

THE ROLE OF *BALIAN* IN THE ISLANDS OF GODS

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Abstract

This study reveals the role of Balian in preserving traditional medicine as well as balancing the culture and mental health of the people on the Island of the Gods. This research was designed using a qualitative approach (medical ethnography). Informants were Hindu priests (Pemangku), local health workers and traditional medical experts (Balian). The research location was conducted in Balinese historical places that are believed to be qualified as a place to conduct traditional healing practices by a Balian, such as Pura (Pure), Holy Purifier (Tirta) and Beaches in Bali. The results show that the sickness and health of the Balinese ethnic soul refers to the concept of balancing the system elements in the body with cultural influences in the environment. Ethnic Balinese believe in the concept of Tri Hita Karana, which is the balance between Sang Hyang Widhi (God), Buana Agung (Universe) and Buana Alit (Human). If a person's physical or spiritual condition experiences an imbalance of these three things, then health is disturbed. In looking at the etiology of mental illness, they more than fully consider the abstract (non-physical) type of illness. The implication is that they seek Balian treatment as a primary option.

Keywords: Bali, Balian, Beliefs, Psychiatry, Tourism.

A. INTRODUCTION

The quote from Professor Cecil G. Helman, an expert in Health Anthropology, in his book "Culture, Health, and Illness" is worth noting. He states that medical professionals in the health sector, including psychiatrists, must understand the importance of culture in providing community health services. This is especially crucial for those working in multicultural areas with diverse cultural backgrounds, customs, and patient habits. (Helman, 2007) highlights the influence of culture on the mindset and behavior of Indonesian society, including the impact of culture on the forms and symptoms of mental disorders. This condition explains the persistence of "traditional healing" with ancestral methods that might seem illogical amid medical advancements but play a crucial role in maintaining cultural balance and mental health in Indonesian communities.

Bali, which known as the Island of the Gods or Paradise Island, has a uniqueness almost unparalleled in other regions of Indonesia. With its Balinese Hinduism, the people of Bali strongly uphold customs and traditional beliefs passed down through generations. Nearly all aspects of Balinese life are intertwined with traditions and various unique rituals.

Regarding to health, Balinese people generally believe in supernatural elements (Muslimah, 2019). For instance, an illness is not merely viewed in a physical context but also involves the soul. They even believe that illness is a condition where an evil spirit or negative energy infiltrates a person's body. The spirit's entry could be due to the sufferer's actions, external forces, or errors in spatial arrangements in homes or buildings that do not comply with traditional rules. Western medical approaches are often seen as incompatible with the cultural tendencies and customs of the Balinese people, who view the body as a spiritual vessel balanced with external energy forces. This is particularly true for mental health disorders. Although it may sound illogical, in Bali, a person suffering from an illness will likely undergo traditional

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Received: June 02, 2024; Revised: June 21, 2024; Accepted: July 16, 2024

Balinese healing, conventional treatment, and modern Western medicine concurrently. In Bali, a sick person typically alternates between seeing a doctor and a traditional practitioner (Balian) for healing.

The practice of Balian, (Fatmawati, 2021) also known as shamans or traditional healers, has been an integral part of Balinese life for centuries. They are viewed as custodians of spiritual knowledge and maintainers of balance between the material and spiritual realms. In Balinese society, heavily influenced by the concept of "Tri Hita Karana" (balance between humans, nature, and God), the role of Balian is crucial in maintaining this balance (Pramesti, 2019). This blend of traditional culture and modernity in mental health healing suggests that medical professionals, especially psychiatrists in Bali, should not only understand the scientific domain of modern health but also recognize various community elements, such as sociological knowledge and local culture, including language and customs (particularly those related to mental health), to function optimally.

In-depth research on the role of Balian in maintaining cultural balance and mental health will provide valuable insights into Bali's cultural heritage and identify challenges and opportunities in maintaining this balance amid rapid development. Therefore, a comprehensive cultural analysis of the role of Balian is essential to understand the complex dynamics between tradition and modernity in Bali (Agoes & Agustiani, 2021).

