

Body of Tradition: Becoming a Woman *Dalang* in Bali

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This dissertation titled
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ABSTRACT

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The role of women in Bali must be understood in relationship to tradition, because “tradition” is an important concept for analyzing Balinese culture, social hierarchy, religious expression, and politics. *Wayang kulit*, or shadow puppetry, is considered an important Balinese tradition because it connects a mythic past to a political present through public, and often religiously significant ritual performance. The *dalang*, or puppeteer, is the central figure in this performance genre and is revered in Balinese society as a teacher and priest. Until recently, the *dalang* has always been male, but now women are studying and performing as *dalangs*. In order to determine what women in these “non-traditional” roles means for gender hierarchy and the status of these arts as “traditional,” I argue that “tradition” must be understood in relation to three different, yet overlapping, fields: the construction of Bali as a “traditional” society, the role of women in Bali as being governed by “tradition,” and the performing arts as both “traditional” and as a conduit for “tradition.”

This dissertation is divided into three sections, beginning in chapters two and three, with a general focus on the “tradition” of *wayang kulit* through an analysis of the objects and practices of performance. Next, in chapters four and five, I shift my focus to the body as the site of the display of political and social power, and write about women *dalangs* and some of the major female characters in *wayang kulit*. In Bali there is both

the *sekala*, visible, and *niskala*, invisible, worlds of existence—and I also look at this invisible or spiritual side. The final section, chapters six and seven, focuses on my experience becoming a *dalang* in order to probe this invisible, or *niskala* domain of *wayang kulit*. I describe, through reflexive ethnography, the training process and ritual initiation I underwent before my first performance. In this dissertation, working from the general to the specific, I interrogate how “tradition” is constructed in Bali through an examination of *wayang kulit*, or shadow puppetry, in order to examine how women’s involvement in these performing arts might provide women an opportunity for greater agency within Balinese society.

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In memory of my mother.

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PREFACE: A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND TERMS

Research and writing about *wayang kulit* in Bali requires the use and study of several languages: Indonesian, Balinese, and Kawi. Spelling for these languages is not consistent among sources. In this dissertation I use the *Tuttle Concise Indonesian Dictionary* (revised in 2006) and the *Tuttle Concise Balinese Dictionary* (2009) as my primary sources for those languages. For Kawi, I rely on the spellings and punctuation given to me by my sources in Bali.

When quoting another source I retain that source's spelling and capitalization, but otherwise I follow the practices advocated by the *Association for Asian Performance* that words for genres of art forms, such as *wayang kulit*, should not be capitalized in the same way that their Western equivalents, such as ballet, would not be capitalized.

Wayang kulit has a specialized vocabulary that is difficult to replicate in English, therefore a few words such as *wayang kulit* or *dalang* will be used throughout this dissertation. In Indonesian and Balinese plurals are rarely used, and if they need to be made clear the word is spoken twice. For example, *anak*, or "child," versus *anak-anak*, or "children." This kind of plural form is awkward in English so I have followed others and used an "s" for making often-used terms plural, for example *dalang* would become *dalangs*. When introducing a term for the first time I include an explanation in the text, I have also included a glossary for reference.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A Journey

A popular story for a *wayang kulit*, or shadow puppetry, performance is *Arjuna Tapa*. In this story Arjuna sets out to go to the top of the mountain Indra Kila Giri because he is troubled by the war between his brothers, the Pandawas, and their cousins the Korawas.¹ Arjuna worries many people will die because of this war between his family members. At the top of the mountain Arjuna seeks wisdom through offerings to the gods and meditation, so that he might imagine a solution to this problem.

Arjuna's journey up the mountain is not easy; there are many dangers he faces because he is traveling where few others have gone before. Additionally, his desire for wisdom has made the ogre king, Niwatakwaca, angry. Arjuna does not find peace, and must battle for his life on the mountain, yet eventually, the god Indra helps Arjuna by giving him a powerful weapon to destroy his enemies. At the end of the story, Arjuna is whisked away to the heavens where he will find wisdom and more adventures.

Even though going to Bali is not as dangerous or mysterious as Arjuna's journey up the mountain, I find myself relating to his desire for knowledge and adventure. I first traveled to Bali to learn about women and performing arts in the summer of 2007 and returned in the summer of 2008. These two short trips (each about two months) established my goals for a ten-month trip to Bali, with funding provided by a Fulbright

¹ In the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, the Pandawas (sometimes spelled Pandavas) are five brothers that are the sons of Pandu and his wives Kunti and Madri. Their names are Bima, Yudistira, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadewa. Their cousins are the Korawas, one hundred brothers all born from Gandari. Much of the action in the *Mahabharata* involves the rivalry between these two families.

Fellowship. Even though I thought I knew what I was looking for, like Arjuna, I was met with many surprises and opportunities to learn new things.

Similarly to Arjuna, I had to travel in order to learn, and I could not guess what awaited me at the end of the journey. I did not have to fight literal monsters, but I overcame many difficulties. In Bali, I discovered that often the most effective way to conduct field research was to sit quietly and listen, as a kind of meditation. Now that I am back in the United States, my time in Bali sometimes feels like it was a dream. My hope, and the hope of my teachers as well, is that through sharing what I have learned, I can contribute knowledge about art and culture in Bali by writing about my experiences. As an academic, it is my job to analyze, question, and probe for meaning, yet, at the heart of my work is my experience from my time “on top of the mountain.”

The Problem of Women and Tradition

My interest in women, tradition, and the performing arts of Bali began when I was reading the book *Balinese Dance, Drama, and Music* by I Wayan Dibia and Rucina Ballinger. The book is targeted towards a general audience of visitors to the island and desires to “lead the reader to appreciate the more common forms that will be seen while in Bali” (7). The authors, both scholars and artists in Bali, support their detailed descriptions with lush photographs of dance and drama; however, one section in particular captured my attention. The opening to this section, titled, “Women in Non-Traditional Roles,” states:

Before the early 1980s, one would be hard pressed to find a female musician or *dalang* (puppeteer). The role of women in Bali is traditionally

one of housekeeper and mother and they have little leisure time to pursue other interests. The 1980s brought much change in the artistic world, with collaborations and meetings between performing artists from all over the world. Women were seen as a viable creative force and female gamelan musicians and puppeteers are becoming more common as their new artistic roles are given more credibility. (Dibia and Ballinger 36)

The short section, only two pages long, tells about women dancing, performing *topeng* (masked dance drama), playing music, and practicing as puppeteers. The authors explain that these women received both criticism and encouragement from local artists, the government, and their families. Dibia and Ballinger describe how sometimes women had to adapt the performance conventions, such as the costume worn or the style of the performance, in order to make it “appropriate” for women artists. The implication throughout this section is that the performing arts are part of “tradition” and that women are breaking with, or being “non-traditional,” through practicing these arts.

“Tradition” is an important concept, used throughout Dibia and Ballinger’s book as well as in many other books and articles on Bali, in relation to the arts, Balinese society, and women; however, it is a concept that is often taken for granted and never explored in detail. Dibia and Ballinger assume that a notion of “tradition” is being challenged in some way by these women artists, and I am left to wonder what the idea of women in these “non-traditional” roles means for the status of these arts as “traditional.” How is “tradition” to be understood in relation to gender in Balinese society? In Dibia and Ballinger’s book and my questions, “tradition” is being used in relation to three

different, yet overlapping, fields: the construction of Bali as a “traditional” society, the role of women in Bali as being governed by “tradition,” and the performing arts as both “traditional” and as a conduit for “tradition.” A more detailed analysis of “tradition” is required to understand the implications of women’s expansion into performing arts previously performed only by men. Does this expansion change the “tradition”? Does this expansion change what is considered the “traditional” roles of women in Balinese society? Do women performing in dance and drama change the meaning that “tradition” possesses in Balinese culture? In this dissertation I will interrogate how “tradition” is constructed in Bali through an examination of *wayang kulit*, or shadow puppetry, in order to examine how women’s involvement in these performing arts might provide women an opportunity for greater agency within Balinese society.

Defining Tradition

In this dissertation I recognize that “tradition” is a complex and unstable category, and my task throughout will be to unpack its many meanings and consequences. “Tradition” is often used as a designation for certain objects and practices that are passed down from generation to generation and that have special significance in regards to culture and identity. “Tradition” can also be a type of judgment given to or about objects and practices, and it is useful to look at the criteria for assessing something as “traditional” and the value that it is therefore given. In Bali, “tradition” has changed over time in response to society, politics, and economics; its meaning has been manipulated in relation to local, national, and global influences.

While “tradition” connects and creates culture, the term “traditional” is a designation that relates something to the past. Art historian John Picton describes the difficulty with applying the concepts of “tradition” and “traditional” when he writes about African textiles; his analysis is relevant for studying the arts in Bali as well. He compares a “tradition of textile making,” which includes the possibility for development and change over time, to the static quality invoked by the phrase “traditional textiles”:

The reality is that traditions entail histories, whereas traditionality closes off the recognition thereof; and that in art as in politics, religion, and so forth, all manner of traditions are contemporary with each other, coexisting, often mutually reflexive, each with its particular temporal status and functional locus. (11)

“Tradition,” as it is relevant to a society, is historically bound and constructed through discourse and action. Throughout the dissertation I will examine how the “traditions” of Balinese culture, *wayang kulit*, and gender roles are productive agents while also being bound by how “tradition” constructs and maintains social hierarchy.

