



START OF TRANSCRIPT

Clement Paligaru:

Hello, I'm Clement Paligaru and welcome to Ear to Asia, the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at The University of Melbourne. In Ear to Asia, we talk with researchers who focus on Asia and its diverse peoples, societies and histories; in this episode, maintaining Balinese cultural identity at home in the Netherlands.

After the end of World War II in 1945, the once mighty European powers who had over centuries laid claim to great swathes of Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia began the process of decolonising. In some cases, granting independence was almost a mere administrative task, as was the case of Great Britain letting go of its colony on the Malayan peninsula. But it wasn't always so easy, or the colonisers so willing. Indonesian nationalists had to fight the Dutch in a bloody, four-year war before gaining their independence in 1949.

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Yet in the majority of these new nation states, there was a small proportion of newly-minted citizens who, for various reasons, would choose to move to the country of their former colonial masters and try to make a life there. In this episode, researcher of human societies, Dr Ana Dragojlovic, discusses how immigrants to the Netherlands from the island of Bali have come to terms with the history of Dutch colonial rule while finding their place in the land of their former oppressor, all this amidst hardening attitudes towards immigration among the Dutch public.

Ana is the author of the 2016 book *Beyond Bali: Subaltern Citizens and Post-Colonial Intimacy*, published by Amsterdam University Press. She's based at Asia Institute and specialises in gender studies.

Welcome to Ear to Asia, Ana.

Ana Dragojlovic:

Thank you.

Clement Paligaru:

Before we discuss how Balinese migrants to the Netherlands shape and forge their identity in their adopted homeland, let's take a quick tour of Dutch colonisation of Indonesia and Bali in particular. When did the Dutch explorers arrive in what we now call the Indonesian archipelago, which spans over 5000 kilometres east to west?

Ana Dragojlovic:

The Dutch first arrived at the Indonesian archipelago in the late 16th century and it didn't take very long time for Dutch government to recognise the potential of the East Indies trade. So the Dutch government merged several smaller companies who were already operating in this part of the world and formed what came to be known as United East India Company, or VOC.

So the VOC had enormous power, so they were not just a trading company, they had lots of power that we don't see companies have nowadays. For example, they had rights to wage a war or to make treaties across Asia. They established themselves in Batavia, which is present-day Jakarta and from this centre, the VOC managed their Asian trading networks.

So from the arrival of the first Dutch ships in the late 16th century, until the proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945, the Dutch ruled this part of the world, but certain parts of what we know as Indonesia today stayed independent and one of these parts was Bali. Bali remained independent until the mid-19th century and it was only in 1846 that the Dutch conquered north Bali and it was only in 1908 that they subjugated the entire island.

Clement Paligaru:

When the Dutch first arrived, what was Bali like when it comes to the cultural, the religious landscape and the like?

Ana Dragojlovic:

So when the Dutch first arrived to Bali, their vision of the island before they even arrived was very much influenced by the orientalist images of Hindu Buddhist cultures and primarily of their understanding of India. Balinese caste system did not resemble Indian system, which the Dutch found confusing and they believed that the Balinese caste system was different because it deteriorated over the time. So they presumed that in some original past, Bali had exactly the same caste systems as in India.

Clement Paligaru:

So it wasn't exactly the same, but there was a caste system.

Ana Dragojlovic:

There was a caste system and there is still caste system in Bali. When the Dutch first arrived, Bali was composed of nine independent kingdoms and there was really no idea of Bali as a unique entity as we think about Bali today. There were only two kingdoms at the time that didn't want to recognise the Dutch colonial rule and these were kingdoms of Badung and Klungkung.

Clement Paligaru:

So the Dutch are in Indonesia now, in Bali, the actual colonisation process of Bali, how did that unfold?

Ana Dragojlovic:

Conquering of the seven of these kingdoms went reasonably easy for the Dutch. But two kingdoms, Badung and Klungkung, they refused to recognise the Dutch rule. So basically these two kingdoms were subjugated by military force in the events known as puputan,

which in Balinese means finishing or ending. The first puputan occurred in 1904 when the entire royal family of Badung and their retainers, dressed in white, walked in front of the Dutch army and they were all assassinated. The second puputan occurred in 1908 in Klungkung where the entire royal family again and their retainers, were assassinated by the Dutch army.

