

HAS THE PAST GOT A FUTURE IN LOCAL POLITICS IN INDONESIA? *PILKADA* 2005 IN BALI

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Historians of Southeast Asia have long reflected on the peculiar difficulties of navigating, let alone representing the past in Southeast Asia. Histories of Southeast Asia have had to come to terms with Southeast Asian histories. One particularly problematic aspect of this is that, to the extent that we can generalise about 'Southeast Asian concepts of the past', the categories of the past, present and future, whose separateness and temporal sequence we take for granted, seem to work somewhat differently in Southeast Asia. They take on forms and relationships to each other, not to mention causal sequences somewhat different from those most of us are used to. This difference, lamented by early scholars of both text and everyday speech, has since been variously engaged, debated and celebrated by later generations.²

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² In Bali alone this tradition includes: G. Bateson, 'An old Temple and a New Myth', in J. Belo ed., *Traditional Balinese Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970; H. Creese, 'Balinese *Babad* as Historical Sources: a reinterpretation of the fall of Gelgel', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, 147, 1991, pp. 236-60; P. Davies, 'The Historian in Bali', *Meanjin*, 1, 1991, pp. 63-80, C. Grader, 'The State Temples of Mengwi', in J. L. Swellengrebel, ed. *Bali: Studies in Life, Thought and Ritual*, Dordrecht: Foris, 1960, p. 160; H. Schulte-Nordholt, 'Origin, Descent and Destruction: text and context in Balinese representations of the past', *Indonesia*, 54, 1991, pp. 27-58; A. Vickers, 'Writing Balinese History: Poststructuralism and Perception' *Australian Asian Studies Association Review*, 10, pp. 15-21, A. Vickers, 'Balinese Texts and Historiography', *History and Theory*, XXIX, pp. 158-78; M. Wiener, *Visible and Invisible*

Nevertheless the problems remain at the level of everyday practice for those of us engaged in ethnographic or historical research in Southeast Asia. Stories about the past tend not to proceed in convenient chronological order, but in orders related to their significance to their tellers or listeners. What appears to be 'the past' also has disconcerting ways of spilling over into the present or even the future. For example, in central Java, prophesies from the past about the future are regularly used by ordinary people to interpret the affairs of the present and even by politicians to guide their decisions about the future.³ While most of us find ways of interpreting these kinds of slippages between past, present and future, Western scholars of Southeast Asia are themselves not immune to such modes of thought.

When is the Past not the Past?: Geertz's *Negara*

One of the most systematic and celebrated attempts to represent the past in Southeast Asia and its relevance to other places and times is Clifford Geertz's book *Negara*.⁴ *Negara* presents a model, based on evidence from Bali, of a form of political organisation supposedly universal in pre-colonial Southeast Asia. There are all manner of problems with this model which have been extensively critiqued elsewhere, but for our purposes here, three are particularly significant.⁵ Firstly, it is a static model of 'the past as another

Realms: Power, Magic and Colonial Conquest in Bali, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 76-96. For more general discussions of indigenous Southeast Asian understandings of the past see N. Tarling, *Historians and Southeast Asian History*, Auckland: The New Zealand Asia Institute, 2000, pp. 16-17; J.D. Legge, 'The Writing of Southeast Asian History', in N. Tarling ed., *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, I, 1992, pp. 46-50; William Cummings, *Making Blood White: Historical Transformations in Early Modern Makassar*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, pp.1-5.

³ T. Reuter, 'Great Expectations: Hindu Revival Movements in Java', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 12, 3, 2001, pp. 327-38; S. Cahyaningrum, 'Pasar Ilang', Dialog Mbok Cancut dengan Jayabaya, *Kompas Edisi Jogja*, 11 June 2005.

⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre-State in Nineteenth-century Bali*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

⁵ For critiques of *Negara*, see F. Barth, *Balinese Worlds*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993; L. Howe, 'Rice, Ideology and the Legitimation of Hierarchy in Bali', *Man*, 26, 1991, pp. 445-67; S. Ortner, 'Introduction' in S. Ortner ed., *The Fate of 'Culture': Geertz and Beyond*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; W. Roseberry, *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History and Political-economy*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991; H. Schulte-Nordholt, *The Spell of Power: A History of Balinese Politics, 1650-1940*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996; S. J. Tambiah, 'A Reformulation of Geertz's conception of the theatre-state', in Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, ed. *Culture, Thought and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985; C. Warren, *Adat and Dinas: Balinese Communities in the Indonesian State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; M. Wiener,

country’—an exotic place/time where familiar categories and relationships are mysteriously inverted. This place floats in a generic pre-colonial past not linked by any historical process to the present. In other words it is not really an historical model at all, as Geertz himself admits, but ‘... a conceptual entity ... simplified, necessarily unfaithful, theoretically tendentious ...’.⁶ Secondly, the evidence on which is based is to a large extent not actually from the past at all, but consists of projections back into the past from Geertz’s ethnographic present of Bali in the late 1950s. So it is no more historiographic than it is historical. Thirdly, it simply does not fit with most of the actual evidence from nineteenth-century Bali. But, ironically, it works increasingly well as a prediction of the future, at least in Bali.⁷

We will return to *Negara*, but for now it serves to remind us that in Southeast Asia past, present and future can be slippery entities, and they come all tangled together in different ways. So we need to deal with them carefully, and avoid assuming that they take the shapes, separateness and sequential linearity of Western commonsense. One way to do this is to pay close attention to the ways local people think about them.

William Cummings points out that “the past is a resource upon which humans draw continuously ... [it] offers the raw materials out of which we construct our selves and societies” and consequently “by virtue of being made in the present, histories inescapably speak to and of the present”. His book *Making Blood White* shows how the forms of local representations of the past became active agents in social and political development in early-modern Makassar.⁸

Likewise John Pemberton, whose research began in the context of national elections in 1982, explores the cultural dimensions of politics in the New Order period. His focus is on the ways in which ideas of ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’ are harnessed to the overtly apolitical system of control of that era. Although he does not refer to it as such, his book could have been framed as an exploration of the uses of the past in the present—‘an attempt to write against the formidable flow of chronology back to a discourse of origins that informs the New Order present’.⁹

The purpose of this paper is to reflect further on such relationships between past and future via an examination of what looks at first glance like some rather ordinary political business of the present in Bali—the election of local heads of government in 2005. But the new political forces that emerged

Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic and Colonial Conquest in Bali, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995.

⁶ Geertz, *Negara*, pp. 9-10.

⁷ MacRae, ‘*Negara Ubud*’. For a more comprehensive discussion of these problems and *Negara* in general see the same article.

⁸ Cummings, *Making Blood White*, pp. 5-13.

⁹ John Pemberton, *On the Subject of ‘Java’*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 25.

in it as well as the wider context needed to make sense of it, refer to and draw on both the past and the future, in ways that somewhat blur commonsense distinctions between them.

The Political Present in Indonesia and Bali: *Pilkada*

John Pemberton has evoked brilliantly the public political sphere of the New Order as eerily a-temporal and ahistorical, an 'idealized absence in which nothing ... appears to happen'.¹⁰ In the late 1990s history re-appeared and swept this political time-warp into the past, but in the process opened up an uneasy space between that familiar, and in some ways reassuring past and an uncertain future. Eight years later the political context is still largely defined by the pressing task of putting behind itself the discredited, centralized, authoritarian politics of the New Order; and finding a way into an imagined future of democracy, inclusion, and freedom from corruption.¹¹ One of the main strategies for this is a decentralisation of political power, decision-making and financial management through a programme known as *Otonomi Daerah* (regional autonomy). A key component of this is the direct election of various positions at various levels of local government.¹²

In mid-2005 in Bali, along with other parts of Indonesia, elections known as *Pilkada* (*pilihan kepala daerah* = choosing district heads) were held. These were for the heads (Bupati) of four of the eight districts (*kabupaten*) and the mayor (*walikota*) of the main city, Denpasar. Two striking new political factors emerged in these elections: one from the past and the other from the future (which has rapidly become the present).