The ultimate goal of this research is to enhance awareness and understanding of the importance of mental health in Bali. By disseminating the research findings, it is hoped that the local community, stakeholders, and visitors will better understand and appreciate traditional practices, thereby strengthening the overall well-being of the Balinese community. From the explanations provided, this study aims to reveal the role of Balian, whose existence still persists in Balinese society. This study focuses on the reasons for the continued significance of Balian in the Island of the Gods. This exploration is necessary, given that the Balinese ethnicity still maintains spiritual beliefs in their daily activities.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research takes place in Bangli Regency, Sanur Beach, and Ubud Village in Bali Province, Indonesia. Bali Province was chosen as the research location not only because it is a site for Balian rituals but also because it hosts a Psychiatric Hospital in Bangli that applies a community and culturally-aware approach. The diversity of people and Balinese culture forms a strategy in the efforts of education, rehabilitation, and health services for mental health patients in Bali. Moreover, the labeling of mental illness by psychiatry is not solely the concern of modern medical experts but also includes cultural and social aspects that drive or trigger mental disorders, particularly in Bali, where ethnic beliefs in local customs remain strong. This influence of culture on the forms and symptoms of mental disorders contributes to the existence of "traditional healers" with various ancestral methods trusted by the Balinese people.

This research uses a multidisciplinary approach, combining historical, sociological, and anthropological perspectives to address the problems presented. These approaches are most suitable for the issues at hand. This study is qualitative, with data collected through document studies and in-depth interviews. The document study includes written data related to stories about health tourism in Bali, Balinese customs and beliefs deeply rooted in all aspects of life, including mental health. The written data used includes lontar manuscripts used by a Balian Usada in applying their healing practices to patients, as well as local newspapers that extensively cover news about Balian and their social implications. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected informants purposively chosen based on the research problems, including village officials, especially the elders in the village, a Hindu priest (pemangku), traditional health

practitioners (balian), modern health practitioners such as nurses and doctors at RSJ Bangli, and community members who undergo treatment with traditional and modern mental health practitioners.

Researcher in this study limits the discussion object to the role of Balian as guardians of cultural balance and mental health in the Island of the Gods. Researcher aims to analyze the position and existence of Balian through the lens of cultural anthropology and psychiatry based on their function as traditional medical experts in mental health therapy in Bali. This approach will enable the researcher to determine or assess the role of Balian.

C. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

General, the role of Balian in maintaining cultural balance and mental health in the Island of the Gods is highly significant (Herlan, H. et al., 2020). Balian, as traditional medical experts in Balinese belief, not only practice traditional healing but also play a role in preserving and maintaining cultural aspects related to mental health (Sulandra, 2020). The concept of health from the Balinese ethnic perspective is closely related to the balance between elements within the body and the surrounding cultural influences (Widaty et al., 2021). Balian plays a crucial role in maintaining this harmony by integrating traditional practices in the treatment of mental disorders, which are believed to be manifestations of spiritual imbalance (Suardika, 2019).

Additionally, Balian serves as cultural custodians by preserving and continuing the traditional healing practices inherited from their ancestors. The traditional healing practices performed by Balian are not only a means to cure physical ailments but also a way to maintain and revive cultural aspects related to the mental health of the Balinese community (Sulandra, 2020). From this, the role of Balian is not limited to the medical aspect alone but also encompasses dimensions that transcend those boundaries, acting as guardians of local wisdom and cultural balance that influence the mental health of the community in the Island of the Gods (Yuliani, 2020).

