



Perfect Order

RECOGNIZING COMPLEXITY IN BALI

J. Stephen Lansing

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

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Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540

In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 3 Market Place, Woodstock,
Oxfordshire OX20 1SY

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lansing, John Stephen.

Perfect order : recognizing complexity in Bali / J. Stephen Lansing.

p. cm.—(Princeton studies in complexity)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-691-02727-2 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-691-02727-7 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Balinese (Indonesian people)—Rites and ceremonies. 2. Caste—Indonesia—Bali
(Province) 3. Bali (Indonesia : Province)—Civilization. 4. Rice—Irrigation—
Indonesia—Bali (Province) 5. Social systems. I. Title. II. Series.

GN635.I65L348 2006

959.8'6—dc22 2005016527

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Sabon

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

pup.princeton.edu

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Thérèse de Vet

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Acknowledgments

FOR ANTHROPOLOGISTS WRITING about their fieldwork experiences, the question of how to acknowledge the contributions of those who helped them with their research has become rather troublesome. Are we really authors, or merely ventriloquists? Can we claim any special status for our interpretations? How much credit is due to ourselves, and how much to our "informants"?

The answers to these questions are a little different for this book than for conventional ethnographies, which are traditionally based on the insights of a lone researcher. I stopped thinking of myself as a lone researcher around 1985, when I began to collaborate with a systems ecologist, James N. Kremer, in a series of studies of irrigation systems in Bali. This proved to be so rewarding that I soon began to cultivate collaborative relationships with other researchers, both foreign and Balinese. Not all of these projects were successful, but in time they produced a variety of results, from doctoral dissertations to articles, books, documentary films, seminars, classes, and reports to government agencies. I've listed some of them in an appendix, partly to acknowledge the nature and extent of my debt to my colleagues, but also as a reference for readers.

This book represents my own distillation of some of the results of these team efforts. My role usually involved helping to plan and organize them, and contributing as an anthropologist to the work we did. But one of the themes of this book is the usefulness of the concept of "emergence," the idea that the parts can sometimes be greater than the whole. While many of our research projects had immediate, short-term goals, we also saw them as pieces of a larger puzzle. Somewhere in my mind, I was engaged in a long-running conversation about Bali with social scientists whose work I admire: Clifford Geertz, Jürgen Habermas, Roy Rappaport, V. E. Korn, Jean-François Guérmonprez, the late Gusti Ngurah Bagus, Valerio Valeri, Lyndal Roper, James J. Fox, Ann Stoler, Robert Hefner, Louis Dumont, Janet Hoskins, Michael Dove, Robert Axelrod, even Karl Marx. At the same time, I was engaged in another sort of mental (and sometimes real) dialogue with ecologists James Kremer, Lisa Curran, Vanda Gerhart, and Simon Levin. Another conversation began in the 1990s with complexity theorists: John Holland, Christopher Langton, Stuart Kauffman, John Miller, Walter Fontana, Erica Jen, and most recently David Krakauer.

