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**Reframing *Tri Hita Karana*: From
'Balinese Culture' to Politics**

Dik Roth and Gede Sedana

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This article takes issue with the uncritical way in which claims of 'culture', 'tradition' or 'local knowledge' are used in science and policymaking around the Balinese irrigators' association (subak). The growing problems of Balinese irrigated agriculture are increasingly framed in 'cultural' ways that are not neutral: such accounts of irrigated agriculture in relation to Balinese culture deeply influence the world of policymaking. In this article we discuss the emergence of Tri Hita Karana (THK; 'the three causes of well-being') as an ideology, scientific concept and policy concept in irrigated agriculture and the subak domain. We argue that this ideological concept is not simply 'local wisdom', 'tradition' or 'culture' but requires critical scientific scrutiny as part of wider processes of socio-political change. How is it mobilised? What does its growing popularity mean for our knowledge of Balinese irrigated agriculture, of policy processes directed at the subak and of the workings of policies in real-life contexts?

Keywords: Culture; Heritage; Irrigated Agriculture; Local Knowledge; subak; Tri Hita Karana

Introduction

Bali's global popularity as a tourist destination is causing huge problems for the island's land and water resources. In this article we address the question of how these problems are framed and turned into policies and recipes for intervention, and with what possible consequences for both irrigated agriculture and its analysis. Focusing on the Balinese *subak* irrigation society (Jha & Schoenfelder 2011; Lansing 1991; Sutawan 2008a, 2008b; see below), we argue that the 'cultural', increasingly ideological approach to these problems mystifies the ongoing social-environmental processes and their socio-political dimensions, hampers their analysis and will probably not lead to more effective, equitable and sustainable land and water policies.

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We develop this argument through a discussion of the increasingly popular concept of ⁷*Tri Hita Karana* (*THK*; see Pedersen & Dharmiasih 2015) in Bali. This concept¹ refers to harmonious relationships between the religious (*parhyangan*), social (*pawongan*) and environmental-territorial (*palemahan*)¹⁰ domains of life (Ramstedt 2014; Sutawan 2008a, 2008b). In recent years it has embarked on a remarkable march through Balinese institutions and its globalising society. Googling the concept gives 131,000 hits² to, for instance, holiday resorts offering spas, yoga, wellness and bodyscrubs, and to websites of hotels that have won the *Tri Hita Karana* Award for sustainable tourism.³ ⁶*THK*, then, is the ‘in thing’, which is not all bad. As the last example shows, *THK* may work as a ‘boundary concept’, linking societal actors around issues like tourism and the environment,¹⁰ and making them act in environmentally beneficial ways. The concept¹⁰ increase societal awareness of environmental issues. In resource conflicts about tourism investments, it can mobilise political support and create alliances against powerful external investors (though they may be short-lived; see Strauß 2015).

There are, however, also real concerns. This article discusses the emergence and growing importance of *THK* in Balinese irrigated agriculture, irrigation studies and irrigation and heritage policies. Both policies for, and (especially Balinese-authored) scientific studies of, irrigated agriculture have embraced this concept as a ‘traditional’ solution to Bali’s land and water problems. However, these cultural ‘framings’ (Lewicki, Gray, & Elliot 2003) of the *subak* domain and references to ‘culture’ in general are not politically neutral, nor should they be presented as such by anthropologists (see Spencer 2007). Through specific framings of causes and effects, problems and solutions, some options for analysis and policy solutions are highlighted, while others disappear. Therefore critical analysis is needed of how resource problems are conceptualised and dealt with scientifically, socially, politically and in policy, in this case by using the concept of *THK*. This increases our understanding of how such problems relate to wider socio-political processes (see Wardana 2015; Strauß 2015). It may expose framings and biases through which such problems are experienced, made sense of, naturalised and turned into policies. This can create greater awareness of the situatedness of understandings of problems and solutions, trigger new scientific questions and suggest alternative approaches to the analysis of Bali’s land and water problems.

³This article started from the first author’s fascination with the emergence of *THK* as ideology, scientific concept and policy concept, and the second author’s extensive experience as a researcher and advisor for agricultural extension in the *subak* domain. What follows is a critical reflection on the emergence and expansion of *THK*, not primarily based on ethnographic fieldwork but on an analysis of scientific and policy literature on the *subak*, some interviews conducted by the first author and the field experience of the second author. It does not aim to contrast ‘our facts’ with ‘their beliefs’, or ‘Western’ science to ‘native’ beliefs, nor to discredit Balinese perceptions of their culture. What it *does* aim to do is argue the importance of taking a (more) ³⁰critical stance towards claims of ‘culture’, ‘local knowledge’ and ‘tradition’.

