

**CULTURAL ECOLOGY CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:  
CHALLENGES FOR KAJIAN BUDAYA IN PRAXIS<sup>1</sup>**

**Diane Butler**

Associate Professor Kajian Budaya Doctoral Studies Program, Universitas Udayana  
President and Co-Charter Founder, International Foundation for Dharma Nature Time  
dianecarolbutler@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

This essay reflects on the distinct approach of the Balinese school of Kajian Budaya at Universitas Udayana, initiated by the now-late I Gusti Ngurah Bagus, particularly in terms of the topic of cultural ecology change and sustainable development. It draws from my years of work as a dance-movement artist, teacher and cultural program director to insights gained during my doctoral studies to my application of the findings in subsequent participatory practice-based work. By doing so, I hope to stimulate us to consider the questions of what is the relevance of Kajian Budaya to our vocations in various fields? How might we make use of Kajian Budaya as praxis? Also, how can Kajian Budaya foster cultural creativity for the well-being of the earth and humanity?

Keywords: Kajian Budaya, praxis, cultural creativity, participatory practice-based methods, well-being

**INTRODUCTION**

When I received the invitation to give a talk for this International Seminar on Cultural Change and Sustainable Development organized by the Kajian Budaya Doctoral Studies Program of Universitas Udayana (UNUD), I accepted with joy because ever since my first consultation with the ‘father’ of the Balinese school of Kajian Budaya, the now-late Professor I Gusti Ngurah Bagus, on 2 October 2002 until the present I have reflected on insights gained during my doctoral studies here. I was also inspired when the current program coordinator, Anom Kumbara, said he hoped that this seminar would look at the role of praxis in addressing cultural ecology change. I responded that praxis has been the core of my thirty-five years of work as a dance-movement artist, teacher and cultural program director. Praxis was also the core of the participatory practice-based work, which served as the basis for my dissertation and subsequent work. For these reasons, I decided to take up the topic of Cultural Ecology Change and Sustainable Development: Challenges for Kajian Budaya in Praxis.

So, from my perspective as the first non-Indonesian person to enter and graduate from the Kajian Budaya Doctoral Studies Program at UNUD where, three years later, the Rector appointed me as a volunteer associate professor in the program – I hope to stimulate us to consider the questions of:

- What is the relevance of Kajian Budaya to our vocations in various fields?;
- How might we make use of Kajian Budaya as praxis?; and
- How can Kajian Budaya foster cultural creativity for the well-being of the earth and humanity?

---

<sup>1</sup> Aspects of this paper are dealt with in my dissertation “Religiosity in Art Inspired by Samuan Tiga and Tejakula Bali: Unity in Diversity” (2011). Original quotations from Ngurah Bagus in Indonesian were translated to English by this author.

Rather than presenting an in-depth discussion on these matters, my talk is a brief personal account. To begin with, I shall share some thoughts about the distinct approach of the Balinese school of Kajian Budaya at Universitas Udayana. As a next step, I will look at the notion of cultural ecology change and sustainable development. Lastly, I will describe some concrete activities that involve Kajian Budaya as a form of praxis.

#### **THE DISTINCT APPROACH OF THE BALINESE SCHOOL OF KAJIAN BUDAYA**

The Balinese school of Kajian Budaya at Universitas Udayana, initiated by I Gusti Ngurah Bagus in 1996, is known as the first Cultural Studies program in Indonesia and is cited alongside other programs in the world that have developed since the 1960s. During my first semester in 2003, I had the privilege of attending weekly seminars for two months with Professor Bagus before he passed away. One session that still remains strong in my memory is when he emphatically said to my fellow doctoral candidates from Bali and other Indonesian provinces that they must publish articles and books about the cultures of their nation to give presence to local knowledge systems, practices, values, and concepts.

