are seven levels representing the layers of the universe. There are over 80 temples total I think.

5) *Apa yang peran dari pura ini di Bali?*

What is the role of this temple in Bali?

This temple is the source of prosperity for Balinese. It has the source of prosperity and we must pray to it forest gives us oxygen for example, it gives us water.

6) *Apa yang anda sembah di sini?*

What do you pray for here?

Everything is created by god and we always pray for safety and balance

7) *Siapa dewa atau dewi yang disembah di sini?*

What gods or goddesses are worshiped here?

We pray to all three gods. Siwa is the center of this temple because Pura Besakih is the center of everything. Every god has their own direction: East is Iswara, South Brahma, In the middle is Siwa. Siwa is like a lotus with 8 petals and must be in the center at the highest point. We put lotus as the most special flower as it can be put in the water or in the mud and can be put in any conditions.

8) *Tolong ceritakan tentang “Eka Desa Rudra?”*

Could you please tell me about “Eka Desa Rudra?”

Yes, big ceremony. It happens every one hundred years and it is for the mountain.

9) *Menurutmu apa peran penting Gunung Agung di Bali?*

What do you think is the role of Mount Agung in Bali?

The first point is because of the position of Mount Agung. Mount Agung is exactly north and east. The position of Mount Agung is exactly in the most sacred part of the island. “Arah mata angin” meaning direction of the eye of the wind. Maybe that the clockwise movement of the wind seems more natural. In Sumeru long time ago exploded and the summit blew off and the top of it moved to Bali to make Mount Agung. Mount Agung very holy which is why Besakih is there

10) *Apakah anda di sini untuk erupsi pada tahun 1963 atau 2017?*

Were you here for the eruption that happened in 1963 or 2017?

I was not present in 1963 when Mount Agung erupted there was also *Pana Wali Kerama* It was literally at the same time. The people here did not want to leave because they believed they had to do the ceremony and they needed to pray. During the eruption in 2017 he wanted to stay but the authorities asked everyone to relocate. However, he would come in the morning everyday to pray

11) *Apa kepercayaan anda tentang erupsi?*

What is your belief about the eruption?

At that time we also prayed for the eruption saying “you may erupt but after that please overcome and be good again and make sure our people are still safe.”

12) *Apakah ada dewa atau dewi yang terkait dengan erupsi atau gempa bumi?*

Are there gods or goddesses that are associated with eruptions or earthquakes?

Yes, we have a special god for earth quakes Ananta Boga is a dragon that lives in the bottom of the earth. If the dragon moves there will be an earthquake. Just story but he cares for the balance of the earth. There are many layers of the world. The dragon in Mount Agung is the highest. Taksaka is the top of the mountain, Ananta Boga is the middle of the mountain (inside the mountain is the lava), Basuki is the bottom. The name of the god who dwells in Mount Agung Giri Tulangkir.

13) *Sesudah erupsi ada upacara untuk dewa, gunung, atau bumi?*

After the eruption were there ceremonies for the gods, mountain, or the earth?

When the eruption starts there is a ceremony *Pangelempana*. For the first eruption there are three dragons, for the balance of nature and earth. *Pangelempana* is for the for the balance of nature and earth. If Mount Agung has to erupt it has to erupt but we pray for the lava to not destroy

14) *Bagaimana anda tahu upacara mana yang harus dilakukan?*

How did you know what ceremony you must do?

*Lontar* which are sacred manuscripts.

15) *Apa hubungan Tri Hita Karana dan Bencana Alam?*

What is the relationship of Tri Hita Karana and natural disasters?

Even though it was a really high alert, the mountain did not erupt that heavily. Our relationship with god, our relationship with human, our relationship with human. After the eruption we ask for the balance of the nature again. It is a warning that we have to always remember the creation of the god and always maintain the creation of the god

16) *Apa yang terjadi pada pura selama erupsi?*

What happened to the temple during the eruption?

In 1962 nothing happened to this temple even though there was an eruption. The ash helped the environment after it erupted.

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