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## THE PERSISTENCE OF AN ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY: IN-DEPTH CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNITY MOVEMENT IN GERIANA KAUH, KARANGASEM

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### Abstract

This research investigates the tenacity of the villagers of Geriana Kauh in the Regency of Karangasem, Bali in preserving their culture and nature. Balinese are facing immediate threats due to massive modernization and industrialization. The excessive and intrusive development generated by mega tourism is causing environmental and societal degradations. People from the small village of Geriana Kauh have been striving to protect their ancestral land with the power of cultural consciousness. For the past 10 years, they have been working to rehabilitate their social and ecological crises caused by modernizations. This research utilizes eco-philosophy theories. The first is post-structuralist three ecologies theory by Felix Guattari. Using this critical theory, authors can extract the importance of equilibrium within the psyche, the social, and the ecological. The second is social ecology theory proposed by Murray Bookchin to understand the formation of a conscious ecological society. The novelty of this research is the amalgamation of local wisdom and religious value as progressive tools to create social-ecological transformation. The Balinese foundation of living lies within the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* or three sources of happiness: harmony among one another (*pawongan*), within the environment (*palemahan*), and to God (*parahyangan*). The villagers of Geriana Kauh live by this philosophy. They are predominantly farmers who have inherited land which has been passed down from generation to generation. This farming tradition is also intertwined alongside the ancient tradition of irrigation or *Subak*. Cultivating lands has become their cultural and spiritual identities.

**Keywords:** ecological society; Subak; sustainability; subjectivity; *Tri Hita Karana*.

### 1. Introduction

Humanity is currently facing a detrimental era, a global ecological crisis that threatens the future of the whole planet (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). This devastating moment forces us to reconfigure our ways of living. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report conducted by various scientists from all

around the world reveals a fact that the planet is becoming increasingly warmer than before. Should it continue the warming pace into 1.5 °C, it will become fatal; the planet will suffer an irreversible damage, and life as authors know it, will be gone. The task to control the increasing climate is almost an impossible pursuit, but for the sake of the planet, it is our collective and imperative duty to rectify the situation.

Attempts of mitigation have been ushered by international bodies, such as United Nations Climate Change Conference. The conversation between nations focuses on the significant steps of climate action to save the environment. The meeting in Katowice in 2018 centralized on how countries can scale up their commitments to reduce carbon emissions. Cutting back emission has become extremely urgent, considering the Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C. The report highlights that authors have more or less than 20 years to act before an even greater biodiversity loss. The report also underlines the heartbreaking prediction that almost one million species of flora and fauna will be extinct.

The IPBES report recommends various measures to tackle environmental crises, including the consideration of building strong communities in safeguarding the environment. Indigenous communities have a deep connectivity with their ancestral lands. The IPBES report points out how local communities extensively understand the knowledge about their biodiversity and ecosystems. This capacity enables them to play a central role in maintaining or rehabilitating the environment. Indigenous communities living in coastal, forest, and mountainous areas are critical agents in recognizing and guiding policies to create good governances in consideration of sustainability (Salamanca & Nguyen, 2016).

This research views the power of local community, such as that in Geriana Kauh village, Karangasem, as an example on how villagers solve environmental and sociological problems. Using critical theory by Felix Guattari, authors can pierce into the complex layers of ecological challenges (Cavalcante, 2018). Guattari emphasizes a critical perspective in understanding that ecological destruction implicates psychological and sociological disorder. Guattari explains this implication through his proposed steps of three ecologies, showing that the subject is never truly isolated from society and nature. Meanwhile, Murray Bookchin urges society to develop conscious and independent individuals. In creating an ecological society, these individuals can form a society by deriving their principles of living in harmony within nature (Cavalcante, 2018).

## 2. Methods

Through years of field research from 2015 until 2019 in Geriana Kauh, Karangasem, authors were able to gather data involving the strenuous effort made by the villagers to sustain their traditional way of living. Authors collected various data concerning agricultural, gender empowerment, and youth participation issues. By conducting empirical research, authors can classify data concerning linguistic, sociological, and ecological findings. After developing theories based on observing their daily practices, authors can observe interrelation between tradition, religion, and environment within the society.