¹⁰ Pemberton, *On the Subject of 'Java'*, p.7; Also see, G. MacRae, 'Art and Peace in the Safest Place in the World: A Balinese Culture of Apoliticism', in T. A. Reuter ed., *Crisis, Inequality and Social Change: The Muted Worlds of Bali*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

¹¹ E. Aspinall and G. Fealy, 'Introduction: Decentralisation, Democratisation and the Rise of the Local', in E. Aspinall and G. Fealy eds., *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralisation & Democratisation*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003, pp. 2-3, 8-9.

¹² On the post-Suharto political scene in Indonesia in general, see N. Tarling, ed., *Indonesia after Soeharto*, Auckland: New Zealand Asia Institute (NZAI), 1999. On the decentralisation policies including *Otonomi Daerah*, see R. Seymour and S. Turner, 'Otonomi Daerah: Indonesia's Decentralisation Experiment', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 4, 2, 2002, pp. 33-51; and Aspinall and Fealy, 'Introduction', *Local Power and Politics*. On local elections see N. Choi, 'Local Elections and Party Politics in Post-Reformasi Indonesia: A View from Yogyakarta', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 26, 2, 2004, pp. 280-301; and J. Vel, '*Pilkada* in East Sumba: An Old Rivalry in a New Democratic Setting', *Indonesia*, 80, October 2005, pp. 81-107.

The Past in the Present

One of the concerns of the immediate post-Suharto period has been fears of a resurgence at local levels of ‘remnants’ of New Order political and military elites—that this past may not be quite so safely in the past at all.¹³ What nobody expected though, and what has taken observers all over Indonesia by surprise has been the resurgence of elites from a deeper past, the aristocracies of the pre-colonial period.¹⁴

As soon as the *Pilkada* was announced in Bali, a number of members of the old aristocracies (*puri* = palaces) put themselves forward as candidates (in all, about 50% of candidates). These were descendents of the rulers of the pre-colonial past, who through the colonial era had been increasingly marginalised in the political process. By the beginning of the New Order most of them had all but abandoned the formal political arena.¹⁵ Those who retained any political aspirations either contented themselves with appointment to the lower levels of local administration or moved onto the national stage in Jakarta. In 2005 however they clearly saw themselves again as potential leaders of the future, as did substantial numbers of the voting public.¹⁶

But there were important differences from the politics of the past. Firstly the elite candidates mostly (but not all) formed alliances with non-elite ones—a new kind of politics in which a form of political capital derived from the past is allied with new forms of political capital. Secondly, the elite candidates played on their traditional political capital in new and different ways. For example a comic duo of unknowns from East Bali dressed up in the regalia of pre-colonial kings (or colonial regents) appeared on television making solemn oaths and pronouncements about sacred duty. On the other hand the much respected head of one of the old palaces travelled about his former kingdom asking his traditional farmer-subjects what he could do for them. Meanwhile, in the city, two mayoral candidates from powerful rival

¹³ V. Hadiz, ‘Power and Politics in North Sumatra: The Uncompleted Reformasi’, in Aspinall and Fealy, *Local Power and Politics*, pp. 124-5.

¹⁴ R. Cribb, ‘Indonesia: Back on the Throne’, *Asian Currents*, February 2006, <http://iceaps.anu.edu.au/asian-currents.html>; G. Van Klinken, ‘Return of the Sultans’, in J. Dividson and D. Henley, eds., *The Deployment of Tradition: Adat and Politics from Colonialism to Indigenism*, London, Routledge, 2006.

¹⁵ C. Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes: Social Development and Economic Change in Two Indonesian Towns*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1968.