Irrigated agriculture is central in Balinese life, cosmology and religious-ritual practices. This is illustrated in Balinese rice cultivation and water management (Sutawan 2008a, 2008b; see Pedersen & Dharmiasih 2015). However, these human-environmental relations are undergoing rapid changes. Land and water are increasingly seen as commodities, 'resources' to be 'developed'. Water transfers out of agriculture create local scarcities and conflicts, and may push farmers into non-agricultural livelihoods (Strauß 2011). Rising land taxes due to tourism stimulate land transfers to non-agricultural uses (MacRae 2003b). With these multiple pressures on agriculture, processes of revaluation of Balinese land and water resources, irrigated agriculture and irrigated landscapes are at work in multiple, often contradictory ways (see Lorenzen 2011, 2015). Water and land, then, are increasingly contested resources.

However, Balinese-authored scientific literature on irrigated agriculture pays little attention to such issues. Instead, it stresses cohesion and stability of a 'traditional' cultural-spiritual order (MacRae 2011; Parker 2003). In the past, when the growing interest in 'farmer-managed irrigation systems' (FMIS; Coward & Levine 1987; see below) as examples of participatory irrigation management stimulated Balinese-authored *subak* studies, these made a great contribution to *subak* research (see, for example, Sutawan 1987, 2000). However, the increasingly ideological use of discourses of culture and tradition in current studies, epitomised in *THK*, hampers in-depth analysis of how Balinese land and water are actually governed. Reified as 'tradition' or 'culture', this discourse reproduces stale but deeply entrenched images of Balinese society in terms of cooperation and harmony. Discursively linked to policy concepts like 'local knowledge' and 'sustainable development' (see, for example, Pitana 2010; Sutawan 2008a), these framings become the basis of policies and interventions.

This article illustrates these processes as follows: first, we discuss how the *subak* domain is increasingly framed in terms of *THK*-based Hindu-Balinese culture.⁴ We trace 'the social life of a concept' (Molle 2009)—*Tri Hita Karana*—presented as traditional 'culture' while actually rooted in a re-invented Balinese Hinduism (Bakker 1993). Becoming a scientific and policy concept inevitably changes its use and meaning. Second, we appreciate how framings of irrigated landscapes in terms of *THK* are turned into instruments of global policymaking. This leads to a (re-) valuation of irrigated landscapes and *subak* resources, and to the emergence of new normative frameworks around the *subak* and *subak*-based livelihoods. Recent recognition of part of the *subak* landscape, temple infrastructure, cultural-religious philosophy and institutions as UNESCO World Heritage serves as an example.

Unpacking 'Culture' and 'Local Knowledge'

The framing of *THK* as uncontested 'culture', 'tradition' or 'local knowledge' can be criticised on many accounts, using insights from various scientific domains. In this

section we refer to two that seem particularly relevant here: Balinese and Indonesian studies, and scientific literature on local knowledge.⁵

Balinese Studies and Indonesian Cultural Politics

Contrary to Indonesian studies more generally, Balinese studies primarily deal with ‘culture’ (Parker 2003). Following earlier work (for example, Picard 2008; Vickers 1989), Parker stresses that, due to a specific history of colonialism and cultural colonisation, Balinese studies are often ‘introverted cultural studies’ in which Bali is seen as ‘unique’ and different from other places. This ‘blindness...wrought by anthropological snobbery’ (Parker 2003, 14) sits well with a long history of depoliticising culture in colonial and Indonesian politics, presenting it as a shared, uncontested, clearly bounded domain, and reducing it to material expressions to neutralise the sensitive relationship between (national) unity, (cultural) diversity and ethnicity (Jones 2013; Smith Kipp 1993; see also below). According to Parker (2003, 100) such potentially sensitive issues are ‘subsumed under the rhetoric of “culture” and thereby made innocuous’.

The more critical stream of Balinese studies shows that it is actually not so clear what ‘culture’ (*budaya, kebudayaan*), ‘tradition’ (*adat*) and ‘religion’ (*agama*) are—both in the Indonesian and Balinese context—and how they are related to identity, ethnicity, law and politics. From colonial times onwards, these terms have been objects of political negotiation, (re-)definition and state engineering. Instead of being ‘naturally’ given, their meanings and the boundaries between them are contested, (re-)negotiated and change with the flows of socio-political change (see Hauser-Schaublin 2011). In these political processes, the (central) state attempts to control ethnicities, identities and related political movements, while regional actors try to politically re-appropriate such domains by redefining the terms. Thus, concepts like *adat*, *agama* and *budaya* have different meanings through time, both in Indonesia generally and in Bali (Davidson & Henley 2007; Warren 2007). The emergence of *THK* in post-Suharto Indonesia provides another example (Hauser-Schaublin 2011; Picard 2011a, 2011b; Ramstedt 2014; see below).