“Tradition” can change and new traditions are invented as society or cultures require them. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argue that not all traditions emerge from some murky past, but rather have distinct histories and purposes:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where

possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (1)

Hobsbawm recognizes three overlapping types of invented traditions since the period of the industrial revolution: those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or membership of groups, real or artificial communities; those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status, or relations of authority; and those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behavior (9). Hobsbawm focuses his analysis on the period after the industrial revolution in the West, but his ideas are useful for establishing a socio-historical understanding of tradition in Bali that accounts for both changes in “tradition” and in the meaning and value ascribed to those “traditions.”

Even though traditions change and new traditions can be created, it is not my intention to judge different traditions in Bali as genuine or spurious. Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin write that “the ongoing reconstruction of tradition is a facet of all social life, which is not natural but symbolically constituted” (Handler and Linnekin 276). All parts of social life, and therefore culture and society, have tradition, and the key is to analyze how the society and culture symbolically constitute its traditions. Tradition is not so much a key to the past, as the door to the present. Tradition “resembles less an artificial assemblage than a process of thought — an ongoing interpretation of the past” (Handler and Linnekin 274). In my research I favor understanding the meaning of “tradition” in the present by looking at the process of transmission, rather than attempting to develop a history of tradition as it was passed down from the past.

Puppet Performance: Introducing the Tradition

Wayang kulit, or shadow puppetry, provides the primary case that I will study in my examination of the meaning and production of “tradition” in Bali. This ancient art is performed with two-dimensional, leather puppets typically at night, but also sometimes during the day. My research focuses on Balinese *wayang kulit*, but it must be noted that there are other versions of puppetry in Indonesia and especially in Java.² At night, Balinese *wayang kulit* is performed against a screen made of white cloth that measures about six feet across and is outlined in a red or black. The *dalang*, or puppet master, brings his own screen to the performance area where the sponsoring family or village has either constructed a booth or erected a stage for the performance (Figure 1). A frame is built out of bamboo for the *dalang* to affix his screen and hang his lamp. Along the bottom and sides are banana logs that provide the *dalang* a place where he can stick his puppets into their soft, pulpy, wood. Although electricity is sometimes used, the lamp is almost always an oil lamp and hangs right in front of the *dalang*'s face. A microphone now is commonly affixed to the lamp to amplify the *dalang*'s speaking voice. Four *gender*, or small xylophone-like instruments, typically accompany the performance. Musicians and assistants sit behind and to the side of the *dalang* while most of the audience watches the shadows from the other side of the screen. Each of these elements is symbolic: the screen is the world; the puppets are all of the physical and spiritual things that exist in that world; the banana log is the earth; the lamp is like the sun because it allows there to be day and night; the music represents harmony and the interrelationships

² For more on this, see Mrazek.

of all things in the universe; and the *dalang*, invisible behind the screen, is like a god presiding over everything (Hobart 128-129).



Figure 1. Setting up the stage for a *wayang kulit* performance. Photo by J. Goodlander.

The atmosphere at a performance is celebratory and chaotic, and the *wayang* show is often just one activity out of many that are happening simultaneously. If the performance is at a temple ceremony there are people at booths selling food and trinkets, men gambling off to the side, children laughing and playing, women carrying offerings in and out of the temple, and perhaps one or two other dance or music performances happening at the same time. The audience rarely sits and watches for the entire

performance, but will instead come and go, watch from both sides of the screen, or even fall asleep. If the performance is at a person's home, the level of activity might be slightly less, but the *wayang kulit* show is always one of many other things going on.

A *wayang kulit* performance not only instructs its audience on matters of morality, politics, and philosophy, but is also in service of the gods. *Wayang kulit* is often described by other scholars, as well as many of the Balinese I met, as a microcosm of Balinese society, culture, and ideals. Balinese Hinduism divides the world into three parts: the lower realm of "bad" spirits or demons; the middle realm that we live in; and the upper realm of the "good" spirits or gods (Lansing 52). Balinese cosmology does not privilege gods over demons in the same way Christianity does, because there is no struggle for one power to eventually win out over the other. Instead there is a recognition of the importance of both kinds of power; much of Balinese religious activity, including *wayang kulit*, is centered instead on bringing these forces into balance.

Wayang kulit, whether performed in the temple or a home, is an important ritual for creating balance. Anthropologist Stephen Lansing explains:

To create order in the world is the privilege of the gods, but the gods themselves are animated shadows in the *wayang*, whom the puppeteers call to their places as the puppeteers assume the power of creation. [. . .] puppeteers are regarded by the Balinese as a kind of priest. However, they are priests whose aim is not to mystify with illusion, but rather to clarify the role of illusion in our perception of reality. As Wijia [a well known *dalang*] explained: "*Wayang* means shadow, reflection. *Wayang* is used to

reflect the gods to the people, and the people to themselves.” *Wayang* reveals the power of language and imagination to go beyond “illumination.” To construct an order in the world which exists both in the mind and, potentially, in the outer world as well. (Lansing 82-83)

It is important to remember throughout my account of *wayang* that it has a complex nature: the *dalang* or puppeteer is understood to be speaking for the gods, to the gods, and as a kind of god because he or she has called the world of shadows into being. Outside of the frame of performance *dalangs* are respected for their knowledge of religion and philosophy; the above kind of priestly identity is for that moment of performance only.

Wayang kulit can also be performed during the day; this kind of performance, called *wayang lemah*, is only done for ritual purposes and not for entertainment. Instead of a screen the *dalang* performs in front of a banana log affixed with a string that gives him a place to rest the puppets. Only one pair of *gender* will accompany this performance and the *dalang* only needs one assistant. Even at a crowded temple ceremony there are very few people watching *wayang lemah*, but it is still important to have because it is an offering for the gods.

Previous Scholarship on Wayang Kulit as Tradition

Previous scholarship on *wayang kulit* does not provide an analysis of the art form as “tradition;” it instead often takes the relationship between *wayang kulit* and tradition, along with the idea of *wayang kulit* as tradition for granted. Anthropologist Angela Hobart’s book *Dancing Shadows of Bali*, written in 1987, is the first book-length study of

wayang kulit in Bali. Her book focuses on the objects of performance and their use, the mythology or sources for the stories used in performance, and the social and cultural significance of *wayang kulit*. Hobart separates day and night performances of *wayang kulit* because she believes that *wayang lemah* are for ritual only and that the dramatic connection with the audience is minimal if it exists at all. Hobart compares this to the night *wayang*, or *wayang peteng*, which is more driven by dramatic action and is for a human as well as a godly audience (178-184). Hobart describes what she sees as *wayang kulit*'s relationship to tradition:

Wayang kulit thus emerges as a vehicle which articulates a distinctive conception of the universe and the rules governing the moral order. This view is objectified and presented for contemplation during each play given at night which unfolds on a stage aloof from the humdrum existence of everyday life. [. . .] Yet a night *wayang* is more than a work of art to be enjoyed and contemplated in the attitude of disinterested attention. It imbues the villagers with an intense sense of the continuity of tradition. It is also an important organizing force in the community. (183)

In support of this statement Hobart argues that *wayang kulit*, through both the stories and the iconography of the puppets, provides an important educational tool about tradition (especially moral behavior and rank) for the Balinese community and provides the transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to another, especially amongst males (184-185). She concludes:

So the night *wayang* appears initially to portray a stable universe which has cosmic dimensions. As such it represents an ideal version of the social structure. [. . .] So theatre provides the community with a set of mirrors or prisms of various shapes and sizes which not only present, but also probe, scrutinize and analyze in a dynamic way the axioms and assumptions of social life. Thereby it can be suggested that theatre helps the villager to develop his own selfhood or identity. (210-211)

Throughout the book Hobart presents *wayang kulit* as a stable sign-system that creates community and identity (albeit for only a male audience and with male artists) for the Balinese that is in some sense “tradition.” It is only here at the end of the book that she hints that the performance might offer change and analysis that is dialogic with each villager’s selfhood and identity. My dissertation will invoke Hobart’s research, but then will further investigate the relationship between “tradition,” *wayang kulit*, and social structure in Bali.

Mary Sabina Zurbuchen published *The Language of Balinese Shadow Theatre*, another study on Balinese *wayang kulit*, in the same year as Hobart (1987), and focused on *wayang kulit* as a means to study Balinese language and meaning. She “aims to bring forward such questions of interpretation as context for understanding the linguistic forms and cultural role of one genre of verbal art, the Balinese shadow theatre” (5). In the first part of the book Zurbuchen traces many of the nuances and history of the Balinese language. In the second part she examines:

the linguistic material of shadow theatre in terms of the textuality of the *lampahan* (literally ‘movement, step’), a term used to refer to both the abstract notion of the structure of plays and the plot of a particular story. I hope to demonstrate that, behind the strange lamp-lit flicker of intricate shadows on a screen, there exists a unified expression of myriad linguistic preoccupations—an expression both reflecting and shaping the complex of Bali’s language beliefs and language behavior. (117)

Zurbuchen focuses on Balinese language together with the language in the *wayang kulit* in order to conclude that through *wayang kulit*’s structure, language, and practice, it is “delineating particular temporal contexts, participant roles, and social meanings” (264). She also states that *wayang kulit* persists as a reflection of culture and popular entertainment even as more Balinese have access to television and other technological, or “modern” forms of entertainment:

Not only the verbal art of *wayang parwa*, but indeed the entire range of vocal, written, printed, and broadcast expression in Bali, is an intricately woven pattern whose object, if any, is its own delightful complexity. It is hardly imaginable that the Balinese would unravel the entire fabric in favor of following one single thread, clinging to any single manner of expression. The tapestry-like richness of the whole is precisely the point. (265)

Through her poetic imagery, Zurbuchen argues that “tradition” will persist in Bali because it is so complex, and that through language *wayang kulit* is an important conduit

for transmitting that “tradition.” She uses the term “modernity” to account for primarily technological advances within Balinese society, but does not account for changing values in Bali. Her analysis of language is dependent upon hierarchy, because Balinese language reveals hierarchy, but she does not probe “tradition” as part of this system.