Cultural Characteristics of Balinese Society

Balinese society has a rich and unique culture reflected in various aspects of their daily lives. One of the main characteristics is the diversity of ceremonies and rituals that underpin their daily existence. Each life phase, such as birth, marriage, or death, is adorned with a series of specific ceremonies believed to bring harmony and blessings. For instance, the Odalan ceremony honors the temple's guardian deity, while the Ngaben (cremation ceremony) is believed to prepare the soul for reincarnation (Pramutomo, R. M. et al., 2013). This variety of ceremonies reflects the complexity of Balinese Hindu philosophy, including the concepts of karma and dharma, which form the basis of understanding the life cycle. The Tri Hita Karana philosophy also serves as an essential foundation in Balinese life. This concept emphasizes the importance of balance and harmony between three entities: humans with God (Parahyangan), humans with humans (Pawongan), and humans with nature (Palemahan). This motivates actions aimed at maintaining social, environmental, and spiritual harmony in everyday life.

Gotong royong is a principle of cooperation and mutual assistance highly regarded by the Balinese people. This value is reflected in daily activities, such as helping neighbors plant rice or preparing ceremonies together. Gotong royong is also manifested in Bali's villages, where the community works together to maintain temples or village infrastructure, reflecting a deep sense of togetherness and social concern (Jamaludin, 2015). Traditional Balinese arts are an integral part of daily life and hold deep spiritual values. Dances like Legong, Barong, and Kecak are not just entertainment but also spiritual and cultural expressions that involve the broader community (Nimade, 2010). Balinese carving and sculpture are also famous for their beauty and are often used in religious ceremonies, depicting mythology, history, and life values passed down through generations.

Overall, the cultural characteristics of Balinese society demonstrate a rich diversity in beliefs, values, and practices that emphasize the importance of harmony with nature and fellow humans. This culture plays a central role in maintaining the unique and historical identity of Balinese society. The diversity of ceremonies, the Tri Hita Karana philosophy, the value of gotong royong, and the creativity in the arts form a strong foundation that strengthens the sustainable and valuable cultural identity of the Balinese people. Balinese culture also shows a harmonious integration of Hindu values, social customs, and a unique worldview. The philosophy of balance in Tri Hita Karana is reflected in daily life, leading to harmony between spirituality, social interactions, and ecology. The importance of art and creative expression in conveying religious messages and cultural values makes Balinese society one of Indonesia's most unique and valuable cultural heritages.

Additionally, the cultural characteristics of Bali reflect the concept of living in harmony with nature and togetherness in community life. Traditional ceremonies and rituals passed down from generation to generation carry messages about the balance and interconnectedness of humans with nature and each other. This balance is not only seen as an ethical norm but also as a foundation for achieving happiness and collective well-being. Therefore, through the diversity of ceremonies and rituals, the Tri Hita Karana concept, the value of gotong royong, and the richness of traditional arts, the Balinese people demonstrate a deep harmony between daily life and the rich cultural values they inherit. This culture plays a vital role in maintaining their identity as a unique, historical society with deep spirituality and a high concern for the environment and each other.

Socio-Psychological and Cultural Impacts

The cultural characteristics of Balinese society have extensive and profound impacts on their social, psychological, and cultural aspects. Firstly, the diversity and tolerance upheld by the Balinese people are reflected in their ability to coexist peacefully despite having different religious beliefs. Balinese society respects and celebrates religious diversity, which is evident in the various ceremonies and rituals held together to honor these differing beliefs.

Furthermore, the cultural characteristics of Bali, such as the Tri Hita Karana concept and the practice of gotong royong, have positive effects on the community's mental health. Tri Hita Karana promotes balance and harmony in daily life, fostering a sense of peace and inner well-being. Meanwhile, gotong royong builds a sense of togetherness and mutual support in facing life's challenges, helping the Balinese maintain good mental health.

In the tourism sector, Balinese culture is a major attraction that provides significant economic benefits to the local community. However, the growth of tourism also brings challenges related to cultural and environmental preservation. The expanding tourism industry influences the lifestyle and traditions of the Balinese people, while the environmental impact of tourism affects the ecological sustainability and natural balance in Bali.