Clement Paligaru:

What was the reaction to these executions in European diplomatic circles?

Ana Dragojlovic:

They really sent a shockwave across Europe, and Dutch colonial establishment received very negative comments. The reaction posed a potential threat to the Dutch colonial control in the entire East Indies and in order to mitigate the negative effects of their actions, as Australian historian Adrian Vickers has argued, the Dutch government attempted to cultivate a better image of their colonialism and they started to promote and celebrate Balinese culture. That's how the Balinization of Bali policy came about and this ended up being closely related with the emergence of tourism in Indonesia and in particular, in Bali. So it was already in 1908 that the Dutch government opened first tourist office in Bali.

Clement Paligaru:

How did that go down? Because it seems like suddenly they brought out this positive to mitigate the negative fallout of the executions.

Ana Dragojlovic:

It led to popularisation of Balinese culture, basically starting from the second puputan all the way up until the late 1930s. There was an influx of international travellers and writers, artists and also anthropologists. So anthropologists who arrived to Bali at this time really played an important role in developing this image of Bali as a place of exquisite and unique culture.

Clement Paligaru:

Now in many former European colonies, a smaller proportion of the population of the newly created nation states chose to migrate to the homelands of their former overlords. In the case of Bali, when was the first wave of immigration to the Netherlands?

Ana Dragojlovic:

So in the period of Indonesian independence, up to 1964, many young people were sent on government scholarships to study overseas and mostly in countries of the former Eastern Bloc, but also in countries like Netherlands or France or West Germany. In 1964, President Sukarno was replaced by President Suharto in the largest massacre that happened in Indonesia. Those who found themselves overseas couldn't really go back to Indonesia because they were accused of being communists.

So what happened with these Balinese and many other Indonesians, is that they travelled during the Cold War between different countries. They were exiled and they were trying to find a home. So many of them ended up being supported by the Netherlands and they moved to the Netherlands in the mid to late '60s or early '70s and they found their home there.

Clement Paligaru:

Globally, and you have touched on this, globally the phenomenon of mass tourism started in the 1970s and Bali was a beneficiary. Well, this mass tourism resulted in another wave of migration of Balinese people to the Netherlands. Why?

Ana Dragojlovic:

With development of mass tourism, lots of young Balinese people started looking for jobs in the tourist industry and lots of young Balinese people from small villages started to migrate to tourist places, especially in tourist centres, especially in south Bali and it was mostly men, because in Balinese society, which is very patrilocal, men have more freedom, so most young men, from poorer families especially, moved to work in tourist industry. This is where they started to meet tourists coming from many different parts of the world, including the Netherlands and as it happens, as is the case in many other places in the world, lots of these people entered into intimate relationships with foreign men or foreign women.

Clement Paligaru:

And they fall in love and they leave.

Ana Dragojlovic:

Yes, they fall in love.

Clement Paligaru:

I'm Clement Paligaru and on Ear to Asia, we're talking with anthropologist Dr Ana Dragojlovic about how Balinese migrants to the Netherlands find their place in their adopted home amidst changing attitudes of the Dutch public to immigration.

Now, Ana, you referred to Balinese immigrants to the Netherlands as subaltern citizens. Can you unpack that for us? Can you explain that for us?

Ana Dragojlovic:

So this term which was developed by Italian political theorist, Antonio Gramsci, was initially used to describe history told from below, or history told by people who were historically marginalised in public representations. But I also think this term, I saw it as a good theoretical tool to try to unpack binary oppositions between colonisers and those who were colonised or migrants and people who are settled. I really hoped in writing this book the way I did, to try to demonstrate complexities between these relationships without saying colonisers have more power, even though in some instances they do, but to kind of tease out the complexities of these power relations, rather than saying this binary where you have oppressors and the oppressed.