I was surprised to realize that both Hobart and Zurbuchen conducted their field research at approximately the same time. Hobart emphasizes the visual and Zurbuchen the aural or linguistic elements of *wayang kulit*. Each invokes tradition and culture as important to understanding the performance, but neither offers an analysis of what those conceptions mean or how they change. Both conducted research primarily through observation, interviews, and archives, but neither, from what I can ascertain, studied *wayang kulit* as a practitioner or attempted to give a performance.

The third scholar who has contributed much to the understanding of *wayang kulit* in Bali is Dr. I Nyman Sedana. He trained as a *dalang*, studied at the art’s university in Bali, and received his MA and PhD in the United States. He has co-written a book on Balinese arts with Leon Rubin that includes *wayang kulit*, as well as several key articles. He writes rich descriptions of the form, gives details about the education of the *dalang*, and considers how innovation and technology have enriched the art form. However, while Sedana provides many useful details and insights, he does not deal critically with the notion of “tradition” and the role of *wayang kulit* in Balinese society. He writes from a standpoint that takes *wayang kulit* as tradition and as important to Balinese society for granted; perhaps this is an effect of his insider status. Sedana acknowledges that there are women *dalangs* but does not look at this addition critically.

I have used the information and terminology from these studies as a guide and reference, both before beginning my own field research, and as necessary to explain or support information that I learned while in Bali. *Wayang kulit* is a complex art form, and as such each artist has an individual stake in what elements and practices constitute the “tradition;” therefore, I am not interested in checking facts or contesting the data in these studies. Instead, I want to argue for a more complicated understanding of *wayang kulit*, tradition, and their relationship to ideologies and values, both religious and societal, in Bali.

Setting the Stage—Local and National

My investigation of tradition is bound by and influenced by its location. Bali is a small island, located to just to the east of Java and slightly south of the equator, in the nation of Indonesia. Indonesia is made up of over 17,000 islands with over 300 distinct ethnic groups and as many languages. Bali is less than one-third of 1% of Indonesia’s total land area of 3.2 million square miles, yet it is Indonesia’s most popular destination. It has a tropical climate and a lush volcanic landscape in the south, dotted by terraced rice fields, and in parts of the west and east is dry desert. Bali is one of Indonesia’s most populous areas, with a growing population of over three million people, compared to the population of Indonesia at almost 250 million. Tourism is the major source of economic revenue on the island, but historically people on Bali made their money through rice and trade (Pringle 1-5).

Bali is a province of Indonesia and is divided into *kabupaten* (districts), *kecamatan* (municipalities), and *kelurahan/desa* (villages). Each *desa* or village in Bali

is then divided into one or more *banjars* depending on its size, and each *banjar* can have anywhere from fifty to two hundred families as members. *Banjars* are unique to Bali and are not found throughout Indonesia. These systems of division and governance demonstrate the interplay between national and traditional or custom government, called *dinas* and *adat* respectfully. The *banjar* is the most local form of government and is responsible for maintaining temples, organizing religious festivals, and upholding traditional law. Membership to the *banjar* is mandatory for each Balinese married man, and the basic social unit of the *banjar* is the married couple. A married woman only has a voice through her husband and an unmarried woman through her father. Members in the *banjar* are all expected to contribute time and money to events, to maintain community buildings, and to help each other with family ceremonies such as a cremation.³ The *banjar* keeps careful track of who has contributed to its activities and will punish or expel a member that does not contribute (Figure 2). If members live in another village, island, or country because of work, they are expected to contribute money instead of time.

Each *desa* has three main temples. Together, they are called the *kahyangan tiga*, and they are: the *pura pusah*, or the temple of origin; the *pura desa*, or village temple; and the *pura dalem*, or temple of death. Each temple signifies a different function and

³ Carol Warren writes about this dynamic in her book *Adat and Dinas: Balinese Communities in the Indonesian State*; she describes how the religious need for a cremation translates into mandatory participation in the *banjar*. Members of the community do not want to be excluded from the system, and so are required to give a great deal of time, energy, and financial support.

Figure 2. Each *banjar* has a public list of members and their recent contributions. Photo by J. Goodlander

purpose in the life of the village. There are also temples, or *pura*, for the rice fields, for each *banjar*, and for other various gods or ceremonies. Each family compound has its own temple as well. The *banjars* in an area will work together to maintain the *desa* temples and ceremonies at smaller temples require both permission from and an offering for the larger temples. The island of Bali has additional temples for each of the cardinal directions; there is also the mother temple, or *pura Besakih*, on Mount Agung where celebrations are held either for the entire island or as part of a local ceremony.

Methods

This dissertation is based on fieldwork that I conducted in Bali for a total of fifteen months between 2007 and 2009. I spent two summers in Bali, first in 2007 and again in 2008 to conduct preliminary fieldwork; the majority of the work that contributed

to this dissertation took place from December 2008 until the middle of October in 2009. I draw from the methods and literatures from theatre and performance studies, together with anthropology, visual arts and culture, dance, and music. Working interdisciplinarily allowed me to draw connections between art, gender, and culture that might otherwise not be evident or possible. The stories and practices of *wayang kulit* cannot be comprehended without a visual analysis of the iconography and artistry of the puppets. Music not only accompanies *wayang kulit*, but also is inseparable from the style and structure of the performance.

My research and the final product are ethnographic, which, for me, emphasizes the link between the methods used to conduct research and the presentation of that research. Sarah Pink, an anthropologist, defines ethnography as:

an approach to experiencing, interpreting, and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles. Rather than being a method for the collection of “data”, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers’ own experiences. It does not claim to produce and objective or “truthful” account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations, and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (18)

This definition of ethnography is useful here for a couple of reasons. First is Pink's emphasis on the interrelationship between the act of doing research, commonly through participant observation and interviews, and the writing of that research. Second, Pink recognizes the subjectivity of ethnography: the researcher is presenting a version of "truth" as she is able to articulate. This notion of "truth" is especially salient to my research location of Bali and my desire to articulate rather than obscure my own role in creating an understanding of "tradition" in Bali.

The area I lived, the people I interacted with, and the activities I did each day while in Bali played an important role in the kind of knowledge that I had access to and the later interpretations of my research. Each day I often had lessons in not only *wayang kulit* but also in dance, puppet-making, language, and sometimes art or making offerings out of flowers. I lived with a family at a hotel, which gave me access to observe and take part in their daily life, while, giving me a little more autonomy and privacy than I might have had living in a more typical family compound. I often went with this family or my teachers to see performances or to take part in ceremonies at temples or homes. The people I studied and worked with were mostly artists, or recognized my interest in Balinese arts and culture. My interactions with primarily artists, as well as my identity as a scholar studying the arts, influenced the kind of experiences I had. There are many people in Bali who are not artists, and art and performance may be a minor part of their lives. It is important, therefore, to point out that their viewpoints are not well-represented in my research.

I am seeking to understand the production of “tradition,” rather than attempting to define the complex systems of religious and social beliefs that are contained within, because the “tradition” of *wayang kulit* in Bali, both as a performance form and religious ritual, is complicated and therefore difficult or impossible to read as a “text.”

Anthropologist Fredrik Barth writes about how knowledge is a type of “tradition” in northern Bali and examines several different foundations for this knowledge. Religion is an important part of his research, and because there is a large Muslim population in Northern Bali, Barth begins with a description of the area’s Islamic practices and beliefs. Barth finds, however, that a different approach must be taken in order to account for the Balinese-Hindu practices because of the great diversity of expression that is given to those beliefs. He advocates a different methodology: “to base my description of the tradition on the sociology, rather than the logic or systematics, of its knowledge” (191-192). Barth enacts this methodology by looking at how the traditions of Balinese-Hinduism are reproduced through practice, rather than trying to untangle the structure or logic of the many complex ideas and expressions contained in those practices. Barth accomplishes this research through interview and observation, and presents his findings objectively. Instead of trying to achieve an objective viewpoint, I accomplished my research through my own participation, which gives me a different insight that emphasizes, rather than diminishes, my own role in the research process.

My research is about the relationship amongst gender, power, and “tradition,” and as such, it is important to acknowledge to role my own gender, together with my

nationality and class, plays in my research. Diane L. Wolf, reflecting on her own research in Indonesia, notes that:

Fieldwork as a research method poses particular challenges for feminists because of the power relations inherent in the process of gathering data and the process of ethnographic representation. The challenges of fieldwork and representation become even more complicated when the research focus is on women in the Third World or women of color in the United States because in most cases, this research entails “studying down,” that is, studying women who are poor, powerless, or marginalized.

(1)

In my research I was often working with and dependent upon women and men who had limited access to education, political power, and money. Wolf later quotes an article by Daphne Patai titled “U.S. Academics and Third World Women: Is Ethical Research Possible?” which in one word offers the answer, “no” (3). I am not satisfied with this answer, because I feel that engagement with women in other parts of the world is vital. I recognize the many dilemmas and problems that the power differential in fieldwork causes, but I needed to find a better answer about how to do this kind of work.