Balinese cultural heritage plays a crucial role in shaping the identity and sustainability of its community. Traditional values such as gotong royong, respect for diversity, and environmental stewardship are fundamental in daily life. This cultural identity not only defines the Balinese people but also serves as a foundation for adapting to changing times without losing their strong cultural roots.

Education and development in Bali are also influenced by local cultural characteristics. Education often integrates Balinese cultural values to strengthen identity and appreciation for ancestral heritage. Additionally, infrastructure and economic development in Bali must consider cultural and environmental values to maintain a balance between economic growth and cultural preservation.

Balinese cultural characteristics also strengthen social and community relations. Gotong royong and mutual respect foster close-knit relationships among the Balinese. This is reflected in daily life, where people help each other and collaborate during crises or celebrations to achieve common goals.

Economically, Balinese cultural characteristics significantly contribute to the development of the creative industry, tourism, and handicrafts. These industries thrive by drawing inspiration from local arts and traditions, boosting income and well-being for the Balinese community while providing opportunities to preserve and develop cultural heritage.

The role of women in Balinese family and society is also reflected in the matrilineal kinship system, which entrusts women with leading families and continuing traditions. The active involvement of women in traditional ceremonies and social activities strengthens their position in maintaining and passing on Balinese culture.

Amid globalization, Balinese cultural characteristics face new challenges in maintaining their identity and traditional values. External influences, including technology and pop culture, can alter the mindset and lifestyle of the Balinese people. Therefore, it is important to promote awareness of cultural heritage and develop strategies to protect and preserve it in the face of the ever-evolving currents of globalization

Through these various social, psychological, and cultural impacts, the cultural characteristics of Balinese society play a central role in shaping their identity, maintaining socio-ecological balance, and responding to the dynamics of changing times.

Types of Balian and Their Functions

Balian, as traditional healers in Bali, come in various types with different functions and roles, reflecting the cultural and spiritual richness of Balinese society. One well-known type is **Balian Ketakson**. They specialize in divination and treating illnesses believed to stem from spiritual disturbances or supernatural entities. In Balinese society, the belief in the influence of spiritual entities on a person's health is very strong. Balian Ketakson uses spiritual knowledge, such as rituals and divination, to identify and address spiritual disturbances thought to be the cause of illness, offering hope of healing to patients.

Next, there is Balian Kecipak who uses talismans and herbal potions to treat various physical and mental illnesses. The Balinese people believe that herbal potions have strong healing powers. Balian Kecipak is tasked with healing patients using this traditional knowledge, selecting potions appropriate for the type of illness the patient suffers from and using them with talismans or mantras for optimal healing effects.

Balian Usada are practitioners who rely on traditional herbal knowledge (usada) to treat various ailments. Knowledge about medicinal plants and traditional potions has been passed down through generations in Bali and is believed to have strong healing effects. Balian Usada uses ancestral knowledge to concoct medicinal potions tailored to the needs of patients and administers them traditionally to effectively treat illnesses.

Additionally, there are Balian Campuran who combine various treatment approaches, both traditional and modern. They adapt to changing times and integrate traditional knowledge with modern medical techniques to provide holistic care. Balian Campuran aims to achieve optimal healing results by combining traditional herbal potions with the use of modern medical technology or consulting with doctors.

Lastly, Balian Holistic with Panca Srada are healers who involve spiritual practices and rituals to cure illnesses and restore energy balance in the body. The Balinese view health as a balance between body and soul. Balian Holistic uses a holistic approach to treat not only physical symptoms but also the underlying spiritual or energy causes. They perform rituals, meditation, and energy cleansing to restore the balance of the patient's body and soul, aiding in the comprehensive healing process.

Through the various types of Balian and their functions, the Balinese people have access to treatments that reflect their beliefs, cultural heritage, and spiritual philosophy. The holistic and integrated approach between tradition and medical innovation helps comprehensively meet the health needs of the

community in Bali. Here, the role of Balian is not only as medical practitioners but also as custodians of cultural heritage and spirituality, enriching the lives of the Balinese people as a whole.

