

# Sight unseen in the light of cultural relativism case study

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



## **Introduction**

Nicholas Kurzon's 'Sight Unseen' is an ethnographic documentary film, having claimed about a dozen local and international film distinctions. The documentary focuses on 'Bali', an Island Province of Indonesia. Bali has metamorphosed into a great international tourist fascination. The main impetus behind this charisma is that Bali has been encountering a process of 'Balinese Globalization'. Globalization can be defined as the process of international integration of ideas, politics, economy and products with the inherited cultural change appeal of the mentioned items. Increasing global adherence and appreciation for Democracy, Capitalism, Free Trade, coupled with the resultant advancements in means of communication and information sharing in the form of Digital Media and Networking, are major markers of Globalization.

Most of the cultures have been losing their local cultural traits for the sake of emerging as successfully globalised communities. However, 'Bali' is one of the very few exceptions showing that if globalization is a Cultural Change, it does not demand acculturation or, extinction of the local culture at all. In fact, it is a process in which local culture undergoes enrichment with adaptation to local changes occurring over a period of time, and assimilation of foreign cultural items, ensuring necessary updating for successful survival. However, even for 'Bali', reaching at any definite results is daunting challenge for international Anthropologists.

## **Reason for Choice**

There is only one reason for choosing this documentary for this cultural analysis; the purity of the presentation owing to Kurzon's complete intellectual honesty. He has not portrayed ' Bali' from his or anyone else's perspective. He has just shown a realistic picture to the world. There is not even a single sign of impurity from his ideas, perceptions or some kind of hidden scholarly agenda. While acknowledging this fact, Anthropology Prof. Kenneth George of Harvard University says:

“ It is a brilliant work. First, Kurzon's film has captured Bali in a way wholly unlike any other ethnographic film with which I am familiar (and I write as a specialist on Indonesia). It never lapses into self-indulgent reflexivity or exoticism, but maintains a poised engagement with a place (Bali) and its ever-shifting image (" Bali")He doesn't try to resolve or do away with the tensions of cross-cultural encounter and understanding, but simply situates them so as to be able to live with them(Der. org, 2014)”

Cultural Relativism refers to a methodological procedure devised for studying a culture in its own temporal and special context or dimensions (Mills, 2003). Kurzon has analysed Bali culture following this theory, avoiding any contamination of ethnocentric origin. The documentary is rich in many cultural themes, including, Cultural Change, Globalization, Archeology, Cultural, Imbalanced Cultural Reciprocity, Cultural Transmission.

## **Cultural Relativism**

The phenomenon is evident from the statements of cock-fighting master, who has been trying to justify that cock-fighting is similar to wrestling events

in the west. As every Wrestler is awarded with prize money on his success, he has a very strong argument that Cocks also deserve rewards. A pointed to be noted here is that in international community, animal fighting events are regarded as illegal and are condemned to a great extent. They regard these events as violation of basic rights of animals. That is the reason why there is an argument presented by the cock-fighter, that the only difference between the activities is that of cock and men. If American culture and globalised world, praises American Wrestling, the local cock-fighting events in other cultures should also be promoted with the same zeal, rather than condemning them at international level.

## **Globalization**

The video shooter has been living a life, imposed by his family beliefs and religious traditions. He tries to live a liberal life that most of the people in America have been living. He is actually inspired by the TV shows in which Americans are shown to play tricks to each other for making fun. Most of the videos are from routine life, captured accidentally and without any special arrangements for events and recordings. The Video shooter of Bali has been trying to make video history in Bali. He keeps his camera with him and uses it for recording special events and ceremonies.

He feels pride in doing this and gives special coverage to the cultural aspects of these ceremonies. So, he has been just trying to live a life of American video shooter in Bali, keeping the local culture intact and just hoping to get further inspiration from American culture whenever he manages to get a chance to go to America. Another major evidence for globalization can be

seen in his managing a wireless camera and managing the live coverage of the events he has been shooting. Moreover, an ice-cream hawker, shown passing across ladies holding traditional baskets and glimpses of Pizza Hut and Kentucky Fried Chicken, amid totally raw Balinese culture provide enough insight into the way Globalization has been cultural change to the region.

On the other hand, the tourist video shooter, who is actually an international tourist, is busy in filming the cultural life of Bali. He has been trying to capture each and every event that can earn him more praise and appreciation for the international masses, for getting actual details about the daily routine life in Bali. So, the main theme here is the need for intactness of each culture. Different cultures will remain significant only if they are successful in ensuring their survival in all of the eras of history.

### **Cultural Reciprocity**

Both sons of the Pandit are actually shown to win regard for their local culture. Their wishes to visit America with the approval of their family show their desire to reciprocate Globalized American culture with the gifts of local Balinese culture.

### **Cultural Transmission**

This theme is also wide spread all across the documentary. Scenes of traditional religious, ceremonial and family practices make most of the documentary. The Balinese have been successful in transmission of their local culture into the new generations and they have been doing it since centuries.

Even one of the main characters goes to an extent that his newly born son has dancing fingers just because of his great grandfather was a good dancer. The narration of event shows his strong faith on transmission of cultural traits from one generation to the other.

## **Archeology**

Images of the wooden handicrafts and traditional temples also add splendor to the documentary. One brother is shown skillful in wooden decoration work which he sells to make his living and devotes to the religious temples for enhancing their appeal and beauty.

## **Cultural Resistance**

Kurzton has been showing the changing patterns in Cultural Resistance over a specific period of time; spanning a few decades. The narrator describes that several decades back when the Dutch tried to take over Bali, there was strong resistance by the local and they chose to march past bullets instead living a life influenced by the foreign rulers. Contrary to that when the movie is being made, foreign forces have still entered Bali, but this time through cultural invasion which, has been accepted to a great extent. Today, the youth of Bali dream of a life in American White House.

## **Cultural Change**

At a point when describing the time of his birth, one of Pandit's son says: 'IDA BAGUS NYOMAN: I was born in the darkness. There's no electricity in the room, nothing.'

So, living patterns have changed over a period of time and process of this

change is still going on. While describing the duties of one of the main characters, the narrator says that renovation and maintenance of temples is his responsibility. Putting in his words:

‘ Nothing is permanent here. The soft sandstone crumbles after a few years, white ants get into the woodwork, and the wet air dissolves the cloth. So tradition means constant renewal, and the form is always being updated and reworked.’

**So, coupled with technology, the inherited essence of change in culture will basically serve as cultural change catalysts.**

Conclusion

Kurzon ends at putting emphasis on continuation of cultural research, whether the researchers are able to ‘ find some fishes or not’, technically, they should not develop a mind set of an ice-cream hawker making predictions and raising expectations before studying any cultural phenomena. The paper has explored various cultural themes including Cultural Relativism, Change, Transmission, Reciprocity, and Globalization in the light of Kurzon’s ‘ Sight Unseen’. Kurzaon has very successfully interpreted a culture, into in its own past and present; giving glimpses into future as well. There is no personal commentary or signs of Ethnocentrism.

## References

- Der. org,. (2014). DER Documentary: Sight Unseen. Der. org. Retrieved 28 November 2014, from <http://www.der.org/films/sight-unseen.html>
- Mills, D. (2003). Relativism and cultural studies. *Think*, 1(03), 79. doi: 10.1017/s1477175600000488

<https://assignbuster.com/sight-unseen-in-the-light-of-cultural-relativism-case-study/>