Kirin Narayan writes about the position of the “native” anthropologist, and questions whether there is ever some kind of subject position that might usurp the power differential between the studied and the studier. She determines that “how the issue of who is an insider and who is an outsider is secondary to the need for dismantling objective distance to acknowledge our shared presence in the cultural worlds that we

describe” (680). It is important to account for the multiplicity of voices, or as Narayan terms it, the “enactment of hybridity,” that forms our research and writing (681). In the article Narayan concludes that there is no such thing as a clear differentiation between a “native” or “non-native” anthropologist and that each must make his or her own way through the cultures they are studying. In order to do this, Narayan advocates for an ethnography that combines narrative with analysis:

Narrative transforms “informants” whose chief role is to spew cultural data for the anthropologist into subjects with complex lives and a range of opinions [. . .] narratives are not transparent representations of what actually happened, but are told for particular purposes, from particular points of view: they are thus incipiently analytical, enacting theory. (681)

Throughout this dissertation I use narrative in order to share my voice with the voices of my informants. In my research, my analysis of tradition is mindful of my position as the student learning about tradition in Bali through *wayang kulit*. I use narrative throughout this dissertation to place the focus on myself as the object, learning “tradition” through *wayang kulit*, while the Balinese people I worked with become the agents in creating the knowledge that I will then share.

People in My Research

Though Bali is small, there are many differences in art and culture from one region to another. Eiseman clarifies the difficulty of doing research in Bali:

Anyone who purports to write about “the way it is in Bali” is either ignorant or a liar. One would think that local variations in culture on such

a tiny island would be insignificant. That is not the case. One of the first things a careful investigator learns is the principle of *desa kala patra*: that whatever one learns in Bali is largely determined by *where* he is, *when* he is there, and the *circumstances* under which the learning occurs. (xiv)

Research in Bali means the researcher will encounter many contradictions, and sometimes it generates much confusion. It is impossible to do without the help of patient friends and guides. This dissertation does not attempt to tell “the way it is in Bali,” but rather is one viewpoint, guided by the insights of my friends and informants in Bali, in what needs to be an ongoing discussion of the arts and artists together with their relationship to culture in Bali. I desire to be part of a shift in the field of Asian theatre that moves away from talking about the “thing” of Asian performance and focuses instead on the people creating those performances.

When writing an ethnography, the researcher must decide if and when to identify informants by their real names. It is part of my project to assert that “traditional” Asian artists deserve the same recognition for their artistic achievements as their Western counterparts do; however, studies on Asian theatre often emphasize the form of the performance over artistic achievement. I believe that there are several reasons for this. One is that sometimes the researcher does not speak the language of the people he or she meets in his or her research, and must depend on observations of artistic form over content, complemented by other research in English. Another is that the very framing of these performances as “traditional” often erases or minimizes the achievement and contributions of individual artists. Unfamiliarity of the form and its history makes it

difficult for Asian theatre scholars to recognize and properly acknowledge the contribution of the people he or she sees perform and also interviews. Therefore, it is important to me that I identify the artists I worked with and give them credit for their creative work and ideas about their art. In my research I have taken care to be clear about my goal and have always confirmed with the artist that they wish to be identified by name; each one enthusiastically said “yes.”

Artists were not the only people that I interacted with who contributed substantially to my research. I am grateful to many friends and acquaintances who shared their lives with me. Living with, and spending time with Balinese women and their families enriched my understanding of Balinese culture and gender. I have chosen to identify these informants by their first names only⁴ in order to protect some of their privacies but I have not fictionalized any of the accounts or locations of my research. Careful thought has been given about what parts of their lives to reveal and what parts to weave into the more general tapestry of meaning that I created in my analysis. I hope in both cases the people I have worked with will approve of my choices and recognize themselves in my descriptions.

⁴ In Bali there is a finite number of first names because Balinese children are named based on their birth order and caste. For example, some of the most common names for the Sudra caste are: Wayan, Nyoman, Made, and Ketut. Many Balinese will have a nickname or be called by their profession (For example Pak Tunjung was often called Pak *Dalang*), and after a person has children they are often called by the name of their first-born. For more on names in Bali see Eisman 33 and 272. In this dissertation when I have made an effort to call each person by a unique name in order to preserve clarity.

*Pak Tunjung*⁵

I Wayan Tunjung,⁶ or Pak Tunjung, was one of the most important people in my research; we met during the summer of 2008. My partner, Tina, and I were walking by the site where the large royal cremation had taken place a few days before. The sarcophagi were so big that the villagers hadn't been able to burn them right away, and we wanted to see the fires before they completely died out. As we arrived at the place and stopped to look, we began chatting with a man named Jaga who was sitting watching. Jaga told us that they had started the fires late at night the day of the procession and that the cremation towers were still smoldering. He asked what we were doing in Bali, and I explained that I was here to study culture and the arts, *kesenian dan budayaan*. When Tina mentioned that I hoped to find someone with whom to study *wayang kulit*, Jaga said he knew a *dalang* who would be an excellent teacher. Jaga said he could meet us at our hotel the next morning and take us to his house. We decided it was worth investigating and agreed.

The next day Jaga drove us to nearby Pengosaken, a village in the southern part of Ubud that is known for its strong community of artists. Jaga pulled the car to the side of the road and we walked through the narrow gate that is the entrance into a Balinese house, or compound. We passed a statue of Ganesha and were welcomed by a spry-looking man sitting within the central *bale*, or pavilion, of the compound. The man, Pak

⁵ Pak (shortened from Bapak) is a title of respect for a man; it means "father" but is often used much like we would use "mister" in English. Ibu, meaning "mother," is the equivalent for women. It is stylistically common to retain the title of address when referring to men and women in scholarship about Bali and I have emulated that here. I have dropped the title for close friends (who admonished me when I used the title) and do not use it when quoting scholarship by Balinese authors.

⁶ When writing complete names in Bali, members of the Sudra caste include the address "I" for men and "Ni" for women.

Tunjung, stood and welcomed us and asked us to join him sitting on the mat. We drank sweet tea and talked about my desire to study *wayang kulit*. Pak Tunjung seemed pleased to meet me and eager to take me on as a student; he promised that he would teach me “systematically” and said that I could also learn to carve puppets. We agreed to begin classes the following week and we would meet on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. When I asked about payment he said that he worked for the love of his art and culture—he did not have a set price. We would figure it out.

For the rest of the summer and then the following year, those Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays became the foundation of my slow initiation into the world of *wayang kulit*. I could not have done this research without Pak Tunjung and his patience and generosity. His wife Ni Budi Astuti, and his son, Nandhu, became like my family.

Kadek

I met Kadek and her family during my first trip to Bali in the summer of 2007. I had just finished three weeks of studying dance at an intensive program offered by Çudamani and was looking for a place to stay because I still had six weeks left in Bali. I spent an entire Saturday walking up and down *Jalan* Monkey Forest, looking at hotels, and negotiating a good price. I was hot and disheartened by the time I walked down the narrow path to her hotel,⁷ and was welcomed by a cool garden overlooking a rice field. I introduced myself and asked about a room, explaining that I was here to study art and culture. Kadek enthusiastically replied that she played in a women’s *gamelan* group and showed me a pleasant room. We agreed on a price and I moved into my “home” in Bali

⁷ In order to protect her privacy I am going to leave the hotel unnamed.

the next day, and that remained my primary place of residence each time I returned to Bali.

Over time, Kadek became like a sister to me and I would often sit with her and her family at home or go with them to a ceremony. Kadek frequently accompanied me on my trips to see performances or to get interviews. She was able to make introductions, and her presence was an assurance to many of the women I later met. Kadek was naturally curious and friendly; I would often joke that we couldn't go anywhere without running into people she knew. She took care of me when I was sick or lonely and helped me arrange for practical things like food, water, laundry, or a motorbike to rent. She would answer my questions about Balinese culture and society and helped with each step in my process of becoming a *dalang*. Her knowledge, friendship, and advice provided an invaluable counterpart to my study with Pak Tunjung.

There are many other people who helped with my research and made my time in Bali pleasant. They met with me for interviews, taught classes, and accompanied me to performances or temple festivals. I will introduce these other people in my dissertation as necessary.

Overview

This dissertation is divided into three sections, beginning with a general focus on the “tradition” of *wayang kulit* and progressing to the specific through interviews with women *dalangs*, and finally to my own experience becoming a *dalang* and negotiating gender and tradition through *wayang kulit*.

I begin by describing the physical objects and practices of *wayang kulit* in order to

examine the notion of “tradition” and its relationship to power and social hierarchy through the performing arts in Bali. At the end of this section, I conclude that “tradition” is not a fixed entity, and that there is room for innovation and change not only in the aesthetics of tradition but possibly in the social hierarchy that tradition maintains.

Next I shift my focus away from the things and practices of “tradition” to the body as the site of the display of political and social power, and write about women *dalangs* and some of the major female characters in *wayang kulit*. I probe the relationship between the *dalang* and the puppet in order to propose a space or “gap” for social change. I begin by analyzing the iconography of the female puppets and how the puppets are used in performance. Women *dalangs* are a relatively recent phenomenon; I begin with the history of this change in performance and then offer an account of the five women *dalangs* I interviewed. I consider their relationship to the art form, and how through *wayang kulit* women have perhaps found a new relationship to tradition and society. At the end of the chapter I determine a level of analysis beyond the body is required—that in Bali there is both the *sekala*, visible, and *niskala*, invisible, worlds of existence—and I need to look at this invisible or spiritual side.