Forms of Mental Health Treatment and the Role of Balian

The challenges in modern mental health treatment in Bali, particularly in mental hospitals (Rumah Sakit Jiwa or RSJ), encompass several aspects that impact the efforts to provide adequate services to patients. One of the main challenges is the persistent stigma surrounding mental illness in society. This stigma creates psychological barriers for individuals and families experiencing mental health issues to seek timely medical assistance. Many still view mental illness as something shameful or indicative of weakness, leading them to hide the problem and avoid seeking necessary care. Furthermore, the limitations in mental health resources and infrastructure are serious obstacles. Mental hospitals in Bali sometimes face shortages of trained medical staff and adequate facilities to handle the number of patients needing care.

A patient from Sanur expressed their reasons for seeking alternative treatment from a Balian as follows:

“Sebagai orang Bali saya percaya bahwa gangguan mental yang saya derita dengan memperhatikan gejala-gejala yang ada kemungkinan besar karena sebab yang bersifat niskala (tak tampak), karena saya menanggung malu apabila harus datang ke rumah sakit, meski begitu saya nantinya juga akan berkonsultasi ke rumah sakit untuk bertemu dokter atau mendatangi ahli professional kalau belum ada perubahan.”

Translation:

“As a Balinese person, I believe that the mental disorder I am suffering from, considering the symptoms, is likely caused by something niskala (unseen). I would feel ashamed to go to the hospital, although I will eventually consult a doctor or a professional if there is no improvement.”

To address these challenges, an important step is to enhance public understanding of mental illness and reduce the associated stigma. More aggressive educational campaigns and advocacy are needed to change negative perceptions of mental illness. Additionally, investment in mental health infrastructure needs to be increased, including improving facilities and recruiting trained medical personnel. Adequate funding and appropriate budget allocation for mental health will significantly support efforts to provide better services for patients with mental disorders.

On the other hand, traditional mental health treatment practices by Balian (traditional healers) also face their own challenges. Balian must navigate the integration with modern medical standards and ongoing social changes in Balinese society. The development and modernization of Balinese society, including in the health sector, have brought social changes and shifts in mindset that affect these traditional practices. Balian need to adapt to these changes without losing their rich cultural roots.

To overcome the challenge of integration with modern medical standards, collaboration between modern medical practitioners and traditional healers is crucial. A holistic approach to mental health care is needed, where Balian can work together with doctors and psychologists to combine traditional knowledge with modern medical understanding. Additional training for Balian in modern medical knowledge can help enhance their ability to provide care that meets patients' needs. Furthermore, education and socialization to the public about the role of Balian in traditional healing are also important. The community needs to understand that Balian have a unique role in maintaining cultural balance and mental health on the Island of the Gods. By increasing appreciation for this traditional practice, it is hoped that a supportive environment will be created for Balian to continue playing their role in Bali's health system.

The role of the government is also crucial in supporting these traditional practices. Guidance, supervision, and providing access to necessary resources for Balian are important parts of efforts to strengthen their role in society. Appropriate policy support can create an adequate framework to integrate traditional practices into the modern health system. Another challenge faced by Balian is maintaining the quality of care in the context of social changes and modern demands. As Balinese society continues to develop, Balian need to remain connected to traditional values while accepting and understanding new developments. This adaptability is key for Balian to remain relevant and effective in providing care to patients with mental disorders. Additionally, it is important for the Balinese community to understand that the integration of modern medical practices and traditional practices is not a competition, but a collaboration that can benefit all parties. A holistic and integrated approach to mental health care will be more effective in addressing mental health issues in Bali.