Culture and Local Knowledge

In development, the idea of discrete and coherent ‘cultures’ is often connected to notions of local knowledge or wisdom. Anthropologists have shown that such notions should be taken seriously (Leach & Fairhead 2002). Sillitoe (2007, 7) rightly stresses that we should ‘beware of scientific assumptions distorting local understandings’ (see also Kalland 2000; Pottier 2003; Sillitoe 2007). However, it should not be taken at face value either. The *a priori* acceptance of its truth claims are often based on simplifications and the creation of false dichotomies (Agrawal 1995; Dove et al. 2007; Pottier 2003). Kalland (2000) warns against overly optimistic assumptions about the relationship between philosophical principles and (ecologically sound) real-life practices, which may actually be far apart. Conservational motives, moreover, are

often read into specific practices by anthropologists, policymakers or others (Kalland 2000; Sillitoe 2007). Pottier (2003) stresses the importance of knowledge interfaces, where knowledge is produced, negotiated, changed or rejected in political and power contexts that determine what counts as knowledge, and whose knowledge is included, authorised and legitimised by whom—involving acts of power, social struggle, negotiation and conflict (see also Sillitoe 2007). Local knowledge cannot be separated from the context in which it develops, is mobilised, given meaning and linked to other domains (for example, development policy).

Finally, 'culture' is far from unproblematic: Leach and Fairhead (2002) stress that a diverse and selective mobilisation of cultural perspectives and claims is involved. Everywhere people give a social and cultural meaning to their relationships with the environment. The related knowledge is often a source of political authority and power (Leach & Fairhead 2002). This, and the diversity of cultural perspectives involved, need critical anthropological attention, as such perspectives 'are discourses in the sense that they are produced through and supportive of power relations, and can have material effects' (223).

Thus, there are good scientific reasons not to take at face value claims of *THK* being 'culture', 'tradition' or 'local knowledge'. Such claims should be analysed as situated in specific socio-political contexts in which they emerge and relate to domains like science and policy. They should then be traced as they travel through such domains, are mobilised for specific objectives, legitimising specific approaches, choices and courses of action. Finally, they should be critically appreciated for their 'workings' in society.

Changing Images of and Interactions with the *Subak*

After the demise of the Suharto regime, Balinese concerns with their environment, society and identity increased. *Ajeg Bali* ('Bali firm'; Schulte Nordholt 2007; Allen & Palermo 2005) became the catch phrase for this preoccupation with Balinese identity, expressed in political and media debates as the revival of the *desa pakraman* (customary village), and the call for a return to 'traditional' cultural and religious values (Picard 2011a). The emergence of *THK* in irrigated agriculture and the *subak*, discussed here, could be seen in this recent post-Suharto context and its historical roots, but also in the context of a longer history of interactions with, and research on, this domain.

The *Subak*

The *subak* is an 'irrigation society' (Jha & Schoenfelder 2011; Lorenzen & Lorenzen 2011) covering various functions related to irrigated agriculture: construction; maintenance; conflict resolution; agricultural scheduling; pest control; and rituals. *Subak* may cover anything between a few and hundreds of hectares, and have their own rules (*awig-awig*) (Birkelbach 1973; Geertz 1972; Sutawan 2000, 2008a, 2008b). While *subak* have often been pictured as egalitarian and autonomous peasant

organisations (see, for example, Lieftrinck 1969; Geertz 1972), this somewhat romanticised picture has been criticised by others (Jha & Schoenfelder 2011; Schulte Nordholt 1994; Parker 2003).

In the colonial and postcolonial periods the *subak* domain was increasingly influenced by the development and agricultural policies of the state (Lorenzen & Lorenzen 2008; Schulte Nordholt 1994). Legal-institutional plurality is a major characteristic of these relationships, as are conflicts about rights and obligations pertaining to water, infrastructure and institutions (Spiertz 2000; Sutawan 2000). The *subak* crucially connects domains of life that are segmented as 'sectors' or 'policy fields' in state bureaucracies: irrigation; agriculture; and religion. This important characteristic is also mentioned by Sutawan (2008a, 20), who calls the *subak* a 'social-agrarian and religious customary community'. Even in a rapidly changing society, the *subak* has remained a key institution of Balinese agriculture (Jha & Schoenfelder 2011; Sutawan 2008a, 2008b). Bali currently has an irrigated area of 81,428 hectares managed by between 1200 and 1600 *subak* (Lorenzen 2011).

The Subak as a Domain of External Framing and Intervention

Historically, different representations have been constructed of the *subak*. For Dutch colonial administrators-researchers it was an instrument for local management and revenue collection (Jha & Schoenfelder 2011; Schulte Nordholt 1994). Postcolonial anthropologists constructed their own images: Geertz (1972) saw the *subak* as an autonomous and egalitarian 'wet' variant of the Balinese 'village republic', a too-simple picture corrected by later work (see above). Later, Lansing (1991) analysed the *subak* as part of basin-wide self-organising systems of ecosystem management, with a central role for temple networks. As 'modernisation' and 'development' policies reached Bali, the *subak*, regarded as backward and incompatible with 'modern' (Green Revolution) agriculture and irrigation technology, became the target of state interventions. Programs funded by international donor agencies had a huge impact (Horst 1996; Lorenzen & Lorenzen 2008). From the 1980s, debates about farmer participation in irrigation management (Coward & Levine 1987), mainly triggered by management problems in state-built irrigation systems, led to a 're-discovery' of the *subak* as an iconic 'farmer-managed irrigation system' (FMIS) by international donor institutions. From 'backward' systems, they became a basis of 'local knowledge' and 'participatory management'. However, it often led to an uncritical idealisation and simplification of 'community', 'local knowledge' and 'tradition', de-emphasising power relations, differentiation and conflict (for FMIS, see Zwarteveen 2006).

