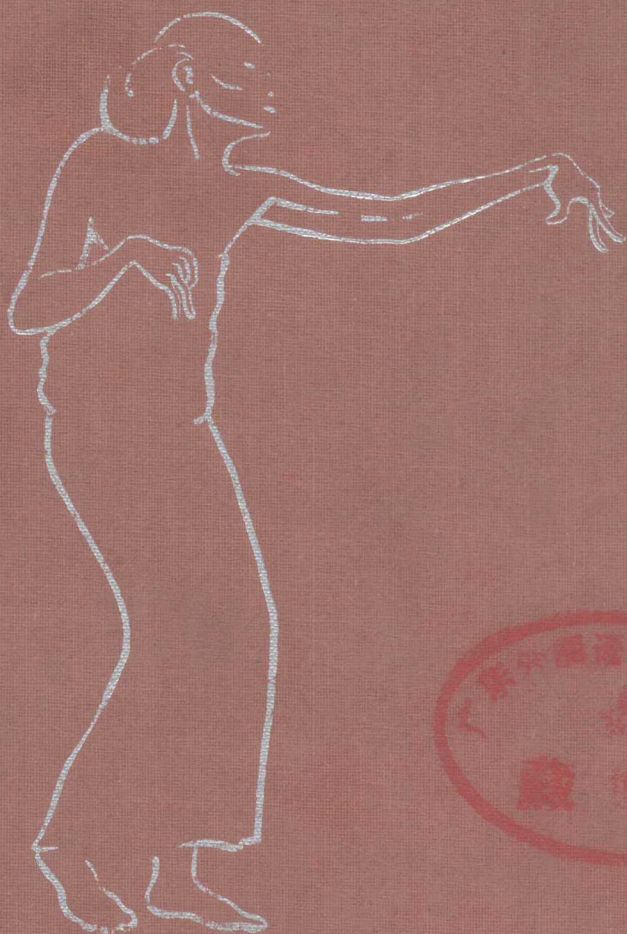


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TRANCE in BALI

Preface

It was because of Jane Belo's preliminary work on Balinese art, trance, and ritual that we thought of going to Bali. From her first four years in Bali, she brought back such complete and fascinating segments of Balinese culture that it seemed the ideal culture within which to plan a project on the cultural aspects of schizophrenia.

During our two years in Bali, 1936 to 1938, and the short return trip in 1939, our knowledge and appreciation of the culture was continuously informed by Jane Belo's already existing appreciation and knowledge. She participated actively and eagerly in our experiments with new methods of recording, even though the rigor of time observations, matter-of-fact cataloguing, and firmly schooled translations seemed at first to be a way of dissecting and denaturing the beauty of the whole. But she was as convinced a scientist as she had been an artist, and set herself to master the techniques of ethnological field work, to become one of the most gifted observers and interviewers whom it has been my good fortune to know.

Initially, we worked along parallel lines, she in the village of Sajan, Gregory Bateson and I in the village of Bajoeng Gedé, and our two secretaries, Madé Kaler and Goesti Madé Soemeng worked in parallel as we developed the complex methods of recording necessary to cope with such a complicated culture. It soon became apparent that an appropriate division of labor would be for Jane Belo to take over the study of trance, as a widespread multifaceted phenomenon. Katharane Mershon, who had lived and observed and participated in the life

of the village of Sanoer, District of Intaran, out of her previous experience as a dancer, was also drawn into the project. Ketoet Moerda, the youngest of the three Balinese secretaries, learned to touch type and record in Balinese, parallel to the observations which Katharane Mershon was making. Occasionally we all met, to record some particularly complicated trance drama, and messengers went back and forth across Bali, carrying our notes to one another. So the observations of each became part of the observational stance of each of the others.