¹⁶ On the history and distinctive political style of one of the more active aristocracies in Bali, see G. MacRae, ‘Acting Global, Thinking Local in a Balinese Tourist Town’, in R. Rubinstein and L. Connor, eds., *Staying Local in the Global Village: Bali in the Twentieth Century*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999, pp. 123-54.

palaces stuck to contemporary issues and let the elite power struggles go on in the background.¹⁷

All candidates, elite or not, began their campaigns with formal visits to their local palaces seeking support/blessing. These visits are known as *dharma suaka* or *simakrama*—new terms referring ostensibly to a distinctively Balinese version of a practice widespread elsewhere in Indonesia, called *silaturahmi politik*. But in the visual language of traditional Balinese politics, this reads more obviously in terms of a familiar practice known as *nangkil ke puri* in which subordinates present themselves at the house of a superior to ask for something—which may be anything from the most mundane material support to sage advice or a spiritual blessing.

So while the candidates were seeking material support and/or spiritual blessings, they were also inserting their candidacy into a symbolic framework drawing its meaning and power from collective understandings about political order and hierarchy derived from the past.

The Future in the Present: The Media

The other new and important factor in *Pilkada* 2005 was the role of the media. This may seem obvious to non-Indonesian readers, but the last free elections in Bali were in the 1950s, when there was no TV, few radios and relatively few people read newspapers. Through the New Order period, the media were strictly controlled and did little more than transmit official government pronouncements. In this sense the new freedom enjoyed by the media post-*reformasi* is something previously unknown and unimaginable to most Indonesians.¹⁸

After their local *puri*, the other place the candidates visited was the headquarters of *BaliTV*. *BaliTV* is a new channel owned by a local media conglomerate, built on the foundation of the long standing newspaper *Bali Post*—which began in 1948 as a voice of the nationalist struggle and gradually became a voice of Balinese cultural identity. *BaliTV* from the start located itself in opposition to the majority of stations which were owned and run from Jakarta and reflected Jakarta issues and tastes. It instead provided self-consciously Balinese programming by Balinese for Balinese audiences. Since the 2002 bombing, *BaliTV* (along with *Bali Post*) has taken upon itself

¹⁷ On the less visible aspects of recent political campaigning, including the array of practices known as ‘money politics’, see Choi, ‘Local Elections and Party Politics’. These, like party machinations, were less evident in Bali than in some *Pilkada*, but they were nevertheless present. The focus of this paper however is on other aspects sometimes obscured in more conventional political analyses.

¹⁸ K. Sen and D. T. Hill, *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 119-23.

the responsibility for guiding Bali through troubled times.¹⁹ The main vehicle for this is a discourse called *Ajeg Bali*, which it promotes in its various media. *Ajeg Bali* is at once a critique of the present (post-bomb) crisis of Balinese economy and cultural identity and a practical programme aimed at protecting, restoring and maintaining Balinese cultural, religious and economic integrity. Through this project and its hegemonic definition of contemporary Balinese thinking about their cultural identity, *BaliTV* was also able to set much of the agenda for *Pilkada*. All candidates were at pains to support and if possible associate themselves conspicuously with the ideology of *Ajeg Bali*. The medium for this was of course *BaliTV*—and it also became the medium of choice for most of their campaigns. So *BaliTV* became the main broker and mediator of *Pilkada*, as well as an important site for campaign advertising.

Early in their campaigns, nearly all the candidates fronted up to the large and imposing headquarters of *BaliTV*, where they were photographed formally signing up to *Ajeg Bali* (and its economic wing *Koperasi Krama Bali*). Only then did they proceed with their campaign statements. All this was covered on TV and in *Bali Post*, in the most scrupulously even-handed, non-partisan manner—giving exactly equal space, time and prominence to opposing candidates—and always emphasising the positive aspects—no dirty politics.