Confrontations between *subak* and project interventions had shown that *subak* were still viable socio-technical systems that required more serious research (see Horst 1996; Spiertz 2000). Ideas about the viable 'community' character of the *subak* also found support in discourses of *subak* autonomy (see above). The government was interested in keeping the *subak* functioning, as they were seen as a crucial point of entry for policy implementation (Spiertz 1991). Thus, the *subak* as a

farmer-managed irrigation system became synonymous with good irrigation management, to be replicated elsewhere, for example, in water users' associations of state-governed irrigation systems (FAO 1982). Whatever their biases, these policy-related developments have stimulated a host of *subak* research, increasingly also by Balinese researchers who have importantly contributed to this field (see, for example, Sutawan 1987, 2000, 2008a).⁶

The Post-New Order Subak

The post-New Order period has brought growing concerns about the future of irrigated agriculture (Pitana & Setiawan 2005; Sutawan 2008b). However, as before, these are often expressed in externally developed normative ideas of what the *subak* should be(come). Several authors see the *subak* as a target of new policies and interventions for 'development' or *agribisnis*, turning them into efficiently run business organisations (see, for example, Pitana & Setiawan 2005). The question is whether the managerial style (of the capitalist enterprise) to which *subak* are now subjected, and the top-down redefinition of what *subak* 'is', are locally seen as legitimate. MacRae (2011) discusses the problems that emerge from experiences with such entrepreneurial initiatives: power relations between local and external actors; different moralities (market and commercial enterprise versus local community); and the influence of sensitive agrarian political issues like landownership and owner-tenant relations (see also Lorenzen 2015).⁷ Another problem, which shows the contradictory and inconsistent character of such recipes, is that they are often presented as unproblematically related to images of the *subak* as an enactment of traditional Balinese culture and *THK* (see, for example, Suyatna 2005).

We have shown here that images, valuations and representations of the *subak* have changed through time. The latest framing—the *subak* as a manifestation of *THK*—is therefore not the only and 'true' one, but just the next one in a long line of such representations.

Further Ideologisation of the *Subak*: The Emergence of *THK*

THK: An Invented Tradition

'*THK*-based development' (Satri 2004) became a pillar of the customary village (*desa pakraman*) (Ramstedt 2014), of the Provincial Spatial Planning Regulations (Provinsi Bali 2009; see Wardana 2015) and was mobilised in many other ways. Borrowing from global policy-speak, some present *THK* as 'local wisdom' (*kearifan lokal*) that makes it possible for Balinese to live in harmony with the environment, and revitalise their culture (see, for example, Pitana 2010; Pitana & Setiawan 2005), or claim its relevance⁸ for sustainable development (*pembangunan berkelanjutan*) (Sutawan 2008a). According to Pitana (2010, 139), 'the Balinese are successful in harmonizing⁹ *THK* with modernism development and cultural conservation'. Pitana (2010, 147) states that *THK* 'dictates the Balinese to be always in harmony with their surroundings, physical and

non-physical'. With *THK*, according to Pitana (2010, 147), ¹⁵ 'the local wisdoms are already accommodated (and revitalized) in the development process'.

THK is also propagated as the *subak*-based foundation of 'traditional' Balinese culture and identity (Pitana & Setiawan 2005; Sutawan 2008b). The 'cultural' narrative presents the *subak* as a stronghold in the struggle of Balinese culture against outside threats. Sutawan (2008b, 3) elaborates that: 'If the *subak* becomes extinct, it is to be feared that Balinese culture will also become unstable, and in the long term may even become extinct, as a result of which Bali will become dominated by cultures from outside'.⁸ Sutawan sees the need for a *THK*-based *keajegan subak* (*subak* ²⁸ *gmnness*). Such approaches are full of contradictions: they stress the many threats to the *subak* as a 'traditional' institution and guardian of Balinese culture, but locate the solution in the *subak* as the *THK*-based source of stability, sustainability and environmental wisdom (Pitana 2010; Sutawan 2008a, 2008b).

Thus, *THK* has become the default mode in Balinese-authored work on the *subak*. Such literature strikingly confuses the world of ideals and ideology of *THK* in cultural or environmental protection with real-life practices (see, for example, Wajana ² 2012), a relationship never discussed in this literature. Interestingly, *THK* has also become the basis for external interventions, both to make the *subak* more 'traditional' (see Pedersen & Dharmiasih 2015 for 'completeness' of the *subak*) and more 'modern', competitive and contributing to 'development' (Suyatna 2005). Suyatna recommends a grand strategy of agricultural development (*agribisnis*), based on *subak* 'social capital', benefitting national and regional development, increasing the wellbeing of farmers and contributing to the protection of the *subak* as a vehicle for the preservation of cultural values (Suyatna 2005, 67). Windia (2006) even sees options for 'exporting' the *THK*-based *subak* model to irrigated areas outside Bali.