To this book which depends principally on her own field work, Jane Belo has added analyses of trances in our villages, analyses of the *sanghyang* dances of Bajoeng Gedé where we were able to record some twenty-five occasions with the same little dancers, trances in Sanoer against Katharane Mershon's background of knowledge, trances in faraway Selat where Walter Spies had a house. The book has been long in the making, although the major part was finished in 1938 and rechecked on Jane Belo's return visit to Bali in 1939. While it was being completed, she has published two short monographs, "Bali: Rangda and Barong" and "Bali: Temple Festival." As it stands, *Trance in Bali* is a unique study of an institution that is rapidly changing in the face of the new world demands of Balinese who are now Indonesians.

There is no comparable study of a complex set of trances in existence. Jane Belo has been able to set her detailed, painstaking studies—supported by observations, stills and films—within the context of Balinese culture as studied

by a group of research workers. The individual trancer, the structure of the particular village, the situation within which the particular trance occurred, are all accounted for. Observations on the spot have been supplemented by repeated study of the film records, and in some cases by bringing members of the village to view the film and comment on the trance behavior. In the years during which the book has been brought to completion, Jane Belo has also had an opportunity to observe and record trances in the

American Southeast and in Haiti, and to show her films to specialists in hypnosis and other types of human behavior.

It gives me more delight than I can hope to express to be able to introduce this book of intricately woven, faithfully observed, and beautifully presented material.

MARGARET MEAD

The American Museum of Natural History
April, 1959

Acknowledgments

This study is based on the author's period of residence in Bali, Indonesia, from 1931 to 1935 and from 1937 to 1939, and on intensive field work undertaken under the tutelage of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in the years 1937 to 1939. I had the assistance of Katharine Mershon who resided in Bali from 1931 to 1940 and took part in the field work set up by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson as a team. Katharine Mershon has written part of the text, and I am duly grateful to be able to include her contributions to this book. With us as part of the team worked three Balinese secretaries, Madé Kalèr (MK), Goesti Madé Soemeng (GM) and Ketoet Pemangkoe Moerda (KP). Throughout the book quotations from the notes of the various participants in the research are annotated with their initials, MM for Margaret Mead, GB for Gregory Bateson, KM for Katharine Mershon.

It would be difficult for me adequately to state my indebtedness to Margaret Mead and to Gregory Bateson for the training which I received from them in the field, and for the encouragement and inspiration which they gave me not only during my association with their field trip but in the subsequent years. Bringing new methods and new insights, they revived for me the problems which a long acquaintance with the culture had failed satisfactorily to treat. The stringent method of note-taking against a time scale and the use of Balinese secretaries who would simultaneously take down verbatim records of the talk and records of the names and relationships of the participants gave us better data with which to work. From Gregory Bateson

I learned also the method of recording behavior in a sequence on Leica and cine film. For the system which the research followed all credit goes to Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. Their help was invaluable to me.

To Katharine Mershon I am indebted for her friendship and cooperation over many years. She gave willingly of herself and established many contacts for us through her close relation with the people living in her area.

I want to thank Colin McPhee whose work on the music of Bali constituted a stimulating parallel to our work on the trance and whose interest in the research was encouraging and helpful.

I want to thank the three Balinese secretaries, Madé Kalèr, Goesti Madé Soemeng, and the late Ketoet Pemangkoe Moerda for their tireless devotion to the tasks we set them, and for the spontaneous interest they showed. I am indebted also to the priest, Pemangkoe Désa of Sajan, who served as chief informant on points of ritual. For the cooperation of all our Balinese friends I am also very grateful.

To the late Walter Spies I am indebted for his great enthusiasm in spotting trance performances over the whole island and especially for his vivid reporting of the trances of Selat which we were not able to witness.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. P. M. van Wulften Palthe who made a special trip to Bali to give his psychiatric opinion on our subjects and who tested them before, during, and after trance. He wrote up his observations and published them in a valuable paper. The opinion

of a psychiatrist interested in the area and with special knowledge of Indonesia was of great benefit to us.