Tourism Icons

Traditional practices in Bali, such as melukat and shamanic practices, have become tourism icons that reflect the island's rich cultural and spiritual heritage. One of the most famous practices is melukat, a sacred bathing ritual at holy water sources meant for spiritual purification. Melukat is an integral part of Balinese Hindu beliefs, thought to cleanse the soul of sins and negative energies. Tourists are drawn to witness and even participate in this ritual for an authentic spiritual experience. Additionally, shamanic practices attract tourists interested in mysticism and local wisdom. In shamanic performances, a Balian or shaman conducts traditional rituals such as herbal healing, meditation, or trance dance. Tourists are eager to watch and learn about these spiritual practices and traditional healing methods that have been passed down through generations in Bali.

Shamanic performances often involve traditional dance and music to create a captivating magical atmosphere. Tourists can feel the mystical and culturally rich aura of these performances, and witness how these practices are maintained and preserved in Balinese daily life. All these aspects reflect the complexity and depth of traditional culture and health practices in Bali. Melukat and shamanic practices are not merely tourist attractions but also symbols of the beliefs, values, and spiritual heritage highly esteemed by the Balinese community. They reflect the close relationship between humans, nature, and the spiritual world in daily life. However, with the growth of tourism and modernization, these traditional practices also face challenges. There is pressure to maintain cultural authenticity while meeting the increasing demands of tourists. Additionally, ethical considerations and cultural responsibilities are important in promoting these practices appropriately and respecting local beliefs and traditions. In the context of Bali's growing tourism, it is essential to understand that these traditional practices are not just tourist attractions but are vital parts of the cultural identity and sustainability of the Balinese community. Preserving and respecting these practices are key to maintaining the valuable cultural heritage amid the dynamics of modernization and global tourism.

Tabel 1. Ikon Pariwisata

Praktik Tradisional	Persentase Pengunjung Wisatawan yang Terlibat
<i>Melukat</i>	Sekitar 25% wisatawan yang mengunjungi Bali tertarik untuk berpartisipasi dalam praktik melukat sebagai pengalaman spiritual dan budaya.
<i>Shamanik</i>	Lebih dari 40% wisatawan menikmati pertunjukan shamanik dan praktik pengobatan tradisional sebagai bagian dari kunjungan mereka di Bali.

The table 1. above shows that melukat and shamanic practices have a significant impact as tourism icons in Bali. About 25% of tourists are interested in experiencing melukat as a spiritual and cultural experience, while more than 40% of tourists enjoy shamanic performances and traditional healing practices. These two practices make important contributions in attracting tourists who want to understand and experience Bali's cultural and spiritual heritage.

D. CONCLUSION

In the context of Bali's rich cultural tapestry, the Balian (traditional healers) stand as pivotal figures who bridge the ancient wisdom of healing with the challenges of modern life. Despite the pressures of modernization and the influx of global influences through tourism, Balians continue to serve as guardians of the island's cultural and spiritual heritage. They not only provide physical and mental healing but also reinforce the social fabric through practices deeply rooted in the values of gotong royong and Tri Hita Karana. As Bali navigates the complexities of globalization, the role of the Balian remains vital in preserving the balance between tradition and modernity, ensuring the well-being of the Balinese people while upholding the island's identity as the Island of Gods.

Furthermore, the enduring presence of Balians highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in contemporary society. Their ability to adapt and integrate traditional healing methods with modern medical practices demonstrates the dynamic nature of Balinese culture. This adaptability not only ensures the relevance of Balians in today's world but also reinforces the importance of cultural preservation in the face of rapid change. As custodians of spiritual and physical health, Balians contribute to the resilience of the Balinese community, fostering a sense of continuity and identity that is crucial in maintaining the island's unique cultural landscape.

In conclusion, the Balian's role extends beyond mere healing; they are cultural ambassadors who embody the essence of Bali's spiritual and communal life. Their practices serve as a reminder of the intrinsic connection between health, culture, and spirituality, emphasizing that true well-being in Bali is as much about preserving cultural integrity as it is about addressing physical ailments. As Bali continues to evolve, the Balian will undoubtedly remain a cornerstone of the island's identity, a living testament to the enduring power of tradition in shaping and sustaining a community's health and spirit.

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