The final section focuses on my experience becoming a *dalang* in order to probe this invisible, or *niskala* domain of *wayang kulit*. This section allows me to probe the process that endows an identity with its continuity. I describe, through reflexive ethnography, the training process by which I acquired the skills as a *dalang* together with the ritual initiation that I underwent before my first performance. I draw from the

theories of Catherine Bell to propose an understanding of the ritual body and I argue that it harbors potential for societal change.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF TRADITION

My research took place in Southern Bali mainly in and around the tourist town of Ubud, which is often considered the place where visitors go to experience the “real” Balinese culture. Tourists spend their days visiting temples, art museums or galleries, and walking through the beautiful rice fields. The main roads of *Jalan Monkey Forest* and *Jalan Hanuman* are lined with hotels, spas, currency exchangers, and shops, and there is a market at the north of town right across the street from the palace. Early in the morning it is a local market selling rice, flowers, fruit, and meat, but later it transforms into a tourist market selling cheap trinkets and machine-made sarongs at high prices (Figure 3). Each night there are many performances for tourists of dances, dramas, and



Figure 3. The market at Ubud. This image demonstrates the mix of “tradition” and “modernity” that I witnessed throughout Bali. Photo by J. Goodlander.

even *wayang kulit*. I lived with a family in the center of this busy city, but often traveled to smaller villages nearby to do my research. When I first arrived at Ubud I was surprised to see so much “modern” activity in what I had hoped would be a “traditional” village. As I spent more time in Bali, I realized that these supposedly different realms were not so incongruent after all; instead, I needed to complicate my understanding of modernity and tradition and their relationship to each other, especially if I wanted to understand gender and performance in a Balinese context.

It is hard to conceive of “tradition” in Bali without including the performing arts, and *wayang kulit* is often described as one of the oldest and most important forms of performance in Bali. It provides the Balinese a means for situating themselves in relationship to the “modern” world. Hobart describes it in comparison to other Balinese arts:

[*Wayang kulit*] is the most esteemed and conservative theatre form and hence its dramatic and aesthetic principles link it to other dance-dramas, statues, reliefs, and traditional painting. Of these the shadow play is regarded as the original form. Through these various manifestations the villager is able to probe and analyze his assumptions of self, in a world which is increasingly affected by modern trends, while retaining his human dignity. (14-15)

The *dalang* is considered a vital person in the transmission of tradition from one generation to another (Rubin and Sedana 16). In this section I will examine the development of *wayang kulit* as it is interwoven with Balinese history and explore how

the two intermingle to produce a notion of what “tradition” is in Bali. I will not attempt a comprehensive historical overview of Bali and Indonesia, but instead will focus on several events or periods that are crucial for comprehending how “tradition” in Bali is understood and constructed today.

Creating Tradition in Bali—History and Myth

Early Balinese history is based on limited archeological data and much conjecture. In his book giving an overview of Balinese history, Robert Pringle notes that agriculture, first in the form of rice and then wet rice farming, and commerce, or trade with other islands, were the major forms of development taking place. Bali was organized into smaller kingdoms that developed literacy, technology, and politics as trade between other kingdoms, especially Java, increased (Pringle 39-40). The most prominent of these influences was the influx of ideas from India, either directly or through Java in and around the ninth century A.D. It is unclear whether or not *wayang kulit* is one result of this trade, but the arts were one of the primary ways of sharing ideas between these cultures (Lansing 25-31). It is possible that shadow puppetry migrated to Bali and Java from China, India, or other parts of Southeast Asia, because each of these areas also has a shadow puppet theatre tradition. Another possibility is that *wayang kulit* developed on its own in Indonesia as a shamanistic practice and then later included the Indian epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as story material in the fourth century (Hobart 22). Evidence for this argument comes from the performance itself; the *panasar*, or clown characters, are a major part of *wayang kulit* in both Java and Bali and do not appear in the Indian epics or in other versions of shadow puppetry around Asia.

Because the historical origins are so vague, *wayang kulit*'s mythic origins are often cited as well (Hobart, Leon and Sedana, and Zurbuchen). The origin myth for *wayang kulit* comes from a palm-leaf manuscript or *lontar*, which is the earliest form of record keeping in Bali.⁸ In the story the god Siwa cursed his wife so that she was forced to live on earth in a cemetery as the demoness Durga. Siwa was lonely and overcome with sexual desire for his wife, so he transformed himself into a demon in order to be with her. After the encounter, Durga bore Siwa many demon children that caused havoc and destruction around the world. The gods Brahma, Wisnu, and Iswara⁹ transformed themselves into three priests and created *wayang kulit* in order to calm the demons, to remind Siwa and his wife of their proper identities, and thus to restore order to the world (Leon and Sedana 21-22). The story is significant because it prescribes the context and conventions of the performance as well as its special status as a ritual performance that is an important, even mandatory, part of many Balinese ceremonies.¹⁰ This myth provides a framework for understanding how a *wayang kulit* performance functions; however, it does not reflect the influences that society and politics have had on *wayang kulit* during different periods of history.

Java's Majapahit Empire, beginning around 1293 and occupying Bali in the mid-fourteenth century, is often cited as the cornerstone of Indonesian and Balinese culture; it

⁸ Two different sources cite this myth as the origin for *wayang kulit* but credit it to a different source. Rubin and Sedana name the origin manuscript as *Purwagama* and Hobart credits *Siwagama*. I do not know if these are variations of the name or two different sources. The precise source for this myth is something that requires further research at another time, but presently it is enough that there is a "tradition" of a common myth.

⁹ These three are considered the primary gods of the Balinese Hindu pantheon and are often referred to as *Sanghyang Tri Semaya*.

¹⁰ Many Balinese-Hindu ceremonies require a *wayang kulit* performance in order to be considered complete and efficacious. It is optional, yet preferred, at many other ceremonies and events. Leon and Sedana credit *wayang kulit*'s interdependence with Balinese religion for its longevity and continued popularity (21).

is the “past” through which Indonesia fashions its present-day identity. The great kingdom of Majapahit did not last long, and it fell during the fifteenth century as Muslim resurgents occupied Java and the court fled to find refuge in Bali. The name Majapahit continues to hold great meaning for present-day Balinese and is often considered the source of many Balinese social and religious customs that find expression through the arts. Indonesian historian Adrian Vickers writes, “Even today Balinese see their culture as essentially Majapahit culture” (46). Many of the characters and some of the stories for *wayang kulit* are thought to have come about as part of the Majapahit (Chalmers 8).

The idea of “tradition” coming from the Majapahit connects Bali to the rest of Indonesia through a shared mythic past and has resonated with both Indonesia’s political leaders and its people. While visiting Yogyakarta, a city in Java, a couple of my guides were female students at a local university. When I told them about my research in Bali, they commented, “Oh Bali shares the same culture as we do in Java. It is because of the Majapahit—Javanese culture moved to Bali.” Indonesia’s first president Sukarno also argued that the Majapahit kingdom was a precedent for the islands of the Dutch East Indies to become a united Indonesia. Sukarno often cited the kings of Majapahit and made references to the puppets from *wayang* in his speeches, calling himself a “modern-day Arjuna” (Sears 219-221).

After Majapahit, Bali was split into about eight kingdoms that were separated by deep volcanic ridges that cut across the island. Geographic separation allowed each group to develop arts and traditions in relative isolation from one another, and this accounts for the great variety found in the arts today (Geertz *Negara*). The Dutch

colonial occupation was the next important event in the production of present-day Bali's relationship to "tradition." Even though the Dutch had been present in the Indonesian islands, called the Dutch East Indies, from the seventeenth century, they had limited contact with Bali. This changed when the Dutch finally became frustrated with the Balinese for plundering Dutch ships that sailed near the northern and western coasts of Bali. The Dutch resolved to take control of the island. The north of Bali fell in a series of battles in the 1840s, but the south remained independent until 1906. In 1906 the Dutch army marched into the kingdom of Bandung in the south, resulting not in a battle, but rather in a terrifying suicide of Balinese royalty and people. Leo Howe describes this event, called *puputon*, or "the end," in Balinese:

When the Dutch marched on the palace of Bandung, situated in what is now Denpasar, they were met outside by the *raja*, his priests, nobles, kin, and servants, indeed the entire court, all dressed in their finery and carrying lances and daggers. At first they walked in procession towards the Dutch, and then ran at them. When the Dutch opened fire the Balinese, in a frenzy, began to kill themselves, each other, and any Dutchman they encountered. (Howe, *Changing World of Bali* 18-19)

In 1908 the same horrible event repeated itself in the kingdom of Klungkung.

News of these events brought protests from the Netherlands and around the world, prompting the Dutch to adopt a new "ethical policy" toward their colonial holdings. This policy was intended to restore Bali to peace and order as well as preserving its culture and arts. This strategy of keeping the Balinese "properly Balinese" allowed the Dutch to

suppress “modern” movements, such as political self-control or a desire for independence, and instead insist that each Balinese person should concentrate their energies on painting, dancing, and writing in a “traditional” style (Howe, *Changing World of Bali* 19). This discourse of placing high value on a particular notion of tradition, and therefore linking “tradition” to Balinese identity, has carried over to the present.

The Dutch control of Bali meant two fundamental changes for the arts in Bali. The first is that with the death and/or loss of power for most of the courts, the villagers were the ones to take on the responsibility for staging performance events. This created a shift in the arts as “court styles” were replaced with local innovations (Picard 46). The “ethical policy” not only centered on preserving Balinese culture but also desired to return Balinese culture to its original “pristine state” that could then be shared with the world through tourism and diplomacy (Picard 39).