To many others who have also contributed their special knowledge, I acknowledge my debt: to the late Professor Ruth Benedict who went over the original material and gave of her insight on the nature of culture; to Dr. Milton H. Erickson, specialist in hypnosis, for going over the manuscript and for viewing the films, giving me the benefit of his incisive knowledge of trance in another culture as a cross reference to our data; to Dr. A. H. Maslow for reading the manuscript and for discussions of the meaning of trance; to Dr. Rhoda Métraux and to Professor Horace L. Friess for reading and suggestions; to Dr. Carney Landis and to Dr. Marjorie Bolles for training in the giving of sorting tests such as were being used at the New York Psy-

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For the photographic materials I am indebted chiefly to Gregory Bateson; also to Jack Mershon, to Less Lindner, to Baron and Baroness von Plessen, and to the late Eileen, Duchess of Sutherland.

I wish to thank the Department of Anthropology of the American Museum of Natural History for the hospitality within which the book was organized.

I wish to thank also Mrs. Kathryn Sewny, Mrs. Florette Henri, and Miss Nelle Chapple for assistance in preparing the book for publication.

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J. B.

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Introduction

The Balinese are a people whose everyday behavior is measured, controlled, graceful, tranquil. Emotion is not easily expressed. Dignity and an adherence to the rules of decorum are customary. At the same time they show a susceptibility and a facility for going into states of trance, states in which there is an altered consciousness, and behavior springing from a deeper level of the personality is manifested.

The material upon which this study is based was collected in the 1930s, at a time when we had the benefit of many years' knowledge of the island of Bali and a familiarity with the leading personalities of the areas studied and the ties between them and between the temples they served forming networks of interrelationships at the particular period. A number of years have passed. The Second World War, the invasion of Bali by the Japanese, the Japanese occupation, the period of unrest following their withdrawal, and the reestablishment of order under the Republic of Indonesia constitute a series of events which have intervened before the study was brought to publication. Our information is that, in spite of the changes that have taken place in recent years, the ceremonial life remains strikingly unchanged and the intensity with which the arts are practiced continues unabated.

All the varieties of trance behavior are culturally stylized: they bear the imprint of cultural patterning. Many subjects will on ceremonial occasions habitually go into trance, suffer convulsive seizures, remain for a time in a disassociated state with altered motility, partial anesthesia, amnesia. When the manifestations

are abandoned and violent, they are related to the exhibitions of riotous behavior which break out at cremations and in great crowds, when the habitual decorum is cast aside.¹ Other individuals who go into trance may seek a more quiescent change, sitting immobile during a ritual sequence until the spirit of the god "comes into" them, when they behave as an altered personality, demanding and imperious.

Ruth Benedict, who made the classical distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian configurations of culture,² went over our material with great care and came to the conclusion that the distinction could not be applied to Balinese culture. Their customary poise and moderation resembles the Apollonian, while the outbreak into trance, approved and recognized in the culture, is nearer to the Dionysian.

According to their religious beliefs, the gods *déwa* who lived "on high" (*ring loewoer*) would come down when they were invoked at festival time to inhabit their shrines in the temples. There they might enter into small godly representations (*tapakan*) which were provided for them or into some precious object, as a stone (*artja*), or they might simply be considered to be present in the shrine, where offerings were made to them. When the gods came down, they were accompanied by demons (*kala, boeta*) who were their followers, and to whom offerings were also made outside the gates of the temple. Often

¹ Jane Belo, "The Balinese Temper," *Character and Personality*, IV (1935), pp. 120-46.

² Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston, 1934), pp. 78-79.

there were sacred masks associated with the temple, and these too might be considered to be animated by the godly presence and to serve as representatives of the gods. If human beings went into states of trance, they were believed to be entered by a god, by a heavenly nymph (*widiadari*), or by a demon. Thus the pattern was the same whether material objects or persons became the receptacles for the deity's presence.

Certain individuals who went in trance would have a *taksoe* or "control spirit" which spoke through them and was able to put the petitioner in touch with the souls of his dead ancestors. Often in the temples there was a shrine to *Taksoe*, the spokesman of the gods. The line between gods and ancestors was not clearly drawn—in many villages the temple of origin

(Poera Poeseh) had as its chief shrine one sacred to the memory of the founder of the village and his wife. In my experience the Hindu trinity, Siva, Brahma, and Vishnu, celebrated in the prayers, were never thought to enter the entranced, nor did Surya the Sun whose throne stood in the northeast corner of so many temples. Especially important in connection with the trance manifestations were the gods of the sacred mask of Rangda, the Witch, derived from the Hindu goddess Durga, and the sacred mask of the Barong, the Dragon, her antagonist, a character perhaps introduced with early Buddhist influences.³

³ See Jane Belo, "Bali: Rangda and Barong," *Mono-graphs of the American Ethnological Society*, XVI (1949); pp. 18–39.