Figure 1. Theoretical framework for this research

Source: Author (2019)

The location of the research on the foothill of Mount Agung adds an interesting character to the already unique society. Research can see the palpable connection between human and nature. Data are rich and fascinating as they range from architectural objects to rituals performed by the villagers. Particularly in relation to the livelihood of the villagers, their social identity is inseparable to the symbols of nature, namely, water, soil, seed, mountain, etc. The hardest task of the research is the construction of a systematical knowledge originating from raw, sporadic, and oral data. This construction is made possible through an analytical method,

most importantly, to understand the correlations between ecological endurance, social congruence, and religious belief.

### 3. Results and Discussions

Geriana Kauh village in the regency of Karangasem is a small rural settlement in the Eastern part of Bali. The village consists of 177 households who predominantly come from a long line of farmers. They live by the Hindu philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, an ancient value concerning three causations of happiness. First is the fulfillment that comes from a balanced social relation or Pawongan. Second is a sense of joy that stems from the equilibrium of nature or Palemahan. Last is the paths of the ethical and the ecological will continue to the vertical enlightenment of god or Parahyangan.

This beautiful philosophy of living is consistently being threatened by the thrust of modernization and industrialization (Gunawan, 2014; Reuter, 2005; Wardana, 2019). Bali is changing drastically, and these rapid changes are causing disruptions within people's cosmological balance. Bali is an iconic image of a global village, an entire cosmopolitan haven, and an exotic international tourist destination (Vickers, 1996). All of these attributes have pushed Bali to conform to megaprojects of tourism infrastructures (Picard, 2006). Land conflicts are rampant; for example, clearing rice fields and conservational areas in exchange of hotels, malls, and resorts. These extreme changes are pushing Bali into the verge of ecological calamity, such as water scarcity (Sunarta & As-syakur, 2015). The shifting landscape in Bali due to progress has inevitably reach the Geriana Kauh village. In the 1960s, because of a government policy to create a high yielding rice production, Geriana Kauh farmers adjusted to the new program.

Green revolution, as mentioned by Lansing (2007), was a national program during the 1960s to increase food security by pushing rice production (Bardini, 1994). The main problem of this policy was the immense effect it caused to the traditional ways of farming. Farmers were introduced to chemical fertilizers and genetically modified seeds to accelerate harvests. The policy worked for a while, but then the soil became over cultivated and the chemicals disturbed the rice field ecosystem, eliminating vital species, such as eels, lizards, birds, snakes, etc.

Agriculture in Bali goes beyond any value of economic activity (Christie, 2007; Davis, 2015). Miguel Covarrubias describes how the rice culture in Bali is intertwined within people's spiritual well-being. Farming is an ancient worship to *Sang Hyang Pertiwi* (Covarrubias, 1973). Rice is not merely the source of life for Balinese; they also believe that rice comes from the

womb of mother earth. Agriculture, apart from its mundane everyday profession, for Balinese, it influences fundamentally on how they understand time and space. All sorts of ritualistic spectacles are closely tied to the rice culture, from the beginning of planting an ancestral seed, to the ritual of casting away bad energy that can cause failed crops, until the celebration of a successful harvest (Lansing, 2012). Praying for guidance to the goddess is believed to be a part of a sacred path in unison, collaborating with nature (Covarrubias, 1973).

According to Lansing (2007) the Balinese agricultural and societal perspective can be recognized through a democratic and sustainable water irrigation system called *Subak*. (Windia, 2013) Instead of changing nature to satisfy human needs, the idea of *Subak* underlines the awareness to follow the shape of nature (Lansing, 2007 & Lansing & Thérèse, 2012). Another sacred symbol for the Balinese is water. Lansing (2007) explains that they also consider water as a medium of purification. In every corner of the rice fields where the *Subak* system flows, farmers build water temples to pray to the goddess of water, *Sang Hyang Danu*. Her dwelling is praised to be one of the principles of water temple called *Ulun Danu* Temple. The root of animism in Bali is discussed by investigating water worshiping as one of the earliest spirituality of water or *agama Tirta* in Bali (Lansing, 2007).