Tourism developed slowly at first on the island. The first tourists came by ship, arrived on a Friday, took a tour around the island, and left only two or three days later. The number of visitors increased from hundreds throughout the 1920s to many thousands by the end of the 1930s. These tourists and several infamous foreign residents on the island felt they were witnessing the final moments of an ancient culture “whose bearers, endowed with exceptional artistic talents, devote a considerable amount of time and wealth to staging sumptuous ceremonies” (Picard 40). The influence of this tourism on Balinese culture is complicated. People in and outside of Bali worried that through

tourism and “modern” influences, Balinese culture and arts would be lost. Picard explains:

Among the perils which threatened Balinese culture, the most conspicuous one was none other than the coming of the tourists themselves. Thus the ambivalent attitude evinced by the colonial authorities with respect to tourism. On one hand, the cultural traditions of Bali were the major asset for the tourist promotion of the island. But, on the other hand, if the Balinese culture was to be preserved, measures had to be taken to protect it against the corrupting contact with the modern world brought about by the presence of foreign visitors to the island. (41)

Many scholars have written about the problem of Balinese culture and outside influences, sometimes referred to as “modernization,” “nationalization,” and “Westernization” (Picard, Vickers, Howe, Parker, and others), and they often conclude that these outside threats have not “ruined” Balinese culture but rather have strengthened it. These scholars argue that tourism provided the Balinese the economic incentive to maintain their “culture” because it was this same culture that lured tourists to the island. Balinese culture is also described as resilient in its ability to accept outside influences and remake them to their own tastes and standards. These various arguments and claims serve to naturalize the content of Balinese culture without critically looking at how culture and tradition together are constructed and operating within Bali.

Indonesia declared independence from Dutch colonial rule in 1945, and finally realized this independence in 1949 under the leadership of Sukarno. The new nation was

established under the doctrine of *panscasila*, or the five guiding principles. These principles are nationalism, internationalism, representative democracy, social justice, and the belief in god. Under the motto, “unity in diversity,” Indonesia celebrates its many different cultures while uniting each citizen in the service of a single nation-state. Bali is mostly Hindu in a country that is predominantly Muslim, although Christianity and Buddhism are also recognized and practiced in Indonesia as well. Indonesian is the national language, but in Bali it is common to hear Balinese, or *Bahasa Bali*, spoken around the island. My research focuses on Bali, but it is essential to remember that Bali and Balinese tradition reside in the context of Indonesia because that context has influenced how the Balinese frame “tradition.”¹¹

Religion was an important part of the formation of the new Indonesian government. The government decided not to adopt Islam as the state religion but instead compromised with an edict to allow only “world” religions. The version of Hinduism practiced in Bali was not immediately recognized as such and had to be “created” as a world rather than local religion by realigning it with Hinduism in India;¹² the resulting religion is referred to *agama Hindu*.¹³ This resulted in a split between what was considered “religion” and what was “tradition.” Anthropologist Leo Howe explains:

¹¹ For more on this split between Bali and Indonesia in studies see Lyn Parker, 14-16, where she articulates the importance of contextualizing the study of Bali within the framework of Indonesia. Even though nationalism and state sponsorship of the arts is not the focus of my study, I have kept this context in mind, especially as it relates to women’s expanding involvement in “traditional” arts.

¹² I occasionally traveled around Bali with friends from India who remarked that the Hinduism in Bali was vastly different from the Hinduism that they practiced at home.

¹³ Depending on the context, I will generally refer to the religion in Bali as Balinese Hinduism. I choose this expression rather than the nationally sanctioned *agama Hindu* because I wish to stress the plurality of my experience, which often combined customs, or *adat* with the “official” part of Hinduism.

Although *agama Hindu* is a new creation which emphasizes doctrine, scripture, and theology, it is represented by many Balinese as an age-old tradition. [. . .] However, because links between India and Bali were severed, largely as a result of the Islamization of Java, this tradition is now conceived of as having become gradually distorted by turning into *adat*, which stresses ritual action. In other words, on the basis that there is a venerable Hindu tradition in Bali, the origins of *agama Hindu*, which in fact are recent, have been projected into the past as a lost tradition only recently discovered. This “old” tradition has also now come to be seen as the well-spring of Balinese culture and Balinese art. (2)

This allegiance of art and culture¹⁴ that Howe refers to demonstrates how *wayang kulit* is made relevant to political and religious discourse in Bali and allows *wayang kulit* to become part of the formation of Balinese identity.

Modernity, or the *moderen* in Indonesian, has been carefully constructed as part of an Indonesian identity as well, and is generally understood as progress, development, and individual achievement (Vickers, *Being Modern in Bali* 6). Sukarno believed that Indonesia must participate on a global level because he wanted to “demonstrate to the outside world that an independent Indonesia would be a peaceful and secure state interested in the welfare of its citizens” (Adams 298-299). He enacted this belief by

¹⁴ Culture is a complicated term that is often over-used without reflection of its meaning. In this dissertation I am influenced by Fredrik Barth’s use of the notion as articulated by John Emigh, “that ‘culture’ is best conceived of, not as a schematic web, but as a set of processes sometimes reflecting tentative consensus and subject to constant conversation” (*Culture, Killing, and Criticism* 71). This definition allows culture, much like tradition, to be understood as a process rather than a thing that is constantly being made in the present out of the past.

hosting international conferences and sports competitions, so that Indonesia might claim its place on the world stage and to be taken seriously as an independent and powerful nation. Sukarno was considered “intensely modern” in his politics and taste. For example, he envisioned the capital city of Jakarta to be one of the great international cities of the world. Sukarno commissioned and built highways, monuments, schools, and shopping complexes. This development continued after Sukarno’s presidency, making Jakarta the twelfth largest city in the world.

Tradition and the Global Economy

One day, I had an opportunity to speak with I Made Sumantra, whom I call Guru Made, about tradition and economy in Bali. He is a fifth generation Balinese healer of Sudra caste and teaches yoga and healing to Balinese and foreigners, and I was fortunate to have him as a friend and informant about many spiritual matters in Bali. We discussed how tradition maintains not only spiritual harmony but also economic and social harmony. His comments demonstrate how the many different historical, political, and economic expressions of “tradition” might be understood at the level of the individual in Bali.

People, Guru Made explained, build community through their ceremonies because they share material goods and money as well as time and energy. Ritual creates economic harmony beyond Bali because the Balinese use apples from New Zealand, batik from Java, and the fabric for the *kabayas* in their ceremonies comes from France. Through the global market, money becomes another part of the system of tradition in

Bali. Guru Made felt this demonstrated the international and local dimensions of what he called “the circular nature of harmony.”

The many Balinese ceremonies and arts, Balinese “culture,” is often given as the reason that Bali is famous and that many people go there to visit. Guru Made felt that culture supports tourism in a way that is positive for the Balinese, which then trickles back into different economies in Indonesia and the world, and that it is good for economy and money to be part of the harmony created in Balinese ceremony. Around Ubud, many of the local *banjars*, or communities, had organized weekly dance or music performances for tourists. The members of the *banjar* were required to be part of these performances and the money raised went to help for community projects. Several innovations, such as a new women’s *kecak* group owes its existence to this economy of the arts for tourists.¹⁵

Guru Made was very critical of people who were bringing ideas of Hinduism and yoga from India because these people argue that god is within each person, not a temple or offering, art or ceremony. Guru Made felt that this kind of Hinduism does away with tradition and in the end is detrimental to the worldwide harmony created through Balinese art and ceremony. If people prefer modern things and do not look outside of themselves for God, he believed that in the end Bali and the world will suffer. Artists sell puppets, leather, masks, costumes, and the many things needed for ceremony and traditions, and he worried that if the tradition of the art is lost, then all of these people would lose their jobs and that things would not be in balance. He argued that the

¹⁵ I presented a paper about this group called *Traditional Performance/ Modern Women: Women’s Kecak in Bali* at the ASEAN Fulbright Enrichment Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia during the spring of 2009. I am developing this article for journal publication.

Balinese must remember their traditions or Bali will not be able to survive spiritually or economically.

It was the first time that I ever heard an argument for tradition in Bali that also accounted for a practical side of things. Through traditional arts, people are interdependent on each other and able to also attract tourists and scholars to the island; this also creates financial and cultural benefits. This viewpoint demonstrates how “tradition” has been manipulated to serve the needs of local people. Objects and practices can be subsumed into the category of “tradition” when it serves the interests of the people. Guru Made’s practice would suffer if people followed the “nontraditional” version of Hinduism and no longer relied on spiritual leaders, such as him, for guidance. His answers about “tradition” in Bali demonstrate that tradition is part of a discourse and therefore part of a system of power.