Hence by supporting all candidates equally *BaliTV* in effect supported none—which had the effect of making the candidates more dependent on *BaliTV* than the other way round—and many of them then proceeded to spend large amounts of money advertising on *BaliTV*.²⁰ By its non-partisan coverage, and emphasis on the best interests of Bali as a whole, *BaliTV* appeared to be placing itself above petty party politics which are, in Balinese thinking, deeply tainted by bad memories of the politics of the early 1960s. Indeed one of the supposed ‘dangers’ of *Pilkada* against which the government and *BaliTV* alike were warning people, was ‘the attributes of party politics’.²¹ *BaliTV* conspicuously avoided this and spoke instead in terms of the future welfare of the whole island. This once again makes a claim in the present about the future in terms which derive from the past: the

¹⁹ For a more comprehensive discussion of *BaliTV*, see G. MacRae and N. Darma Putra, ‘A New Theatre-State in Bali? Aristocracies, the Media and Cultural Revival in the 2005 Local Elections’, *Asian Studies Review*, 31, 2, 2007, pp. 171–189. On the media in Bali more generally see N. Darma Putra, ‘A Literary Mirror: Balinese Reflections on Modernity and Identity in the Twentieth Century’, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2003.

²⁰ *BaliTV* charges fees for coverage of people, groups and events under the guise of ‘news’. This practice applied to *Pilkada* candidates who paid flat fees for coverage of their campaigns on both *BaliTV* and its parent newspaper *Bali Post*. This practice no doubt contributed to the even-handedness of coverage.

²¹ ‘Kampayne *Pilkada* Bebas Atribut Parpol’, *Bali Post*, 6 June 2005.

men (of admittedly critical political persuasion) about the *Pilkada*, *BaliTV* and KKB. One of them commented spontaneously that the real purpose of it all was to expand the '*kerajaan*' of *BaliTV*. *Kerajaan* is the word Balinese most commonly use to refer to the pre-colonial kingdoms of their island and its literal translation is close in meaning to the English 'kingdom'. While the word refers to political relationships of the past, its root noun *raja* (king) is also used in everyday speech, especially in parts of Bali where old elites retain considerable socio-religious authority, to refer to the heads of these royal families. I asked the young man if he really meant that *Bali Post/TV* was really like a *kerajaan* and *Satria Narada* like a *raja* and he said yes, that was exactly what he meant. One of his companions immediately added, shifting to terms of the contemporary politics, that 'there are two Governors in Bali now, that one over there (indicating the direction of the Governor's office) and this new one'.



Figure 2: Satria Naradha and the Governor.²³

A Future Based on the Past: *Ajeg Bali*

While *Ageg Bali* is, as we have seen, central to the *BaliTV* project of representing itself in the image of past kingship, both the discourse and its corresponding practical programme are themselves rooted in a tension between past, present and future. A literal translation of *Ajeg Bali* goes something along the lines of 'Bali standing upright', or more actively, and to borrow an anglophone metaphor not inappropriate in the Balinese context, 'standing Bali back on its feet'. Such a simple slogan has wide and easy appeal to all strata of a society deeply pervaded by a sense of ongoing crisis

²³ Source: *Bali Post*.

and uncertainty about the future, but in practice it is interpreted in wildly divergent ways and used to justify equally diverse suggestions for action.²⁴

The problem, or set of problems *Ajag Bali* seeks to address are those which have come to light in the present crisis, post-*reformasi*, especially post-bomb, and the accompanying cycles of decline and (always incomplete) recovery of the tourism economy. In the process Balinese have come to understand the price, in terms of economic vulnerability, they have paid for their over-dependence on tourism. But there are other scapegoats at hand, embodied primarily in social-geographical metaphors.

The first is 'Java', from which large numbers of immigrants have come, especially from the poorer regions of East Java.²⁵ These people now form a large, semi-mobile class, performing most of the hard, dirty and dangerous work on construction sites and the lower levels of the labour hierarchy in the tourist industry. They also fill various micro-niches in the informal economy retailing such goods as imitation brand-name watches, tourist trinkets, cheap tasty food, and sexual services to tourist and local alike. Balinese, many of whom are now unemployed, have come to see them as an economic threat because of their virtual monopoly on the bottom end of the labour market. They are also widely suspected of being involved in petty crimes against property and persons. But, perhaps even more importantly they are seen as the vanguard of a supposedly aggressive and expansionist Islam. The identities of the perpetrators of the 2002 bombs are seen as incontrovertible proof of this.²⁶

