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## ***Hooykaas on (the) Geertz(es): A reply***

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## DEBATS · COMPTES RENDUS

### HOOYKAAS ON (THE) GEERTZ(ES) : A REPLY (\*)

*par Clifford GEERTZ*

#### I

Confronted with this anthology of personal insults, elderly ramblings about alliteration or the aesthetic beauties of Balinese toilets, obiter dicta about the deep inner meaning of terms like "holy," "king," "law," and "palace," anti anti-colonialist (and anti-Indonesian) rancor, attempts at satire ponderous enough to make an elephant blush, outright disingenuousness rising at points to mere dishonesty, shameless self-congratulation, and the sorts of mistakes one can only commit when so desperate to assassinate a reputation and defend an interest that one is blinded not only to the elementary rules of fairness but to the actually printed page, I'm at a bit of a loss how to respond. The temptation to descend to the same level of invective, particularly when the piece is openly admitted to have been written to hurt (apparently within a few days of the reception of the book, the need was so great), even to destroy, is quite strong. But except for a small yip of what I hope will be understandable outrage here and there, I shall try to ignore the arch nastiness Professor Hooykaas inherits from the great tradition of scholarly arrogance whose academic monopoly he is here concerned to protect and attempt to stick to the issues, such as they are and such as, through the quaver of his prose, I am able to understand, that he raises.

There is one point, however, having to do with the niceties of academic discourse, on which I must comment before getting down to cases. My wife is the senior author of the book in question, not I; and neither she nor I are precisely pleased to have her reduced to a parenthesis after my name. In some places, the view that female scholars are appendages of their husbands, academic Adam's ribs, remains green, but not anymore in the United States. Apparently it is I that Hooykaas

(\*) Cet article est la réponse de M. C. Geertz au compte-rendu de M. C. Hooykaas paru dans Archipel 11, p. 237-243.



regards as the dragon to be at all costs slain ("the author," "his latest book," "he should have warned", even the title of the piece speaks of "Geertz" on the apparent assumption there is but one who need to be taken even seriously enough to defame). That's alright with me —a sort of left-handed compliment actually— and I will respond accordingly, even to the point of using the first person in what follows. But I should like it recorded that my wife and I regard Hooykaas' reduction of her from the major author of the book to a sort of non-person, no more to be blamed for the excesses of her husband than a child is for those of his father as an unforgivable affront to her.

## II.

That done, let me proceed, serially, to those of Hooykaas' points that reach some minimal level of coherence. In preface, it should be noted that not a single one of them are addressed to central argument and substance of the book —that is, to its subject. Those that do not refer to appendices or footnotes are concerned with introductory background material, and the whole core of the book, indeed the book as such, is left entirely unattended. Hooykaas says, in the course of suggesting to my colleagues that they disown me, that this is because he doesn't know anything about anthropology. As I shall try to show in the third section of this reply, this is true —in spades. But it does suggest that what we have to do with here is something else than scholarly criticism or a dispassionate concern with the advance of knowledge.

1. The Kirtya in Singaradja (the former *Dutch* capital of Bali, never the Balinese) has done invaluable work in preserving Balinese manuscripts, but if Hooykaas is under the impression that it is or ever was a popular Balinese institution he lives in a world even more hermetic than I thought. My informants (who were not just "young village lads" —having defended my wife against Hooykaas' infantilization of her, I'll leave the Indonesian youth, whom I admit to regarding as neither callow nor ignorant, to defend themselves against his slurs—but men of all ages, including ones born not only before 1928 but even before Hooykaas) said exactly what I said they said. And they were correct: the pre-war enterprise was not intended, nor did it serve, to make the resources of the Balinese written tradition available to the ordinary man, but to European scholars and administrators and a few of their chosen aides. As such it was an important contribution to scholarship, but hardly a vulgarization ("in the root sense") of religious knowledge and theory to the Balinese populace. Balinese anti-colonialism (and, as my passage indicates, it is theirs, not mine) is not cheap: it is real, deeply felt, and justified. Nor is the fact that the spread of religious literacy beyond the priestly castes is recent incorrect. The Kirtya existed; but so, in the sixteenth century, did the Vatican Library. Pity Luther couldn't abide it.

2. The very first line of the preface to our book reads, "The fieldwork upon which this analysis is based was conducted in the principality of Tabanan, August-December, 1957, and in the principality of Klungkung, April-July, 1958 and *this is the period of reference in following pages*" (Italics added, because they seem to



be necessary.) This use of "the ethnographic present" is standard in anthropological monographs and does not indicate when the book was written. It was in fact begun in 1960 and completed, six drafts later, in 1973. There is thus no proof error and no "excuse" called for. Hooykaas' notion that the Balinese massacres, in which some close friends of ours were killed, I am afraid in part by some other close friends of ours, has escaped our attention is beneath contempt.