Clement Paligaru:

And that's in relation to the former people of Bali, the ones who have taken up home in the Netherlands in relation to their former colonisers. But at the same time, there is the way the Balinese express themselves there. Now it appears that the Balinese community there puts a great deal of effort into reminding the Dutch that they are better than other migrant groups from the global self, the best of the rest, so to speak. In your book you mentioned that one of the ways the Balinese maintain their special reputation is by becoming, and I quote here: long distance cultural specialists. What does a long distance cultural specialist do?

Ana Dragojlovic:

So to answer that question, I have to go a little bit back in history to talk about establishment or development of Kebalian or Balineseness.

Clement Paligaru:

Kebalian?

Ana Dragojlovic:

Kebalian. In the early stages of the colonial period, Balinese people who could afford Dutch education ended up, some of them, forming a very important group of Balinese intellectuals who were the first to promote idea of Bali as a coherent ethnic entity or to talk about Bali as an entity that was not just settled around these nine kingdoms that I was talking about, but of Bali as a unitary form.

These intellectuals, they agreed that what's unique to Bali is Balinese Hinduism and customs, so the first idea of Kebalian formed around this idea. It was also this period that Balinese intellectuals developed concept of culture, which before that didn't really exist in Balinese language or this idea of culture was not something that people talked about.

Clement Paligaru:

As an intellectualised concept.

Ana Dragojlovic:

Yes.

Clement Paligaru:

But rituals did exist in all this.

Ana Dragojlovic:

Of course, absolutely, of course, where culture exists and people are doing all kinds of things that we talk about as culture, but this intellectual conceptualisation of culture didn't exist.

So following from there, Kebalian has been talked of or discourse around Balinese identity or what it means to be Balinese focused on these three aspects: on Balinese religion, custom and culture. This was then taken up again with a policy of cultural tourism. And French anthropologist, Michelle Picard, has argued that this policy had a profound influence on Balinese identity discourses and this is an ongoing discussion. This notion of culture has been crucial in development and maintenance of distinctive idea or what it means to be a Balinese person.

Clement Paligaru:

And it has been taken by the Balinese to Netherlands as well?

Ana Dragojlovic:

Yes, Balinese to the Netherlands.

Clement Paligaru:

So the concept of cultural specialists, how does that come into play here?

Ana Dragojlovic:

This notion of Balinese as being artistic, it's not something that Balinese people themselves believe in, but it's also something that's been so promoted through the tourist industry and it's a very common understanding of Balinese people outside of Bali or in the Netherlands, so when non-Balinese talk to the Balinese in the Netherlands, they always ask them about culture, et cetera, et cetera. So there is this kind of common understanding that Balinese people are peace loving and this is part of the creation of this myth of Balinese culture, they are peace-loving Hindus and they are very artistic. So that's a very simplified, common understanding of who Balinese people are.

Clement Paligaru:

But why do they need to keep reminding the Dutch, for example, that they're not like the rest of the immigrants in the Netherlands?

Ana Dragojlovic:

Starting from the early 2000s, the Netherlands, as many other countries in European Union, started to introduce various policies that would control influx of migrants. This is of course time where xenophobia and Islamophobia became really prominent and I think they became even normalised, nowadays. So when Balinese people talk about doing these little acts, doing bodily compartments through which they can inform somebody who doesn't know them that they are Balinese...

Clement Paligaru:

You're talking about performances here.

Ana Dragojlovic:

I'm talking about performances.

Clement Paligaru:

Right.

Ana Dragojlovic:

So people would often, if they meet somebody they don't know, they would do little postures, like hand gestures or head movements or facial expressions that are associated with Balinese stance and they would inform their interlocutors that they are Balinese before the communication even starts. And for Balinese, it's to try to distinguish themselves from other migrants. Lots of my interlocutors would say, unless you tell people you are Balinese, you are just another brown face in the crowd, or people might think that you are Muslim, which Balinese people wouldn't want to be taken for.

Because in many other ways, Balinese are recent migrants; the way they speak Dutch language, it's very similar to other recent migrants, their job prospects are usually on a lower level scale. So for them it's really important to perform and to inform people to do these little acts through which they distinguish themselves as Balinese. This improves their prospects of getting jobs or just being recognised as somebody who is not seen as a potential threat to the Dutch, basically a good migrant.