What about this 'traditional' concept in earlier *subak* studies? A quick glance through the *subak* literature shows that references to *THK* are of recent origin. It is hardly mentioned in older, mainly foreign-authored work, and only from the late 1990s in the published Balinese-authored literature.⁹ Why was it never taken up in earlier Balinese-authored studies on design and organisational principles, *subak* rules and conflict resolution (for example, Sutawan 2000), of which *THK* is nowadays claimed to be the philosophical basis? The answer is that *THK* is 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Pedersen & Dharmiasih 2015). This is confirmed by Sutawan (2008b, 5), who refers to *THK* as 'nowadays increasingly popular in society'. He traces the concept back to the 1960s, when it was coined to denote the philosophy of the Hindu organisation *Prajaniti Hindu Indonesia* (PNHI).

Here we come closer to its political roots. Bakker (1993; and interview¹⁰) traces the concept to the growing Balinese orientation towards India in relation to growing national state pressures on the Balinese from the 1950s onwards to reframe their spiritual-religious practices to make them acceptable for government recognition as 'religion' (*agama*).¹¹ As Picard (2004, 57) aptly states: '[T]he Balinese had to reinvent themselves as the Hindus that they were already supposed to be'. *THK* had originally been developed by religious leaders and intellectuals:

5 as a strategic tool to construct a veneer of theological unity and to camouflage those aspects of the diverse local cosmological beliefs and associated ritual practices in Bali that had been judged as essentially 'animist' rather than Hindu in character by the delegates of the Muslim-dominated Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (IMORA). (Ramstedt 2014, 64)

As *THK* was defined in a way both 'rescuing the 5 spiritual core of Balinese customary law' (Ramstedt 2014, 65) and making it fit within the strict guidelines of the state, Balinese Hinduism was recognised as religion.¹²

Ramstedt (2014) traces the recent emergence of *THK* and its role in processes of juridification of ritualism and customary law in new Balinese village jurisdictions. The growing influence of modernist movements on the dimension of *THK* that covers the relationship between humans and God (rightful religious behaviour; relations with the Divine) was much resented by the traditionalists. Modernist movements, banned under Suharto, regained their freedom after 1998. However, the same political changes created new political space for 5 redefining *THK* along traditionalist lines. According to Ramstedt (2014, 61), 'it was this traditionalist notion of the *Tri Hita Karana* that was juridified in Bali's new village jurisdictions, exacerbating extant conflicts between 5 modernist and traditionalist Balinese Hindus'. Traditionalists 'revitalised the ideological potential of the *Tri Hita Karana*, yet exclusively bound them to the ritualism embedded in the local customary law traditions of the Balinese customary village communities' (68).

THK as a Product of Irrigation Sector Policy Interventions

The emergence 7 of *THK* can also be analysed in the history of *subak*-oriented policies.¹³ Though only mentioned recently in *subak* literature, *THK* emerged much earlier in relation to externally driven policy agendas. In the irrigation sector there was a growing state- and donor-driven need to turn institutionalised practices into formalised donor- and state-recognised 'rule systems'. This formalisation started in 1972 with the Provincial Irrigation Regulations, which marked increasingly intensive state interventions. From the late 1970s, the Asian Development Bank-funded Bali Irrigation Project, intended to 'modernize' irrigation, created many conflicts (Horst 1996). The Second Integrated Irrigation Sector Project (1995–2000) focused more strongly on institutional strengthening, making formalisation of internal rules obligatory. Project implementation was made contingent upon the *subak* becoming a 'legal body'. Registration in accordance with national water user association regulations required a formalised, written version of *subak* regulations (*awig-awig*); policy demanded a clear definition of its operational basis (see also Lorenzen 2008). *THK* was mobilised here as a model for *subak* regulations. Signing of the *awig-awig* by a *subak* board, government authorities and court created a legal body. The Public Works Agency actively stimulated and facilitated the *subak* to attain formalisation because of its loan agreement with the Asian Development Bank.

Even older so-called '*subak* contests' (*lomba subak*; see Pedersen & Dharmiasih 2015), also meant to formalise and create conformity (see Parker 2003). To join the

contest, *subak* had to constitute written regulations. In a competition, *subak* are judged on their performance in the three domains of *THK*. This activity is organised by the Department of Culture, in cooperation with other departments. *THK* also entered the irrigation policy domain through the yearly *subak* subsidy for improvements of irrigation and agricultural ritual infrastructure (see Pedersen & Dharmiasih 2015). Since 2000 *subak* have received this ‘*subak* incentive’ grant of Rp. 20 million (Rp. 30 million from 2013),¹⁴ paid from the Balinese regional budget by the Provincial Department of Culture which also drafted the Regional Regulation for this initiative. The grant primarily aims to consolidate the *THK* philosophy in the *subak* domain. To qualify, *subak* have to submit a *THK*-oriented work plan.