TYPES OF TRANCE IN BALI

1. *Trance Doctors.* The institutionalized role of native doctors and diviners who practiced by going into trance was very widespread. They were called *balian ketakson*, from *taksoe*, control spirit, spokesman, to distinguish them from the lettered doctors called *balian wisada* or *oesada*, who practiced by consulting the palm-leaf books. The history of the *balian ketakson* in Balinese culture most closely resembles that of a shaman as described for other cultures. A man, or woman, would often begin by having symptoms of hysteria, transitory periods of unconsciousness, states of falling limp, followed by uncontrolled movements or convulsions, rigidity, crying, sometimes talking obscure language. (Other syndromes, it seems, might also serve as the prelude.) A *balian ketakson* would be consulted. In the trance utterance the god might state that the patient was entered by a spirit and should likewise begin the practice of trance doctoring. Thus the practice was transmitted from trance doctor to trance doctor. Many patients with these symptoms would be treated but would not receive this diagnosis.

* In these states the entranced was believed to

be able to establish contact with and to speak as the souls of the petitioner's dead forbears. There was often a very regressive quality to the utterances, the soul speaking as a baby, calling upon petitioners as parents.

When the patient was able to undertake the role of *balian* his idiosyncratic conflicts would be changed over to conflicts shared by the other members of the culture, and his symptoms to ritualized symptoms, which the other members of the culture would find reassuring.⁴

2. *Mediumistic Ceremonial Practitioners.* These trancers also would begin their roles either following trance states of an ecstatic nature or an illness. A group of institutionalized mediums connected with the temples would be consulted, and if the gods' utterance through them was favorable, the subject would be inducted into the group and become a regular trance practitioner. He or she would be considered to be the representative of a specific god,

⁴ For a discussion of such a process see George Devereux, "Normal and Abnormal; the Key Problem of Psychiatric Anthropology," in *Some Uses of Anthropology* (Washington, The Anthropological Society of Washington, 1956), pp. 23–48.

who would "come down" into him on ceremonial occasions, just as the gods came down into the little figures or the holy objects which were kept in their shrines, when ceremonially invoked. These godly representatives would not be expected to go in trance on other than the ceremonial occasions, and as a rule after induction they did not. Thus the tendency to disassociation was rewarded with social approval and brought under social control. The subject developed a secondary personality which was honored in the cultural religious scheme. A rise in status was effected. There was ego satisfaction accompanying this rise in status, and there was an opportunity to express unconscious wishes, as when a woman would assume a male role or a humble peasant would act out the demeanor and the imperious commanding role of a prince.

3. *Impersonators of the Rangda and the Barong.* Those who animated the sacred mask of Rangda, the Witch, and of Barong, the Dragon, although chosen first as dancers, might go into trance in their parts. These masks, kept in the temple and given offerings also as representatives of the gods, were considered to be spiritually powerful (*sakti*). When the players went in trance, they sometimes would go wild, rush out of the accustomed performance place into the crowd, trampling on offerings and on the orchestra, then fall unconscious and have to be revived. They were not always thought to be "entered" by the god of the masked figure they were impersonating, but in some instances were believed to be entered by another spirit. Identification on a behavioral level with the masked supernaturals were observable, the player in his trance continuing to behave in the culturally stylized manner of the figures even after the mask had been removed.