3. How the original five miles between Tabanan and Krambitan of the manuscript got transmogrified into the fifteen of the text (the reference is a quite passing one in a larger, but still rather minor, point, in case some unwary reader should take at face value Hooykaas' insinuation that it is pivotal to the book), I don't know. It happens—even, as we shall see, to an ex-"taal-ambtenaar" so finely trained to give justifiable advices to the Government. Anyway, as we also lived in Krambitan for awhile, and went there dozens of times, we do not need a map to know where it is, and the lumbering sneers are misplaced. I will treat the point about "tailored tales" below in connection with an examination of Hooykaas' total misconception of what anthropology is. As for the Jembrana point, the capital of Jembrana is, I confess it, a hundred kilometers away, but its sphere of influence—which was greater than Hooykaas pretends—met Tabanan's just where we said it did. As Hooykaas must know this—that is, that it is political loyalties not the distance between capitals or even settlements around which traditional Balinese politics revolved—I can only take the points disingenuous. In any case, Polard has nothing to do with the case, Covarrubias' book is indeed charming (at points, rather too charming), and reality, especially political reality is rather less palpable in Bali than Hooykaas, who has a stunningly simple view of it, imagines.

4. I fail to see where "manorial courtyard," with its intimations of a European-style feudalism, which never existed in Bali, is an improvement over "palaces." And though Balinese *cokordas* perhaps don't impress Hooykaas sufficiently to deserve to be called kings, I don't quite see why we (or the Balinese, who regarded them as divine) should be obliged to share his prejudices.

5. The point about the *teba* seems to me the one genuinely funny part of Hooykaas' screed, and one which would tempt me to Freudian wisecracks if I hadn't promised myself to desist. The denomination of the Klungkung court was given to us by a member of the royal (manorial? baronial? *cokordalijk*?) family who lived there as a child and participated in the *puputan* march, barely surviving it, as his parents did not, before the protectors of Balinese high culture, having failed to shoot him, exiled him, as a dangerous orphan, to Lombok. I presume he knew where the kitchen was, whatever the *siisilah* may or may not say.

6. The statement about the "holy writings" isn't on page 68 as Hooykaas says (see, even six years at Leiden doesn't render you immune to slips), but I suppose it exists somewhere, as it is true. It is also true that neither "the author" or "his" informants know Sanskrit. I am sure we never said otherwise. But the fact remains, even if the quotation only possibly does.

7. There is an open square in the center of Tabanan and I invite all our readers to journey there, at Professor Hooykaas' expense, and see it. (Actually, it



is not altogether empty now, a building for sports or something having been built there in the mid-sixties.) Many of the Tabanan "palaces" are indeed still there, but the royal one, at least in its original and complete form (the ex-king still resides in a compound there, or did in 1957) is not. (A sketch map of Tabanan, ca. 1900, showing the disposition of the various puris, including the royal one, can be found in H.J.E.F. Schwartz, "Dagverhal van eine reise van den Resident van Bali en Lombok," *Tijdschrift v.d. Bataviasche Genootschap*, v. 42 [1901].) There is no more confusion in our minds between Badung and Tabanan than between Poland and Krambitan (Krambitan is the one where the barons lack monocles). Indeed, it will doubtless give Hooykaas great anticipatory pleasure to know that I am completing a book on the Balinese state in the nineteenth century, based on oral materials gathered in Tabanan and Klungkung, and to some extent in Badung and Gianyar, as well as on the literature (including his!). When *that* comes out our keeper of the scrolls will doubtless explode in a veritable mushroom cloud. I rather look forward to it.

8. I skip the fulminations about the Majapahit Javanese, the chronicles, informants, refugees, etc., here, to return to them in the general discussion of what anthropologists are up to in the next section.

9. The notion that "sacred" and "holy" are technical terms from theology/divinity reflects on more than Hooykaas' scholarship; it reflects on his common sense. Nor, as mentioned, do I want to wrangle with him about what "king" means; perhaps we can settle on *koninkje*? As for his view that the relation between the king (baron ...) of Tabanan and the lord (baronet?) of Krambitan was "purely personal" and had nothing to do with politics, I can only say that anyone who has lived in Tabanan and can believe that can believe anything. As for the king being a "private person" —well, he had resigned as *kepala daerah*, but he was not exactly just another Balinese. Indeed, the popular view was that kings can't abdicate and that he was still the legitimate ruler, a view he explicitly held himself. If Hooykaas is under the impression that the former "barons" of Bali are no longer politically important under the Republic —and they were, if anything, even more so in 1957— it's one that no Balinese I know, including all the baron, shares.