We have identified two major lines along which *THK* has entered the *subak* domain. Originating in the Indonesian and Balinese politics of religion, *THK* was a political construct in the first place, to deal with the tension between local diversity and the standardising demands of the state. In the *subak* domain, it was first mobilised from the 1980s in the framework of a state-driven agenda of standardisation, formalisation and political control, and a donor-driven search for local institutions to support irrigation management in the *subak* as farmer-managed irrigation systems. Thus it became an instrument of intervention in the *subak*. In a second, more recent wave, its political character becomes even clearer. Hauser-Schäublin (2011) calls this a ‘spiritualized politics’, a re-appropriation of the local involving the amalgamation and re-politicisation of domains like ‘tradition’ (*adat*), culture (*budaya*) and religion (*agama*) that had been artificially separated and depoliticised under state influence (Hauser-Schöblin 2011; Picard 2004, 2011a, 2011b). This crucially entailed the local juridification of ritualism and customary law: the ‘ideological reduction of the *Tri Hita Karana* to Balinese ritualism’ (Ramstedt 2014, 74). Like the village, the *subak* domain has become a new arena for local political contestation, and *THK* a weapon in the struggle.

Sanitised Irrigated Landscapes: *THK* and ‘World Heritage’

The latest success in *THK*’s ascendancy is the recognition of parts of the terraced irrigated landscape with the highest value for tourism, as a UNESCO World Heritage site: ‘The cultural landscape of Bali Province: the *subak* system as a manifestation of the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy’ (ICOMOS 2012).¹⁵ Little systematic research has been done in relation to on-the-ground processes occurring after the recognition of historical-cultural sites and landscapes as ‘world heritage’ to understand how these processes are experienced; how rights and obligations are changed; and burdens and benefits reallocated. However, in relation to the famous Temple of Besakih in Bali, Hitchcock and Darma Putra (2007) reveal conflicts over identity, political and economic control and rights. For rice terraces in Ifugao Province in the Philippines, Guimbatan and Baguilat (2006) reveal various consequences of such policies: revaluation of the landscape in terms of new, external criteria of ‘outstanding universal values’; imposition of new restrictions on the population to preserve

'authenticity'; and 'fixing' of landscapes and the revival of traditions for the sake of heritage and tourism.

Shaping 'Heritage'

In 2007 the cultural landscape of Bali Province was nominated for a place on the World Heritage List for its 'natural, mixed and cultural properties'. It was put on the tentative list, with international assistance from the World Heritage Fund provided for preparing the nomination. UNESCO documents offer insight into the process of negotiation towards an outcome leading to recognition. In the nominations for 2008 the proposed 'property'¹⁶ was described as:

A loose cluster of ten sites across three geographical zones...nominated together as the material manifestation of Balinese philosophical thoughts, particularly *Tri Hita Karana*, the harmonious relationship between God, people and nature, and as representative of the *subak* system of water management.¹⁷

In its general description, the report stated that:

Rice, the water that sustains it, and *subak*...have together shaped the landscape over the past thousand years and are an integral part of religious life. Rice is seen as the gift of god, and the *subak* system is part of temple culture. Water from springs and canals flows through the temples. The nominated property consists of eight separate temples along the Pakerisan and Petanu Rivers, where only the temple buildings are nominated, a royal temple to the south and a separate area in central Bali that is part of a *subak* system. The link between these sites is seen as the Tri Hita Karana philosophy. (ICOMOS 2008, 42–43)

The originally nominated 'property' was represented as consisting of a mix of 'monuments' (nine temples), 'a site' (a location of *subak*-managed rice terraces) and 'intangible processes and associations' (the *subak* system and *THK* philosophy)¹⁸:

The water temples are at the centre of a delicately balanced system of cooperation between neighbouring farmers that is steeped in symbolic ritual activities. Due to rigorous social coordination led by temple priests, pest levels are minimised and water sharing optimised in the rice paddies. The need for effective cooperation in water management links thousands of farmers together in hierarchies of productive relationships that span entire watersheds. (ICOMOS 2008, 44)

Remarkably, the initial nomination did not make any attempt to show linkages between temples, society (villages, *subak*), rice fields and management systems (ICOMOS 2008, 43–44). It was a loose assemblage of architecture, landscape and non-material elements, together claimed to be representative of *THK*. Expressing doubts about the integrity of temples and cultural landscapes, in 2008 the committee deferred their decision, asking the 'State Party' to reconsider its choice of site in order to better present the claimed integration of terraces, temples, villages and other elements where the traditional *subak* system is still functioning in its entirety and managed by local communities', and to 'put in place a management system that aims to sustain traditional practices and deflect inappropriate development or the impacts

of development'.¹⁹ While 'tradition' and 'community management' are presented here as unproblematic concepts, 'development' is regarded as problematic; its impact should be restricted. The heritage site thus becomes a mirror image of the 'real' world outside, where 'development' is the ideal and 'tradition' problematic.