Geriana Kauh has been terribly suffering due to unsustainable farming since the Green Revolution. Not only the environment was broken but also the delicate system of beliefs, rituals of time, and worshiping of soil and water were dissolved and abandoned due to discontinued narrative. The turning point took place in 1999–2000 where villagers made a firm decision to save their village. They switched back to traditional farming inspired by their ancestors. They rehabilitated lands, curing soil infertility by cutting back their usage of chemical pesticides. They also started searching and re-planting the rare ancestral seed named *Padi Masa*. This type of seed was almost extinct competing against modified seed. *Padi Masa* needed time to flourish, but when the crops were cared organically, the harvests were proven to be high quality rice.



Figure 2. Water temple in Geriana Kauh indicating the strong correlation between farming and religious belief.

Source: [Mahendra \(2017\)](#)

The villagers were worried because for almost 30 years, their sacred ritual had been forgotten; they thought the goddesses have forsaken them ([Putri, Mawangi, & Utami, 2014](#)). Alongside their attempt to save their rice ecosystem, the villagers chose to rebuild their lost tradition of *Sang Hyang Dedari* ([Mawangi, 2016](#)). *Sang Hyang Dedari* is a holy dance in celebration of the presence of goddesses (*Dedari*) walking among mortals to bless harvests by giving out flowers and sprinkling holy water (*tirta*) ([Dibia & Ballinger, 2004](#)). Similar to the return of sustainable farming, this holy dance was also resurrected from negligence. These acts of reconstruction can be understood through a sharp, critical analysis about the brilliance of indigenous movement.

In three ecologies theory, Felix Guattari explains, “If today, human relationships with the socius, the psyche, and nature are increasingly deteriorating, then this is attributable not only to the objective damage and pollution but to the ignorance and fatalistic passivity with which those issues are confronted by individuals and responsible authorities” ([Guattari, 1989, 134](#)). Guattari investigates that segregations exist between the psyche, the social, and nature, as if they are exclusive entities. He blames fatalistic passivity for destroying the ties between the threefold. Passivity to an unchecked proposal of modernization and industrialization (in farming and tourism) only to pursue the bottom line has become the main source of social and ecological problems in Bali.



Figure 3. A villager carrying on her head offerings to the gods, on the backdrop lies Mount Agung as one of their sacred cosmological symbols.

Source: [Mahendra \(2017\)](#)

Guattari warns about a new manifestation of capitalism, the one he calls integrated world capitalism (IWC). He elaborates IWC as a post-industrial capitalism that moves the center of power away from the production of goods and services, aiming the structures of the production of signs and syntax ([Guattari, 1989](#)). Authors can criticize our current climate crises through Guattari's idea of losing language and signs of relationship between the three ecologies. Our denial of climate disasters, for instance, is a symptom of an acute problem of disconnection with nature.

Through the critical approach by Guattari, the act of resurrecting mythical narrative while revitalizing good farming in Geriana Kauh can be viewed as a form of resistance ([Hauser-Schäublin, 2004](#)). The villagers in Geriana Kauh perform sacred rituals that are inseparable to agriculture, such as *Ngusaba Emping*, *Ngusaba Goreng*, and *Ngusaba Dodol*. The word *ngusaba* is derived from *usaba* or *utsawa* from the Sanskrit word *utsava* which means festival celebration. *Ngusaba Emping* is a ritual celebrated by the villagers to honor the old tradition of sharing *Padi Masa* seed, which is considered a symbol that binds villagers together as a collective, social entity. In this auspicious occasion, the chief of village (*Jero Bendesa*) equally distributes the seeds to farmers.

*Ngusaba Dodol*, which comes around March or in the Balinese calendar called *Sasih Kadasa* (10th month), is celebrated nearing the Balinese *Saka* New Year. During this celebration, villagers create tall offerings called *Sokan*, filled with fruits, flowers, and their sweet palm sugar cake made from rice flour processed from *Padi Masa*. Similar to *Ngusaba Dodol*, the festival of *Ngusaba Goreng* is a festive event where villagers perform the sacred



*Rejang* Dance as a devotion to Goddess Sri, praising the benevolent goddess for the abundance of harvests.