10. The *ngurah* point is interesting, and I suppose correct. At least a half dozen Balinese, some of whom were quite knowledgeable about the Tabanan court, having served in it, told me otherwise, so the "purity" label has at least some standing as a phenomenological fact if not a philological one —another point I'll return to when we get to what ethnographic description is a description of. For *pamecutan*, the same comments apply. The *pandita* business brings us back to "holy," and I can only say that Hooykaas is wrong: whatever the derivation of the word, *panditas* are holy in Balinese eyes. Not all of them are so terribly learned either.

11. Wauwerauh is a typographical error for Waurawuh. How Hooykaas knows my notes to be illegible interests me: am I to be left with no virtues at all? On *meperascita* and so on, I don't give a damn what Sanskrit is, that is the way the word was spelled in the document we translated. Perhaps the elders of Aan are not up to Hooykaas' standards for being Balinese. But for us they are the authorities in these matters, not him, and we do not go about like "language officials"



correcting their mistakes. A plain man in these matters myself, I am unable to conceive how people can take "considerable freedom" or make "arbitrary renderings" of texts they have themselves put together. As for the points about translating Dharma, Siwa, Tirtha, they were again thus glossed in the manuscript, and it's a crying shame if Hooykaas doesn't like what the Balinese themselves wrote. Perhaps he should go to Aan and give a course on how to be properly Balinese. All this to-do, it should be remarked again, concerns an appendix to the book, added for its possible interest, not the body of the text.

12. Well, the Pulosari and Kebun Tebuh puns were given to us by a dozen people or so each in the village concerned. I surely lack the wit, or, though Hooykaas may not believe it, the gall to have made them up. The double language nature of them is indeed interesting, but not appropriate of special comment in a book on kinship. As for our "un-Balinese" research assistant, he was indeed a Sundanese from the faculty of Rural Sociology at Bogor. He was of great help to us, and went on to become one of Indonesia's more eminent scholars, and I not only feel no need to apologize for him, but found him an excellent ethnographer and am proud to have been associated with him. He has, however, nothing to do with the case at hand for (as is clearly stated in the text) he was not with us in Klungkung, to which the material refers, but only, earlier, in Tabanan, and so another of Hooykaas' pleasantly insulting little theories is ruined by a fact.

13. As the footnote (p. 199 is just footnotes) indicates, the *dadia* derivation was given to us by J. Stephen Lansing, who forwarded it on behalf of a native Balinese linguist working with him at the University of Michigan, I Gusti Ngurah Oka. If Hooykaas wants to quarrel with it he should address himself to them. Indeed, as the term is puzzling (Professor Alton Becker, also of Michigan has suggested it might derive from Sanskrit *adi* —with locative *di-*— meaning "top" or "highest" or from Malayo-Polynesian *djadi*: *dadi* + *a*, meaning "potential" or "possible."), this is one place where I should like to have heard something of Hooykaas' view as to derivation, and the like. But, as I say, he is really not concerned with truth in all this; just exorcism.

14. The east/west reversal (it comes in an interior note to a rather dense appendix text) is a typographical mistake. I apologize for it. It is typical of Hooykaas' vast generosity of spirit that he should use it as the occasion for one of his more rancid attempts at humor.

15. I don't see why we should have referenced Goris, as we did not refer to him. I don't know what is supposed on p. 134 to have source and page, as no publication is referred to, or even distantly alluded to there. Homer (or perhaps Nestor?) nods again.

16. Our statement about temple congregations is correct, and not just for "my" villages. I don't suppose if a Balinese stops in at a temple just to pray (I, myself, have never seen anyone actually do so) anyone will tell him not to; but, as Hooykaas knows, Balinese temples are occupied by gods only during *odalan* festivals and I'm at a bit of a loss why he would do so when they are not there. Anyway, Balinese congregations are specific to temples; the contrast with Christianity and Islam is accurate.