Women and Tradition in Bali

Women’s involvement with tradition was and still is mainly within the sphere of the home, raising a family and making offerings. Luh Ketut Suryani, a Balinese scholar, writes: “In Bali, the primary female role is one of fostering balance and harmony within families.” Women are expected to marry, produce children, and “work as part of a family team” (Suryani 213). An important part of this teamwork is the making of offerings, both simple and elaborate, to be used in daily or special ceremonies. This kind of involvement with tradition is often invisible and frequently discounted by researchers. Emiko Susilo writes:

[Traditional] activities, with the exception of dance, are frequently

peripheralized (if considered at all) in discussions of Balinese arts, not only by Western scholars, but also by many Balinese. This is not because these activities are insignificant. Perhaps because they have generally been activities that take place in non-public spaces, they have been overlooked or have been considered to be of minor importance. (9)

These activities of making offerings for the home, community, and temple ceremonies take many hours. Many of the women I observed were up before dawn, worked all day, and then continued working late into the night. While I was in Bali, I observed that men would occasionally assist with some of these activities at home, in the private sphere, as women's involvement in the public sphere has been expanding.¹⁶

In the past,¹⁷ *wayang kulit*, a public art form, existed outside the usual sphere that accounts for women's relationship to tradition; therefore, women did not only not perform *wayang kulit*, but were rarely part of the audience as well. Hobart, writing in the late 1970s, offers one explanation for this lack of interest:

It is first relevant to recall that a night *wayang* primarily attracts adult men and boys of all ages. It rarely compels the interest or enthusiasm of females. This is in line with the complementary division of the sexes in Balinese society alluded to earlier. Although times are changing, men are ideally still considered responsible for the perpetuation of cultural

¹⁶ For detailed accounts of gender in Bali and the oppression of women through traditional roles, or *adat*, see Parker or Jennaway. They fully describe the inside/outside spheres of influence that I discuss here.

¹⁷ I am purposefully invoking the "past" in a general sense, because there are not continuous historic accounts and details of women and their specific roles in society. The Balinese I've spoken with understand there to be a shift in gender dynamics and social roles that began with independence and continues to expand. This is an area that requires more detailed historic research, but for my purposes a sense of a shift is just as meaningful as an actual quantifiable change in social roles and the arts.

heritage. Particularly as they grow older, men become increasingly concerned with philosophical, religious, and literary matters, and with acquiring verbal fluency. [. . .] In contrast, few intellectual demands were traditionally made on women. In the religious field they mainly had to know how to make the offerings required for rites and festivals. Their duties were primarily in the private sphere of the household. (Hobart 185)

Hobart's observations are consistent with other studies (Zurbachen and Jennaway) and some of the descriptions I heard from friends while in Bali.¹⁸ Presently, the gendered division between public and private spheres is blurring as women not only play in *gamelan* ensembles, dance at ceremonies, and perform in theatre, but also own businesses, work in government offices, and are active in politics. Ni Made Wiratini, a Balinese scholar who teaches at ISI, writes that women are taking over the responsibility for preserving "tradition," often as expressed through the arts, within Balinese culture. She researched women dancers in the area around Denpasar and argues that the reason those women want to perform and work as artists is to perpetuate their culture. The women Wiratini interviewed saw the practice of traditional arts as vital to the maintenance of their identity as Balinese.

As public and private spheres blur, the relationship between gender and the arts is changing as well. Dance in Bali used to be primarily a male activity; girls might dance but they would stop after marriage. Now, in all the classes I observed at the university, at a middle school, or in the village, most of the dancers were girls. In a class of about forty

¹⁸ Lynette Parker observed in her study of gender and school children in Bali that education and its application to the public sphere of business and politics was targeted towards the boys and that girls were steered towards more domestic concerns.

at the university, only eight of the students were men. The male students were not as good as the girls and in the village classes I watched the boys only danced a third as much as the girls. Boys seemed anxious about dancing and had to be coaxed to come over and practice. This was a sharp contrast to the girls, who would watch each other and even dance along so they could learn the “boy’s” dance.

Most explanations for women’s expanding involvement in the arts, including *wayang kulit*, position “tradition” as an object; it is “something” to preserve or it will be lost. This does not account for the function of “tradition” in society, that “tradition” provides a certain kind of power-affect through its production because it is often tied to economic and political power. “Tradition” is not choreography, story, or an object like a puppet, but rather is the meaning that society ascribes to those activities and objects, and it is important to account for the role that “tradition” plays in the structures forming Balinese society and hierarchy.

My concerns regarding the status of women in Balinese society in relation to tradition are echoed by Balinese feminists.¹⁹ One side maintains that gender equality must be realized only within the traditions of Balinese society. For example, Balinese author Luh Ketut Suryani argues that women need to be the safe-keepers of Balinese culture and tradition. She points out that women also deserve gender equality, but the type of “equality” she envisions still relies on traditional divisions of roles. The other view, articulated by Dra Luh Putu Sendratari, calls for women to act out against tradition,

¹⁹ Much has been written about the inherent conflict using the Western term and philosophy of feminism and applying it to women from different cultures, especially to women in the “Third-World” (see Mohanty, Narayan, and others.) In this case, the women I am referring to identify themselves as “feminists” and draw upon Western feminist theory in their analysis.

because, the argument goes, tradition oppresses Balinese women (Creese). The conflict between these two views often becomes overwhelming for Balinese women (see Figure 4). Suryani describes this dilemma:

Outside influences from the West and Java have generated a lot of confusion for Balinese women. Women's rights activists try to get Balinese women to see themselves from the perspective of a different value system. They see Balinese women as second-class citizens who do not inherit, are not free to speak in public, and rarely take a part in politics. The problem is that the values underlying these ideas for emancipation clash with Balinese values and lead to confusion and misunderstanding.

(223)

Suryani expresses concern that women will feel pressured to choose between their "culture" and modernity and cites several cases where this conflict caused great unhappiness for her patients. Suryani urges instead for an understanding of



Figure 4. This cartoon by Surya Darma depicts how Balinese women view the negotiation of modernity and tradition as a balancing act.

emancipation, or women's equality, that embraces rather than challenges Balinese identity (230). In my analysis of women *dalangs* and female puppets I strive to find this kind of middle ground by proposing a more dynamic understanding of tradition and gender in Bali.²⁰

Implications

This overview of tradition in Bali as it is situated amongst history, politics, religion, and identity demonstrates how Balinese culture can be understood as a site of conflict, and that “tradition” is a primary force within this struggle. Leo Howe defines culture in Bali as “the contested outcome of struggles historically constituted. Balinese ‘culture’ and Balinese ‘religion’ are not simply contexts for social action; they are the very issues Balinese are fighting over” (*Hinduism and Hierarchy* 7). He argues for a “theoretical discourse which views cultural practice as polysemic, relational and historically constituted and as an active production of agents located in structures of opportunity and constraint” (*Hinduism and Hierarchy* 8). “Tradition” as an expression of culture in Bali directly relates to power in Balinese society because it constructs identity and provides social and political power that is legitimized through “tradition’s” connection to religion and the past. This connection to power is key in determining the relationship between tradition, *wayang kulit*, and women’s agency. In the next section I will examine in greater detail how *wayang kulit* is constituted and practiced as “tradition” in the present.

²⁰ For more on these two viewpoints and how they have been expressed in the local Balinese media, see Creese.

CHAPTER 3: TRADITION—OBJECT AND PRACTICE

A Performance

On 17 January 2009 I accompanied I Wayan Tunjung to a *wayang kulit* performance he was giving in the village of Mas. It was already dark when I arrived at his house, even though it was just past seven at night. As always, when I went to a performance with Pak Tunjung, I was dressed in *pakian adat* (Figure 5), or “traditional clothes.” I wore a sarong and a brightly colored *kabaya*, which is a type of blouse made out of lace or cotton with lace decoration. Around my waist I wore a sash of a contrasting color.



Figure 5. *Pakian adat*, or "traditional clothing," for a woman and man in Bali. This clothing is worn to the temple, for a party, or for any formal occasion. Photo by J. Goodlander.

I rode my *speda motor*, or small motorbike, to his house. Like all Balinese in traditional clothes, I did not wear a helmet, because the Balinese feel that a helmet is “too modern” and looks “wrong” with traditional clothing. The law reflects this attitude and does not require a helmet with *pakian adat*. Pak Tunjung was sitting in front of his room and invited me to come over and sit with him.

We talked about the performance he was going to give that evening. Pak Tunjung said he had been considering which story to tell. He explained that it was important for a *dalang* to know many stories and to be able to select the appropriate one for each performance. The performance that night was going to be at a family’s compound for a tooth-filing ceremony, often called *matatah* in Balinese, or *potong gigi* in Indonesian, it is an important coming of age ceremony in Bali (Eiseman 108-114).

After we chatted for about half an hour, the musicians arrived and began getting things ready for the performance. They were the ones who packed the box containing the puppets, the four *gender*, oil lamp, the sound system, and other equipment into the car or truck. Pak Tunjung usually checked his puppets earlier in the day to make sure he had the ones needed for the upcoming performance packed in the puppet box. This time he told the musicians that he needed the crocodile puppet that I used earlier for rehearsal. The musicians gathered around to carefully take the crocodile puppet from the box I used for my lessons and put it in the box Pak Tunjung was going to use for the performance. I never saw him use it during the performance, but they thought it was important to have. I was not sure why.

Finally, Pak Tunjung went to bathe and get dressed. He had prayed and given offerings in his family temple earlier in the evening in order to recognize the gods and ask for success before the performance. Pak Tunjung explained that the gods would guide his performance and provide protection from any troublesome spirits or *ilmu penengen*, “black magic.”²¹ At around 8:00 P.M. we piled into the van that Pak Tunjung typically used to get to performances and headed on our way.

I sat in the middle of the crowded front seat with the driver and Pak Tunjung, while the musicians, additional assistants, puppets, and equipment rode in the back. The location for this performance was only about ten minutes away. When he was younger, Pak Tunjung would travel all night to give performances, often giving two or three a night, almost every night of the week. Since having a family, he performed less often and preferred to stay closer to home.