4. *Fighting and Self-Stabbing Trancers.* Followers of the Dragon, who at a certain point in the ritual performance were carried away in an abandoned trance, would attack with drawn krisses the figure of the Witch. Overcome by her magic power, they would fall to the ground, trembling and twitching. The Dragon would come to revive them, they would rise to their

feet and with savage yells begin to attack their own breasts with the sharp dagger. The pattern resembled that of the *amok* psychosis described for the area, in that unconscious aggression was first turned outward, then towards the self. After a period of violent activity, leaping and thrusting the krisses at their bare breasts, they would struggle fiercely when an attempt was made to disarm them. They might suffer a convulsive seizure, with *arc-en-ciel* and thrashing limbs; they might go absolutely limp and have to be carried like rag dolls into the temple for the reviving rituals. Induction in this role was not preceded by a history of illness.

Bateson and Mead have likened the plot of the trance performance to the sequence of stimulation and frustration such as a child may experience in response to the attitude of the mother and which may lead to temper tantrum.⁵ The role of the Witch is compared to that of the mother, that of the Barong with the father's. Subjects in this type of trance activity reported an overwhelming feeling of anger, of a sort which it was not customary for Balinese not in the trance state to experience or to express. The whole performance constituted an exorcism of the powers of evil, of witchcraft, and of the threat of demons. It was reassuring and relieved the anxiety not only of the performers but of the onlookers as well.

5. *Occasional Trancers.* Certain individuals would take part in the temple ceremonials with acute involvement. They would be carried away during the rituals into the disassociated state of trance. Often these were temple priests from neighboring, interrelated temples who would participate, thus bringing the god they represented to the assemblage of the godly presences. Such individuals who could demonstrate their ability to go into trance also could demonstrate the ability to stay out of trance when, in their own temples, the responsibility for carrying out the ritual rested upon them. Other individuals,

⁵Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character; a Photographic Analysis* (New York, New York Academy of Sciences, 1942; Special Publications II).

without a priestly function, also were known to dance themselves into a state of trance during the ceremonial dancing which took place as a part of the ritual, suddenly careening off in an abandoned manner, often taking a kris to perform the self-stabbing *ngoerek* pattern. These people had no well-defined institutionalized role. They might be male or female. Often they were older women who in this manner achieved both ego satisfaction and the release of emotion from a deeper level. They often would go round from temple festival to temple festival in the neighboring area in order to increase the frequency of the opportunities for trance expression. These people did not put into words any phrasings of religious devotion or spiritual experience in connection with this devoted attendance and intense involvement. It was sometimes possible to observe in these crises of involvement an analogy to sexual excitement. One could suspect that at a deeper level libidinal as well as ego drives were operating.

6. *Child Trance Dancers.* Little girls who became trance dancers also were inducted without a history of illness, but were chosen to perform when the village decided to form a club around a pair of them, traditionally in order to ward off epidemics. They were chosen apparently for their ability to go into the disassociated state and to perform in this state dances which it was said they could not possibly have executed if they were not entered by a god, since they had received no previous training in the dance. They would dance, somnambulistically, with closed eyes, sometimes balanced upon the shoulders of men, bending far backwards and forwards without falling. Some would dance through hot coals without being burned. As gods, they would behave like petted and petulant children.⁶ At the beginning and at the end of their performance they would appear to be in a deeper state of trance, with more uncontrolled movements—rhythmic automatic movements appeared which were culturally patterned—and transitory states of complete limpness.

These children played an important role in

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

the community for the time that they were active as trance dancers. They had to stop when they reached puberty. They showed no signs of the neurotic or psychotic, either before or after their induction as trance dancers. They were able to dance in trance every night for a month if the village required it. It is easy to see how the child dancers embodied for the attendant audience the idea of the pure and godlike. The individual motivation of the children for first going into trance remains unclear. When their role was established, they would be dressed for the occasion in gilded cloth and elaborate head-dresses. They would become the center of admiring attention. There was obvious ego satisfaction connected with the role, and there may have been further satisfactions in the license to accept or reject the proffered stimuli of the songs the onlookers sang to them, the offers by grown men who stooped down so that the children could dance on their shoulders, and so on.