Soon after, I came to understand that Ngurah Bagus had published numerous articles and books and presented conference talks on linguistics, anthropological studies, history, archaeology, literature, and Balinese culture, as well as on social, environmental, and political issues in which he put forth theoretical and practical ideas for the sustainable transformation of Bali from a cultural perspective. Given that since 1976 UNUD has had a *Pola Ilmiah Pokok Kebudayaan* (Cultural Primary Scientific Pattern), in his paper on its application amid changing scientific paradigms, Bagus (2001 see 2004: 53–55) articulated that:

... when connected with findings from traditions in Indonesia and particularly in Bali ... which gave birth to an identity concept that shaped a way of life derived from a local cosmology formulated in *Tri Hita Karana*. In *Tri Hita Karana*, humankind tries to see the essential parts of their lives, which are:

- 1) concordance with other human beings,
- 2) concordance with nature (space), and
- 3) concordance with the supreme power of God the Great Oneness,

which in the Balinese language is termed as *pawongan*, *palemahan*, and *parhyangan*. These three aspects have harmonious connections or relationships. As well, all three aspire to bring prosperity into reality for the local community. This becomes the anchor point.

... *Tri Hita Karana* must be drawn near with a Cultural Primary Scientific Pattern that is truly based on a turning point from humans as objects (as in Newton's metaphor of a mechanistic universe) ... rather they must be [seen] as active subjects who have relationships and concordances with their ecology (*palemahan*), with other people and communities (*pawongan*), and with their God (*parhyangan*) ... So that related studies do not halt at just their physical needs, rather, go further to the issues of meaning that adhere culture wherever that person is a sustainer of it.

Of equal importance, in reflecting on the distinct approach of the Balinese school of *Kajian Budaya* in the context of Indonesia and the world, Bagus (2001 see 2004: 55, 57) felt:

It must be emphasized that a positive aspect, which can be taken from the existence of a Cultural Primary Scientific Pattern in Indonesia, moreso a Cultural Primary Scientific Pattern at Universitas Udayana, is the consequence of the emergence of sciences that are plural ... This means that '*bhinneka*' (diversity) and '*tunggal ika*' (in unity) must always endeavor to be balanced through a dialectic that offers benefit for '*bhinneka*' and '*tunggal ika*'.

So, while the field of Cultural Studies favors a contextual, interdisciplinary, and reflexive approach to regard cultural practices and their meanings in daily life, *Kajian Budaya* is distinctive in that it is also concerned with how the diversity of local knowledges and traditions in unity contribute to the quality of life and society's prosperity.

### **CULTURAL ECOLOGY CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

In seeking to understand why the intersection of cultural ecology change and sustainable development was of interest to the organizing committee of this seminar, I made a quick review of literature that I had drawn from for my dissertation. I noticed that the notion of cultural ecology was tied to a theory developed in the 1950s–60s by anthropologist Julian Steward (1995) and is mentioned in the book *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity: a Complementary Contribution to the Global Biodiversity Assessment* edited by ethnobiologist Darrell Addison Posey (1999) – comprised of articles by some 300 contributors and published by the United Nations Environment Programme.

In brief, what I learned is that cultural ecology examines the interactions of a particular human society with the natural environment and the cultural adaptation to it. However, an important finding emerged in the 1980s when Posey brought to light the 'inextricable link' between biological and cultural diversity – now termed biocultural diversity. Since then, scholars around the world (see Posey et al., 1999) have demonstrated how indigenous and traditional peoples are the inheritors of a corpus of knowledge including social, cultural and spiritual values and associated practices as a basis for environmentally sustainable living and local development.

As we know, some societies have proven to be capable of adopting, adapting and inventing combinations of old and new cultural practices in a manner that is responsive to the changing environmental and social conditions for centuries or even millennia (see Soebadio, 1986: 23 on local genius). But, allow me to bring up a matter that I have mentioned at several conferences, which I believe is very important for us to contemplate now and in the future: the biocultural diversity of Indonesia. Why? Because as one of the top twelve 'megadiversity' countries in terms of biodiversity richness and as the second most linguistically diverse (see Table 2.2 by Harmon, 1996 in Posey, 1999: 26), Indonesia epitomizes biocultural diversity. Also, there are thousands of sacred natural and built heritage structures and sites and a multitude of forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This means that Indonesia is an important study area in terms of the contributions of culture for inclusive

sustainable development and the resilience of the world's ecosystems (see World Culture Forum, 2016).

#### CHALLENGES FOR KAJIAN BUDAYA IN PRAXIS

Scholars in the fields of Kajian Budaya and Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue have stressed the need for participatory practice-based activities developed by and implemented with the people of a locale to foster cultural creativity, self-reflection, and sharing between cultures; and whereby results and documentation are accessible to and can be of long-term benefit for the present and future generations.