Figure 4. *Ngusaba Dodol* Ritual can be recognized through the magnificent colorful offerings called *Sokan*.

Source: Author (2017)

Rice growing is a complex activity that involves not only the perceived world but also paddy cultivation, which is a part of the spiritual journey for the Balinese. Thus, their calendars closely coordinate with the phases of the rice cycle (Darta, Couteau, & Breguet, 2013). Time, or in the Balinese word, *Kala*, is a concept not solely meaningful and is constructed by human beings. Based on the rice culture in Bali, human beings simultaneously depend on nature in nurturing their body and consciousness. Furthermore, the cosmological conception in Bali is deeply connected to the process of life happening in nature (Baal, 1969; Vickers, 2012).

According to Guattari, the danger in losing our ecological conscience is beyond environmental degradation. At the same time, with an ecological disruption, human beings also sever their bond with society in its wholesome context. Guattari further elaborates this factor in his book, *Chaosmosis*, by describing the importance of nature as a part of our crucial subjectivity. Subjectivity enables an individual to create, re-create, and deconstruct their life as an act of autonomous being. As previously mentioned, modernization and the rise of capitalism prey on human subjectivity. IWC penetrates the most private corners of human minds. Capitalism molds human consciousness into this passive, one-dimensional being in constant need of consumption.

Guattari proposes the urgency of the ecology of the virtual as an articulation of artistic reconciliation with nature; “An ecology of the virtual is thus just as pressing as the ecologies

of the visible world; in this regard, poetry, music, plastic arts, the cinema—particularly its performance or performative modalities—have important roles to play.....” (Guattari, 1992, 91). From a critical theorist approach, the rice culture rituals conducted by the villagers of Geriana Kauh can be interpreted as methods to maintain the ethico-aesthetic paradigm for subjects to remain close to nature. “Beyond the relations of actualized forces, virtual ecology will not simply attempt to preserve the endangered species of cultural life but equally to engender conditions for the creation and development of the unprecedented formations of subjectivity that have never been seen and felt (Guattari, 1992, 91)”.



Figure 5. On the left, the picture displays various crops; corn, sweet potatoe, rice, pumpkin etc. On the right side, it shows young Rejang dancers adorned with flower crown.

Source: Author (2017)

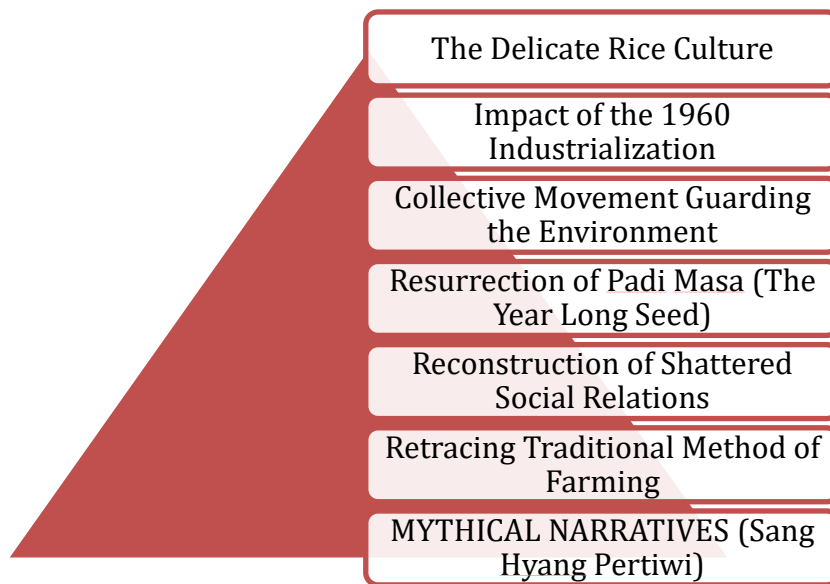


Figure 6. The Structure of social ecological problems in Geriana Kauh, Karangasem and possible arrangements of cultural strength