Clement Paligaru:

Now, Ana, in your writings you do characterise the Balinese relationship with the ethnic Dutch in their adopted home as tension-ridden proximity. Why is this the case?

Ana Dragojlovic:

Tension ridden because when we talk about intimacy, it is usually that we think about relationships that are harmonious and drawing on the research of anthropologist Michael Herzfeld, who some years ago published the book on cultural intimacy, I tried to extend his concept to talk about post-colonial intimacy but to talk about intimacy as something that's tension ridden, that intimacy, it's a sense of proximity and distance, but it's a sense that you understand people even into things that are not necessarily positive or harmonious, but it produces sense of commonality.

And I decided to use that or to develop this concept of post-colonial intimacy because my Balinese interlocutors almost never talked about violence that took place in two puputans in Bali. When I asked people how about colonialism, how about puputan, my Balinese interlocutors weren't critical of the Dutch colonialism, they were not critical of the violence that took place, they would say, oh that was history and wherever you look around the world there was violence. They didn't feel inspired to criticise but at the same time, unlike

other Indonesian migrants or people of Indonesian heritage in the Netherlands, they didn't want to engage in post-colonial commemoration of colonial violence.

Clement Paligaru:

Let's talk about generational differences, if there are any. The children of the Balinese immigrants often refer to themselves as Dutch with a Balinese parent. Do you see Kebalian, this Balinese identity, continuing after the passing of this generation?

Ana Dragojlovic:

Yes, absolutely. While people would say that they are Dutch, in terms of citizenship and in terms of where they grew up, it's the Netherlands. But I think for most of the children of people who are now young adults were born to Balinese and Dutch marriages, being Balinese is an important part of who they are and how they live and most of them go to Bali very regularly. Most of them do some ceremonies and from 2010, since the first Balinese temple was established in Belgium, lots of people participate in Balinese Hindu ceremonies that take place in Belgium. So I think in many ways that Kebalian will continue, of course in a different form, but Kebalian is changing in Bali; it's an ongoing process anyway.

Clement Paligaru:

Be interesting to see how that changes and morphs as well in the Netherlands.

Ana Dragojlovic:

Absolutely.

Clement Paligaru:

Now Ana, you've spent 10 years conducting research for the material in this book, which is a very long time to maintain that necessary momentum. What drew you to doing and undertaking ethnographic research into the Balinese living in Netherlands?

Ana Dragojlovic:

I was initially really fascinated at the role of the Dutch government in forming the image of Bali or Bali as a place of cultural tourism that we know now. Of course Balinese people played a very important role in developing these images in collaboration or conversation with these foreigners, but that's something that really fascinated me. That's why I wanted to do research with Balinese people living in the Netherlands.

Clement Paligaru:

Have there been challenges conducting this research gaining those insights, especially when you've mentioned there some of the people you turn to for insights don't actually speak about many things?

Ana Dragojlovic:

That was actually main challenge. I mean for me personally, it was very unexpected that people were not criticising colonialism very openly or they were not interested in commemorating colonial atrocities as some other migrants of Indonesian heritage in the Netherlands do. But that also opened a space to think why not, that also made me even more interested in this research, because I think it's a very intriguing question to see what is it that people are actually doing and how they are navigating their everyday lives.

I think because it's been so hard to be a foreigner and a foreigner of colour in the Netherlands, starting from the late 1990s, I think it makes a lot of sense to see why people don't talk about violence, why they are trying to find a space for themselves to be seen as good migrants so that they make their lives easier for themselves. Of course, if you talk about violence, it would immediately be seen in opposition to the good image of Bali. And of course, Balinese people among themselves sometimes talk about violence, they talk about 1965 or colonialism, but it's very hushed up and it's not something that's necessarily publicly expressed.

Clement Paligaru:

Ana, many thanks for joining us on Ear to Asia.

Ana Dragojlovic:

Thank you.

Clement Paligaru:

We've been speaking with anthropologist and gender studies expert, Dr Ana Dragojlovic, from Asia Institute about the lives of Balinese immigrants to the Netherlands.

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