The revised proposal containing the new site selection satisfied the criteria of outstanding universal value, integrity and authenticity.²⁰ Five sites were nominated that 'are together seen as manifestations of the Balinese philosophical principle *Tri Hita Karana*...that promotes a harmonious relationship between the realms of the spirit, the human world and nature' (ICOMOS 2012, 170). The state justification mentions *subak* and water temples as a reflection of *THK*, *subak* as democratic and self-governing, the physical landscape as reshaped by philosophical ideas and temple networks as managers of terraces at watershed scale (ICOMOS 2012, 174). Note that there is no scientific agreement on these assumptions. The report stresses the need for active management support (strict enforcement?) to keep alive the harmonious relationship 'with the spiritual world and the ancient philosophical concept of *Tri Hita Karana*'. It pleads for the encouragement of 'a return to traditional architecture and building techniques for the *subak* villages' and the development of 'ways of strengthening traditional practice' (ICOMOS 2012, 177). Thus, the report clearly stresses heritage-related governance agendas of sanitising and fixing the area to keep it 'traditional'.²¹

This process shows how *THK* ideology, applied to heritage policies for the *subak* landscape presented as a manifestation of a 'traditional' philosophy, has become a 'fact' on which these policies are based, with added instruments of governance to regulate spaces, resources and people. The basis for these policies is a kind of assemblage of rice terraces, temples at various levels of a hierarchy, technologies, agricultural practices, organisations and human behaviour, linked by the *THK* religious philosophy. As earlier studies of the impact of 'heritage' have shown, such policies will probably have real consequences through their redefinition of rights and obligations (property), of territories and boundaries (zoning), of inclusion and exclusion (access; benefit sharing) and through their legal and governance instruments for controlling human behaviour.²²

Heritage and the Creation of Sanitized Landscapes

As these are recent developments, the challenges for future research on the real-life workings of heritage policies are many. Critical scrutiny of the Balinese heritage process is required from a point of view that does not take for granted the 'cultural' narrative of *THK*. Heritage policies cause a revaluation of Bali's irrigated landscapes: irrigated agriculture is increasingly valued through the landscapes it (re-)produces—a tourist attraction and icon of 'traditional' Bali. Rice terraces may primarily become 'postcard motifs', and farmers managers of the tourist landscape (see Lewis & Lewis 2009). Heritage processes often involve processes of 'invention' of tradition presented as 'authentic', again with 'real' effects: sites are given a material 'face-lift'

(Sheller & Urry 2004, 2), turning them into ‘packaged, themed environments whereby relatively sanitised representations of rural life are designed, constructed and presented to visitors’ (Urry & Larsen 2011, 112; see Lorenzen 2015).

Physical spaces defined by heritage policies differ from the places lived in and given meaning to by the local population. Heritage creation involves the production of new categories and definitions of property rights, often with past or future rather than current conditions, uses and livelihoods as their point of reference (F. von Benda-Beckmann, K. Benda-Beckmann, & Griffiths 2009). These entail new rights and obligations, inclusions and exclusions and new forms of tourism-related exploitation. More research is needed on the legitimisation, construction and contestation of heritage sites, and on the consequences for people, places, social relationships and practices developing in them (Urry & Larsen 2011).

THK Ideology: What Gets Lost? What Questions Can Be Asked?

In post-New Order Bali, scientific and policy approaches to the *subak* have turned towards the cultural-religious ideology of *THK*. It is not our intention here to dismiss the concept of *THK*, nor to replace it with the truth claims of global science (see Pottier 2003). Scientific knowledge is only one of many possible ways of experiencing and knowing the world. Acknowledgement of such differences in worldview and epistemologies should be the point of departure. Further, the concept can play an important social and political role in structuring local and other forms of organisation or protest, and contribute to the growth of environmental awareness in the tourism sector.

However, a critical scientific appreciation of *all* knowledge and truth claims and how they are mobilised in society should at least be possible. The ideological turn towards *THK* in the (especially Balinese-authored) scientific literature on irrigated agriculture and the *subak*, and its framing in terms of shared and uncontested tradition, culture and local knowledge, hamper such critical analysis. While earlier Balinese-authored work has made a significant contribution to studies of the *subak*, the current centrality of *THK* ideology leads to analytical closure. The above analysis of *THK* in *subak* studies, irrigated agriculture and heritage policy clearly shows the extent to which it guides scientific practices, policies and new ways of governing landscapes. Rather than being taken at face value, this requires critical scientific questioning, analysis and explanation—both in relation to research practices, policy frameworks and interventions and processes of governance. Where *THK* has become hegemonic, however, such questions are no longer asked. Where it determines the definition of problems and solutions as a policy concept, scientific analysis of its working and meaning in real life will be sacrificed.