## III.

But there is a deeper misconception in Hooykaas' little introduction to the "discipline" (shudder quotes original) of social anthropology than these wild firings at strange noises and fleeting shadows suggest: he is under the impression that its subject matter is manuscripts, preferably old manuscripts, preferably elite ones, not people; the literary properties associated with a place, not the lives that are led there. For someone for whom the Kirtya (or perhaps the Leiden) library is the realest part of Bali, the notion that what "the voices of informants and the man in the street" have to say about who they are, where they come from, and what they believe is as nothing when compared to some arcane notation on an ancient palm leaf may seem a reasonable one; but it's a difficult doctrine to follow if one resides in villages, talks to his neighbours, and gets caught up in their word. There has been a great deal of discussion —most of it bootless— in anthropology recently as to where, actually, culture "is." But if I had to choose (as I do not), I should surely prefer to locate it in the lives of men, not in the annotations learned scholiasts attach to recondite texts.

It is important not to be misunderstood here, especially when the passion to do so is so intense. I am not opposed to the proposition that classical texts can tell us a great deal about what being a Balinese here and now comes to. In a praising review of Hooykaas' *Agama Tirtha* (*American Anthropologist* 68: 242-3 [1966]) I said as much with what I thought a certain eloquence and strenuously urged my fellow anthropologists —and especially those interested in Bali and the Indic world— to put aside their ahistoricism and their, not entirely unjustified, nit-picker view of philology and read it; and I am myself much indebted to his work, which I regard as neither alien nor competitive, only occasionally rather precious and self-regarding. But, for an anthropologist anyway, and not just this anthropologist (and his collaborator) such texts are relevant only to the degree that they, or the ideas and images they contain, become part of the living experience of existent human beings. If one does not find in one's informants what the texts lead one to expect, then one does not read it in and report it as being there, nor slander them for being illiterate. It is for that sort of thing, not misspelling Waurawuh (Wahu rawuh; waü raüh), may the Lord keep him safe from harm, that one gets kicked out of my profession.

The whole extended nonsense about the role of Majapahit, the court traditions, refugees, and so on, is built on this hopeless misunderstanding of what the very object of description is: the Balinese view of their past, not what "really" happened, whatever that might mean. (Though I would remark that Hooykaas' view that "reality is [how I wish I could write a sentence with such a triumphant beginning!] that after centuries of direct and indirect hinduisation in Bali in the middle of the fourteenth century was conquered by the Javanese. Javanese courtiers, captains, and colonels [!] were spread over the island, built themselves a hundred baronial courts ..... and accelerated the earlier process of hindu-javanisation" is simplistic beyond the call of duty, and the invoking of Coedès, Krom, and De Graaf —who, in fact, Krom perhaps aside, have not so unshaded a view as this— doesn't make it seem any more plausible. Five centuries do separate us from the events; but it is Hooykaas, not my wife and I, who is taking legend for history, and Western-made legend to boot.)



That is why we speak of "traditions," "tailored tales," "court chronicles declaring" —perhaps that should have been "court chronicle tellers," but the context makes it clear— "were said," and so on —that is, to avoid the very false historicizing Hooykaas accuses us of, and himself indulges in with a confidence I, anyway, find breathtaking. I'm sure he is quite right that the fugitives of the European wars did not carry the Brittanica with them (though the notion that the Majapahit incursion into Bali consisted of a few sailors "escaping the sword of the Musulmans" landing on Nusa Pendida is hardly more plausible than the Balinese view that it consisted in Javanese kings severing a Balinese one from his pig-form head), and that people couldn't remember the truth about Stalingrad twenty-five years later (would the Kremlin library be a better source?). But what has that to do with the case when what we want is the Balinese, not Hooykaas', views on these matters?

The sentence he quotes from us ("the author") —"Two fully cooperative and intelligent Balinese from the same village may give completely variant accounts on matters that the ethnologist believes to be crucial to his formulations"— states the conditions of an ethnographer's work, the very shape of the "fact" he is investigating, and the challenge and possibility his subject offers him, not something to be got round by consulting "proper books." If there is anything which is *vieux jeu* it is the idea that sociological reality, messy and contradictory and bereft of enlightenment as it may be, is to be tidied up by recourse to approved prejudices about the way it ought to be if people would just shape up and be the sort of Hindus, "Musulmans", primitives, or whatever that we have in our heads. Well, they won't, and all the apostrophes to the godlings of academe will not avail against the wonder and glory of their recalcitrance.

I can, in the end, find neither point nor content in Hooykaas' outburst, merely a rage to harm. The book, as he notes, will have finally to be judged by those who understand it and are unencumbered by *parti pris* or the animus of interest. He need not fear, for despite his extravagant vision of my wife and I as holding down positions so "honored and influential" as to discourage criticism, I am confident that our colleagues will prove intrepid enough to judge our work on its merits and without the need of any gratuitous advice from vengeful philologists as to whether they should expel us from the profession.

(May, 1975)