Source: Author (2019)

For Murray Bookchin, the ability of humans to reconstruct is a process of poetry, imagination, integrated with science and technology (Bookchin, 1982). In the case of Geriana Kauh, the villagers have reformulated and practiced their ethical and esthetical living in congruence with nature. Bookchin reiterates that the goal of social ecology is wholeness, a consciousness of unity with nature. Social ecology for (Bookchin, 1982) is a feeling of aligning with nature, full of care, cooperation, security, freedom, and love. No opposition exists between culture and nature. On the contrary, wholeness is achieved through an elevated realization that the individual, social, and ecological factors are band together (Bookchin, 1982).

(Bookchin, 1982) argues that the meaning of freedom in an ecological society goes further than freedom in the sense of how modernity shaped our civilization. Freedom is understood as freedom from nature and freedom to conquer nature. In Geriana Kauh, the villagers feel that their rural living in accordance with nature is the definition of freedom. Village elder, I Wayan Bratha (56 years old) explains that the ritual encloses them with the love and magic of the earth goddess (Dewi, 2017). Ni Kadek Anggi Riskayanti (13 years old) reiterates that the feeling of happiness and freedom comes from the simple enjoyment of walking beneath the lush bamboos and breathing fresh and cool mountain air.

According to Bookchin, the main critique toward an ecological society is that the society is taken as a farfetched plan to combat environmental degradation. That is, many critiques dismiss ecological society as utopic. (Bookchin, 1982) answers with a voice of optimism, saying that changes in our culture, economy, and politics must be understood as radical attempts to remove the source of the problem, not merely the symptoms (Bookchin, 1982). In the case of Geriana Kauh, cultural, social, and ecological preservations are cross-cutting acts, and they are inherently interconnected. Saving the environment must be performed in the spirit of the advancement of ecological justice, eliminating domination among humans and between human and nature.

Bookchin (1982) reminds that ecological society should not be translated into “retribalization,” relying upon narrow homogenous society. In the context of indigenous community, authors are seeing the rise of communes who are fighting for their social-ecological survival. The example of Geriana Kauh villagers is one narrative among various indigenous communities worldwide attempting to save their environment (Cojucaru, 2012). These actions can be inferred as critical reconstruction methods to mend the broken relationship with nature (Dewi, 2015).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The message of this research can be classified into two main points. The first point is that in facing climate crises, people must turn our attention to how indigenous movements all over the world are capable and steadfast in maintaining an equilibrium of living. Their elegant solution is a strong criticism to the banality of modern lifestyle disregarding nature. By exploring through theories by Lansing, Covarrubias, Guattari, and Bookchin, people unravel such complex ethical-spiritual-ecological knowledge bundled into one.

The second point is that Geriana Kauh, as a willful community, is a shining light of hope in a dim future of ecological detachment. This separation of ethical, ontological, and epistemological with nature not only will hurt our species but also will damage the entire archaic order. The spirit of the villagers is a reminder that people can change this desperate situation into an opportunity for a sustainable future.

Revisiting the goals of IPBES, people must understand various strategies to tackle climate crises, including applying methods that are organic for indigenous communities. By learning the close bond between human and nature through their perspective, people can envision ways to reshape our modern society, aspiring toward sustainability.

### Author Contribution

Author LG. Saraswati Putri, conceived the idea to do an extensive research in Geriana Kauh Karangasem, and documented an array of rituals in the village (*Ngusaba Dodol, Ngusaba Goreng, Sang Hyang Dedari, Sang Hyang Jaran*) while also assisting the villagers in creating a community museum. This cultural analysis made possible because of previous theories by Stephen J. Lansing and W. Windia focusing on the *Subak* system in Bali. Due to the author's background in philosophy study, it is a challenge to elaborate a critical analysis by Murray Bookchin and Felix Guattari, viewing cultural phenomena namely, traditions and ancient customs in Bali.

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