Whether *THK* is a ‘real’ or an ‘invented’ tradition is, in itself, not important. What matters is how it is used to give meaning to wider social and political processes, for what purposes and with what consequences. Framings of *THK* as culture, tradition or local knowledge are not simple ‘truths’ but part of specific knowledge-power regimes

that establish and naturalise specific forms of social ordering. *THK* politicises the *subak* domain in specific ways by linking it to processes of local governance, intervention and juridification, but depoliticises other basically political issues of control over resources like land and water. Where *THK*-determined order and stability are assumed, issues of conflict and contestation, inequality and inclusion and exclusion no longer exist. Where *THK* becomes the policy focus, alternative options disappear. In that sense, an uncritically accepted *THK* ideology mystifies the wider social-environmental processes at work such as land conflicts, water transfers and ensuing scarcities and conflicts. In addition, it is not conducive to analysing the extent to which *THK* contributes to solving social-environmental problems. Many relevant scientific questions can be asked: how does *THK* ideology relate to actual practices of resource management and governance? How relevant is *THK* for analysing water transfers out of river basins and agriculture? How do *THK*-based policies 'work' in the *subak*? How do heritage policies change property rights, and who benefits and who loses from these changes? How do farmers deal with scarcities and water conflicts in situations of competition, such as in tail-end *subak*? What policies are directed at irrigated agriculture in areas of minor interest for tourism?

THK is yet another way of representing Balinese society as 'cultural' rather than political, a new expression of Bali's 'culture of apoliticism' (MacRae 2003a). Taking such representations of 'culture' and 'tradition' at face value is a final blow to the analysis of human-environmental relationships and processes. According to Dove et al. (2007), the deconstruction of essentialist ideologies of local knowledge is only a first step and not the end goal of scientific engagement. It is, however, a necessary step to bring back analysis of the social-environmental transformations in Bali.

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Notes

- [1] 'Three causes of well-being' (Ramstedt 2009, 2014; Sutawan 2008b).
- [2] As per September 10, 2014.
- [3] See <http://kgdharmaputra.blogspot.nl/2009/12/tri-hita-karana-award-and-accreditation.html> accessed 15 October 2014.
- [4] Around 92 per cent of the population of Bali are Hindu (see Editorial Introduction).
- [5] Since the 1970s the culture concept itself has been much criticised in social anthropology (see Gupta and Ferguson 2006).
- [6] For instance, a growing scientific interest in water rights and how they are negotiated by social actors (Spiertz 1991, 2000; Sutawan 2000).
- [7] Though not often mentioned in the *subak* literature, such tensions may be quite common. Parker's (2003) research also puts into perspective images of the *subak* as egalitarian and

democratic, pointing to the subordinate and marginalised position of small landowners and tenants.

- [8] Translation by the authors.
- [9] *THK* is not mentioned in a recent journal special on the *subak* (*Human Ecology* 39 (1), February 2011). Nor does Lansing (1991) mention it. Mitchell (1994) mentions it in a very general sense. In the project in which he was involved it was primarily propagated by academics and the Provincial Planning Board BAPPEDA (Bruce Mitchell, personal communication March 15, 2014).
- [10] Interview with Freek Bakker, Utrecht, September 23, 2014.
- [11] This required fulfilling a number of conditions derived from the 'world religions' including one god, a holy book, a prophet and international recognition (see Picard 2004).
- [12] Balinese Hinduism was recognised as a 'religion' in 1963 (Picard 2011b).
- [13] This section on policy is based on the extensive experiences of the second author with interventions in the *subak* domain. See also Lorenzen and Lorenzen 2008.
- [14] Rp. 27 billion equals around USD82 (November 2014).
- [15] See <http://www.bisnisbali.com/2012/07/02/news/badung/n.html> accessed 5 July 2012.
- [16] Note it being referred to as 'property' in the UNESCO documents, to be negotiated with a 20th partner' in 'consultation' with local stakeholders.
- [17] See <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2008/whc08-32com-inf8B1e.pdf> accessed 25 July 2012.
- [18] The framing of the 'property' to be conserved seems to follow Lansing's (1991) analysis of the *subak* as governed by a hierarchy of water temples. Lansing played an advisory role in the nomination; see <http://uanews.org/story/ua-anthropologist-authors-world-heritage-site-in-b> accessed 10 August 2013.
- [19] See <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/1483> accessed 10 August 2013.
- [20] Note that UNESCO's stress on uniqueness (unique culture, unique institutions, unique landscapes) reproduces and strengthens the self image of Balinese as members of a unique culture.
- [21] After pressure by UNESCO, regional regulations (PERDA) for the *subak* were drafted on 30 November 2012 (see <http://www.antaranews.com/berita/345353/unesco-desak-bupati-keluarkan-perda-subak> accessed 22 February 2013).
- [22] See note 21.

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