Deeper into 'Java' is 'Jakarta', the site of the discredited New Order regime, the weaker and less stable governments since, and also the big capital increasingly invested in Bali since the 1990s. The former is seen, not without justification, as conspiring to drain taxes out of Bali while returning little in

²⁴ *Ajag Bali* has been the subject of several extensive discussions, which will not be reviewed here, where the focus is on the temporal contradictions inherent in the concept. For more comprehensive discussions, on which this one draws, see forthcoming work by G. MacRae and Darma Putra; G. MacRae, 'Understanding Indonesia? Or Imagining Indonesias? The View from Bali', in S. Epstein, ed., *Understanding Indonesia*, Wellington: Asian Studies Institute, 2006; Michel Picard, 'From Kebalian to Ajag Bali. Tourism and Balinese Identity in the aftermath of the Bali Bombing', in M. Hitchcock, V. King, M. Parnwell, eds., *Tourism in Southeast Asia: New Perspectives*, Copenhagen: NIAS; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, (in press); H. Schulte-Nordholt, 'Bali: An Open Fortress', prologue to N. Suryawan, *Bali, Narasi dalam Kuasa: Politik dan Kekerasan di Bali*, Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2005.

²⁵ The Balinese term *wong jawa* or *anak jawa* means specifically a person from Java, but also more generically an 'outsider', with all the xenophobic potentials inherent in such a concept.

²⁶ For a more thorough discussion of these migrants and Balinese attitudes towards them, see M. Hitchcock and N. Darma Putra, 'Bali after the Bombs: Local Values and Inter-Communal Relations', in W. Ardika and N. Darma Putra, eds., *Politik Kebudayaan dan Identitas Etnik*, Denpasar: Fakultas Sastra, UNUD, Balimangsi Press, 2004, pp. 213-25.

the way of services. The latter, often in cahoots with the government, is seen, again with justification, as having progressively taken control of the upper end of the tourism industry, alienating large tracts of Balinese land in the process. Taken together, these outside agencies are seen as having taken control of both the top and bottom ends of the Balinese economy, leaving little for Balinese in the middle, especially in the present economic climate.

Ajeg Bali provides, firstly an analysis and critique of this state of affairs and, secondly the outline of a programme of action. While the specific suggestions vary widely, they consist of two main elements. The first is defending Bali against destructive outside influences such as terrorism and excessive immigration of Muslim Javanese as well as (supposedly decadent) 'western' or 'foreign' cultural influences such as drugs and prostitution. The second is by strengthening Balinese culture from within by reinvigorating traditional institutions and practices and economic development.

While this entire discourse rests on a spatial metaphor of 'inside' vs. 'outside', which is itself not without its contradictions, it obscures an equally contradictory discourse based on a temporal metaphor of past, present and future, which goes something like this: 'Bali is no longer prosperous or even safe, because we are losing control of our economy and our borders and losing touch with our traditions. In the past, when we had control of those things, Bali was safe and prosperous. So, for a better future, we need to regain control of them. The way to do this is to return to the values and principles of the past and reinvigorate the institutions of the past'. In other words *Ajeg Bali* is a conservative movement, seeking to locate true Balinese cultural identity in the past and to model the future in certain respects upon this.

Balinese are by no means unique in this kind of thinking but, leaving aside obvious parallels, spatial as well as temporal, with discourses and movements of ethnic/cultural conservation, nationalism and revival, from inter-war Germany to postcolonial India, my point here is that this discourse involves systematic conflations and confusions of past, present and future. For most of the recorded past, Bali was in reality neither especially safe nor prosperous. The relative safety and prosperity for which Balinese are understandably nostalgic seems ironically, less a product of an unalloyed 'Balinese culture', than of the culture of the New Order, which Pemberton evokes so cogently. The past upon which the *Ajeg Bali* discourse draws is an imagined pre-colonial one, minus the chronic violence, frequent epidemics and periodic starvation, but the reality on which it is based though is a much more recent one, the repression and violence which Balinese were relatively unscathed by. A further irony is that the deeper past, where the generally recognised origins of much of what Balinese regard as their contemporary

culture lies, leads inescapably back to 'Java', the supposed external source of many of their present problems.²⁷