Films of the little girls in trance were shown to Dr. Milton H. Erickson, who has made a life-long study of hypnotic trance, and to a normal subject of his whom he put in trance to view them. The behavioral phenomena of the trance state, in spite of the cultural patterning, were recognizable both to Dr. Erickson as hypnotist and to his entranced subject. The subject pointed out the moments when the Balinese children "went to sleep," "went in deeper," and "waked up," judging from the facial expressions and from the movements. Dr. Erickson pointed out what he called "unitary movement" as a characteristic of the trance state, that is, the moving of the whole arm as a unit in the way that a baby does, and "economy of movement," that is, the use of only the part of the body necessary to the action. He also directed our attention to movements of reorientation, such as feeling the ground, when the subjects were coming out of trance. There was no doubt, either for Dr. Erickson or for his trained subject, that the states were genuine.

7. *Folk Trancers.* There existed in the mountain area of East Bali a form of trance in which the player or players would become for a time

an animal or an inanimate object—a monkey, a pig, a snake, or a potlid. These were true folk trances in which the audience would take a lively part by singing to the players folk songs embodying suggestions which they might, in their state resembling an hypnotic trance, either accept or reject. A characteristic of these trances

was that at times the whole arm of a subject might be affected differently from the rest of the body, either remaining disassociated and beyond voluntary control after the player had come out of trance, or, in certain varieties, only the arm might be affected by the inducing ritual.

TRANCE EXPERIENCE

We invited the well-known psychiatrist, Dr. P. M. van Wulfften Palthe, head of the Psychiatric Service in Java at the time, to come to Bali to give his opinion on our trance subjects. He subsequently wrote a paper, "Over de Bezetenheid" (On Possession),⁷ in which he distinguishes two forms of possession: that in which an alien "something" has entered the personality, causing the patient to feel that a power is present that is different from his "I," and making two simultaneous integrations; and that in which there is a temporary but total change of the personality, in which the person is "transformed" into the other being or object. The first type of "possession" he identifies with typical schizophrenic symptoms, the splitting of the personality; the second, with symptoms of hysteria, to which, he says, normal individuals are prone in situations of stress. He compares all the varieties of trance which he saw in Bali—that of the temple mediums into whom the gods entered, that of the small girls who were entered by the gods, and the folk trancers of East Bali—to his second type of possession. He speaks of the reduction of consciousness, the attack, and "the dramatic realization of a living conception" as phenomena of an hysterical character, without suggesting that the "players" must be regarded as hysterics. He points especially to the hysterical mechanism we observed in the folk-trance *sanghyang seri-poetoet*:

Here two men are seated opposite each other, each holding a stick in his hand. These two sticks

⁷P. M. van Wulfften Palthe, "Over de Bezetenheid," *Geneeskundig Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, Afl. 36, Deel 80 (1940), pp. 2123–53.

are connected by a string on which are fixed two puppets that can move along the string. The people who sit around the men chant a song, the men make rhythmical movements, first with the whole body, finally only with the right arm which holds the stick. After all sorts of other ceremonies they fall into a deep trance, in which their pupils are wide and hardly react. The puppets perform a whole play with a strongly erotic tint. When the play is brought to an end by people who grasp the men and restrict the movements of the right arm, it is not long before the men come out of trance, but their right arm, that was part of the "play" undergoes a stretch-spasm with closed fist. The arm may be said to have become disconnected from the body, completely separated from the body-scheme; the man cannot direct it in any way, looks at it as upon a strange object that does not belong to him and that he does not feel. The arm has remained "in trance" and must now be brought out of it with the known ceremony.

Putting it over smoke, stroking and spraying it, gradually affects the arm so that it begins to belong to the body again and can be reached by impulses of the will. In this case there is a striking analogy with the hysterical spasm and insensibility of a functional unit which is cut off from control of the will without anatomical lesion. The fact that this persists for some time, even after consciousness has been completely reestablished, distinguishes this case from what we sometimes see in hypnotic suggestion; it could best be compared, perhaps, with posthypnotic executions of orders given during hypnosis, yet it is not quite identical with that situation.⁸

Dr. van Wulfften Palthe pointed out and illustrated with our photographs such behavioral

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 2145.