For me, the field of Kajian Budaya is also concerned with the different ways humanity experiences and interacts with the inner and outer conditions that shape the world in which we live. Yet, it is not merely an interdisciplinary approach for theoretical work to analyze culture. So, one of our challenges is to create viable models of Kajian Budaya as praxis and especially processes that sustain cultural, ecological, and spiritual diversity for the well-being of the earth and humanity.

#### REFERENCES

- Bagus, I Gusti Ngurah. 2001. "Aplikasi Pola Ilmiah Pokok Kebudayaan di Universitas Udayana dan Prospeknya di Tengah Perubahan Paradigma Ilmu". Paper presented for Postgraduate Studies program, Universitas Udayana, 31 August. In I Gede Mudana (ed.). 2004. *Mengkritis Peradaban Hegemonik*, ch. 13. Denpasar: Kajian Budaya Universitas Udayana.
- Butler, Diane. 2016. "Living Prayer: Its Contributions for the World's Ecosystems and Interreligious Harmony". *Jurnal Kajian Bali*, Vol. 6, No. 1, April, pp. 81–118.  
<http://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/kajianbali/article/view/19900/13214>  
Abbreviated version published on the 2016 World Culture Forum website  
<https://worldcultureforum-bali.org/living-prayer-contributions-for-the-worlds-ecosystems-and-interreligious-harmony/>
- Butler, Diane Carol. 2011. *Religiosity in Art inspired by Samuan Tiga and Tejakula, Bali: Unity in Diversity*. Thesis (Ph.D.), Universitas Udayana, Bali. Abstract and summary in *E-Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Juli. <http://ojs.unud.ac.id/index.php/ecs/article/view/3643/2672>
- Fadlillah. 2003. "Cultural Studies" Mazhab Bali: Sebuah Paradigma Baru Kajian Budaya". *Kompas*, 16 Februari, hal. 18.
- Heron, John and Reason, Peter. 1997. "A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm". *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 274–294.  
<http://people.bath.ac.uk/mnspwr/Papers/Participatoryinquiryparadigm.pdf>
- Kartohadikoesoemo, Soetardjo. 1984. *Desa*. 3rd edn, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka. [Original edn, 1953].
- Mohamad, Goenawan. 2017. "Universitas dan Pasca-Kebenaran". Ceramah untuk Hari Ulang Tahun Universitas Negeri Sebelas Maret, 11 Maret.
- Nasr, Sayyed Hossein. 1984. *Antara Tuhan, Manusia dan Alam*, 2003. Ali Noer Zaman (trans.), Edi AH Iyubenu et al (eds). Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD. Indonesian edn, *The Encounter Man and Nature*. University of California Press.
- Novack, Cynthia [under the name of Bull, Cynthia Jean Cohen]. 1997. Sense, Meaning, and Perception in Three Dance Cultures. Jane Desmond (ed.), *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*. Durham, Duke University Press, pp. 269–288.
- Posey, Darrell Addison (ed.). 1999. *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity: A Complementary Contribution to the Global Biodiversity Assessment*. London/Nairobi: Intermediate Technology Publications/UNEP. [http://www.unep.org/pdf/Cultural\\_Spiritual\\_thebible.pdf](http://www.unep.org/pdf/Cultural_Spiritual_thebible.pdf)
- Soebadio, Haryati. 1986. "Kepribadian budaya bangsa". In Ayatrohaedi (ed.). *Kepribadian Budaya Bangsa (Local Genius)*, pp. 18–25. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya.

- Steward, Julian H. 1995. *Theory of Culture Change: the method of multilineal evolution*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Universitas Udayana. 2016. *Statuta Universitas Udayana Tahun 2016*. Bukit Jimbaran, 26 Agustus.
- World Culture Forum. 2016. "Bali Declaration", adopted by participants of the 2nd World Culture Forum: Culture for an Inclusive Sustainable Planet. Nusa Dua, 13 October. Indonesia: Ministry of Education and Culture and UNESCO. [http://www.unesco.or.id/download/WCF\\_2016\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.unesco.or.id/download/WCF_2016_Declaration.pdf)
- Wright, Handel Kashope. 2003. "Cultural Studies as Praxis: (making) an autobiographical case". *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 6, pp. 805–822.