So if the *Pilkada* seems to have been a stage on which political actors, images and ideas from the past played themselves out, it also occurred in the wider context of a society deeply engaged in a debate about the relationship between its past and its future. It was in a sense a contest about who could best *mengajegkan Bali* (make it *ajeg* again), and thus about who could create a future most reassuringly modelled on the past. So it is less than surprising that the sources of political capital from the past, cultural as well as social, played such a visible and perhaps even determining part in it.

Conclusion

While *Pilkada* was a project of the present aimed at shaping the future, it was permeated and to a degree hijacked by all manner of baggage from the past. Traditional aristocracies re-emerged into the contemporary political arena, and they used various practices, images and networks derived from tradition. Candidates, traditional aristocracies, the public and the media all communicated messages of status, deference and legitimacy in a language derived from traditional politics. *BaliTV*, by setting the agenda and controlling the representation of campaigns was able to effectively manage the whole *Pilkada*. But it positioned itself in a way reminiscent of the traditional ideology of legitimate kingship. Furthermore it not only acted like a palace but appeared like a palace. So in both these ways *BaliTV* was presenting itself as the true king of Bali, modelled on the kings of old.

At the conference where the original version of this paper was presented, Tony Reid commented generously that it was very interesting but asked what it enabled us to conclude in terms of conventional political-scientific analysis. I was somewhat at loss for reply then, but on reflection suggest that: firstly, it shows us something about the way elections are understood and practised, not from the point of view of the state, nor the political parties, but of ordinary people—the voters. Secondly, while it shows us neither the voters' party preferences, their voting patterns nor policy priorities it does show how they actually interpret the whole thing and what it means to them. Thirdly, it locates this ostensibly 'political' process known as an election, in multiple wider social/cultural contexts including traditional ideas, images and practices of leadership; contemporary politics of culture and identity; and the growing role of the media in Balinese life.

²⁷ For an account of the less peaceful sides of Balinese history, see Geoffrey B. Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995; and A. Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1989.

These are no doubt arguments for the value of ethnographic methods and anthropological holism in histories of the present but, perhaps more apposite, is the additional suggestion that reference to the past in political science tends often to suffer from shallowness in temporal depth and to exclude all but the conventionally political-economic from its analysis. What the story of this *Pilkada* shows us is that contemporary politics in Bali, and I believe in all of Indonesia, and suspect elsewhere in Southeast Asia, are deeply conditioned by affiliations and loyalties whose socio-political roots go back generations if not centuries; are informed by modes of cultural expression and visual style rooted in an equally venerable past; and perhaps most importantly, that these are located not only in the most (supposedly) 'traditional' elements of Balinese society but also in the most (supposedly) modern and progressive ones. The point therefore would seem to be not to reduce such elections to the terms of political science, but to relocate the somewhat abstracted concerns of political science into the wider contexts where pasts, present and futures meet in Southeast Asia.

Finally, to return to Clifford Geertz's brilliant misrepresentation of the relationship between past and present in Southeast Asia, aspects of this story look increasingly reminiscent of key elements of his theatre-state. The Balinese *negara*, he argued, was constituted less by conventional politico-military power than by symbolic display of conformity to divine order and ritual performance of hereditary status based on that order. The members of the old royal families who sought political office, their constituents who observed, analysed and voted for or against them and the media who drew on both the material functions and symbolic imagery of past polities, all understood perfectly well the same things Geertz understood in the mid-twentieth century and projected back onto the nineteenth century. However accurate or otherwise his portrayal of the past, he remains, like Nicholas Tarling, ironically, a surprisingly reliable guide to the present and I suspect will continue to be so in the future.