We pulled up in front of the compound and got out of the van. It was very dark, but I could hear the sound of a river running along the road. The men unpacked the vehicle and I followed Pak Tunjung. Inside the compound we were led to a *bale*, or covered platform, and asked to sit on a blue carpet that was laid out; meanwhile, a man in a sarong and a mismatched batik shirt came over. He was a good friend of Pak Tunjung’s

²¹ Balinese religious and spiritual beliefs are based on the balance between negative and positive forces in the universe, and that these forces are contained and controlled through human intervention such as ritual. These forces are called *ilmu pengiwa* and *ilmu penengen*, in Balinese, or *ilmu putih* and *ilmu hitam* in Indonesian, which mean “white magic” and “black magic” respectfully. In my interviews and interaction with Balinese they almost exclusively used the term “black magic,” even when we were not conversing in English. I believe they used the English term because of the real fear of attracting these forces if one would call attention to them by using the Balinese or Indonesian term. Out of respect for that convention, I will continue to use the term “black magic” in this dissertation, even though I am aware that it contains unintended meaning in the west. In order to point out my use of this term in English I will put it in quotes to remind the reader that it is a specifically Balinese concept that I am invoking. For more on “black magic” in Bali see Angela Hobart’s *Healing Performances of Bali: Between Darkness and Light* or I Wayan Kardji’s *Ilmu Hitam dari Bali*. I hope to address the connections between “magic” and *wayag kulit* further in a later study.

and they were happy to see each other. Later Pak Tunjung explained that since having a family, it was much harder to make it around to visit friends. Often Pak Tunjung decided to accept a performance opportunity because it allowed him to see people he knew, exchange local gossip, and visit old acquaintances.



Figure 6. Pak Tunjung and a couple of his musicians wait outside his house as everyone finishes getting ready to go to the performance. Photo by J. Goodlander.

Soon several women came over with coffee and little Balinese cakes made of rice and palm sugar. Pak Tunjung and I were given separate trays with coffee and two cakes, but the musicians and assistants were served on one large common tray that had many coffees and cakes. Another tray was brought with cigarettes as well. The musicians often made a joke of offering cigarettes to me, and then laughing when I turned them down. I always waited to have anything until Pak Tunjung indicated that I should drink

the coffee and eat. He ate and drank very little that night, and I remembered earlier he mentioned that his stomach was sick and he was worried about making it through the performance. Afterwards he commented to me that during the show he did not think about his stomach, but only focused on the performance.

At approximately half past nine, we moved over to the playing area. The screen was set up on the compound's central *bale*, next to an elaborate altar with many decorations and offerings. Usually the central platform in a compound serves as a place to receive and sit with guests or family, and during a ceremony it is the space used to welcome the gods. Behind the screen there was a large altar with many offerings together with all of the things needed for the performance. It was not a very large platform and I had to perch off to the side next to the musicians. Several kids and adults gathered around to watch the *dalang* get set up, but throughout the performance people moved between the two sides of the screen quite a bit. During the performance the audience watched small bits, wandered away, and later came back. I don't think anyone sat still for the entire performance. I moved to the front after the characters entered and started talking, but I returned to my spot behind the screen right before the fighting scene started. Figure 7 shows what it looks like behind the screen for a typical *wayang kulit* performance.

The children liked watching the beginning as the puppets were taken out of the box, but once the characters began talking, most of the children wandered away. During the performance, I could hear the sound of a video game being played nearby and it occurred to me that the beeping music of the game was an odd contrast to the puppet

show. The most interested audience members were the old people. At one time the kids were joking with an old man right next to the screen and a group of younger adults sat off to the side loudly talking and drinking tea during the performance; sometimes kids would even run up and touch the screen or play with the puppets. It was never quiet during a *wayang kulit* performance.



Figure 7. Backstage during a *wayang kulit* performance. Photo by J. Goodlander.

The women who served us coffee earlier hardly had time to sit still and watch because they continued to work in the kitchen or adjust the offerings. Once the fight scene at the end of the performance began, many of the children and adults crowded around the screen to watch.

Sangut and Delam, two of the clowns, or *panasars*, performed a comic scene that was one of the highlights of the performance. I could not catch all of the dialogue, but it had something to do with being sick and going to the hospital. During that scene the chatter erupted into laughter and cheers in response to the joking of the clowns. At one point everyone burst into applause at a clever remark Delam made.

After almost three hours of performance, the *kayonan* returned to the center of the screen and the musicians played one last melody as Pak Tunjung and his assistants returned the puppets to their box. Offerings were brought so that the *dalang* could bless the screen, the puppets, and the *gender*. Holy water was sprinkled around and finally Pak Tunjung pulled out the center pin rooting the screen to the banana log, an action that signified the ritual was over. Pak Tunjung went off to the side to sit and talk with the sponsors of the performance, while the musicians and the assistants finished packing and loading up the van. The sponsors thanked him for the performance and gave him a small basket that contained a flower offering and money. Pak Tunjung put the money in his pocket and a flower behind his ear, and he gave his host a flower from the basket as well.

After a few more minutes of conversation, Pak Tunjung begged, "*Permisi, mau pulang. Tamu saya capai.*" ("Excuse us, we need to go home. The guest I brought is tired.") We stood, found our shoes, and returned to the van. After we returned to Pak Tunjung's house, the assistants had to unload everything and carry it back inside. I got on my motorbike to leave, and Pak Tunjung reminded me, as he always did, to drive slowly and to drive safely. Before going to bed, he gave the puppets additional offerings and prayed to thank the gods for the successful performance.

Tradition, Art, and Structures of Power

The performance I just described could be explained in many ways as a very “traditional” or “typical”²² performance of *wayang kulit*, meaning that it maintains certain conventions, or as Pak Tunjung would say, “basics,” over time. In the performance, and the practice of *wayang kulit*, “tradition” is constantly being produced and reproduced.

Handler and Linnekin provide a framework for thinking about “tradition” in this way:

that there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and inseparable from the interpretation of tradition in the present. [. . .]

We would broaden [Hobsbawm’s] insight and argue that the invention of tradition is not restricted to such self-conscious projects. Rather, the ongoing reconstruction of tradition is a facet of all social life, which is not natural but symbolically constituted. (276)

All parts of social life, and therefore culture and society, have tradition, and it is always being recreated and reconstituted. The key is to recognize how Balinese society and culture symbolically constitute its traditions because tradition is not so much a key to the past as the door to the present. Tradition “resembles less an artificial assemblage than a process of thought — an ongoing interpretation of the past” (Handler and Linnekin 274).

Handler and Linnekin conclude by arguing that it is not possible to separate spurious from genuine tradition because social life is always symbolically constructed and therefore tradition is constantly being reinvented in the present (281). *Wayang kulit* in

²² “Traditional” is not the same thing as “tradition,” although it implies a value judgment regarding something’s status or acceptability as “tradition.” In order to minimize confusion, I will opt to use the term “typical” rather than “traditional” except in cases where I am quoting the observations or judgments of others. When doing so, I will put the word “traditional” in quotations to remind the reader of the difference between “tradition” and “traditional.”

Bali is one such case where tradition is being symbolically constructed because the exact performance, and even more importantly, the understanding of that performance, is always changing.

A “tradition” like *wayang kulit* must be studied at the level of the expert, or artist. Studying only the objects and act of performance as separate from the individual artist perpetuates the notion that *wayang kulit* is a fixed tradition. Asian theatre scholar Joan Erdman notes that studying performance through the performer reveals how “tradition” changes with the intervention of the artist:

Recognition of a continuum of change in the arts — rather than a sharp shift from “traditional” to “modern”— and the use of performing arts for political and social messages and value transmission create questions for scholars which arise from the performers themselves. [. . .] Furthermore, artistic traditions, however preserved and matured, are not rigid rituals. They are vigorous or lethargic, virile or languid, continually undergoing change because of their embodiment in new artists as well as the aging of mature artists. Each tradition resides in its artists. Artists are persons of their times, and their arts are affected by their involvement in or detachment from contemporary events. (113)

I am able to study the way “tradition” is constituted and practiced in *wayang kulit* because of my access to artists. This access, together with my own study of the “tradition” of *wayang kulit*, expands and limits my perspective.

The theories of Pierre Bourdieu provide a framework and vocabulary for understanding the complicated relationship between social practices (in this case, *wayang kulit*) and social hierarchy. Randal Johnson explains that “in Bourdieu’s theory, symbolic aspects of social life are inseparably intertwined with material conditions of existence, without one being reducible to the other” (4). The material conditions of existence are the systems of hierarchy such as race, class, and gender. The symbolic aspects of social life are the systems and objects that perpetuate the material conditions; they are not the same thing but one should be considered in relation to the other. Thus, Bourdieu provides a framework for my consideration of how *wayang kulit*, in both its objects and practice, is intertwined with systems of gender hierarchy in Bali.

Bourdieu’s notion of “habitus” provides a way for analyzing the complex relationship between “tradition” and social hierarchy, or structures of society. Bourdieu defines habitus as:

Durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express of mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of an organizing action of a conductor. (*Logic of Practice* 53)

“Tradition” is one of the principles that are organized unconsciously within society, but because of this constant reordering, “tradition” is always changing in relationship to the society to which it belongs. “Tradition” has currency because of its links to the “past,” but its meaning is always being produced in the present. The community adheres to “tradition” without questioning it or having a “conscious aiming at ends” (*Logic of Practice* 53). The structures of society are always changing, and likewise, tradition adjusts, and I argue, can also affect those changes.

In the next section of this chapter I am going to demonstrate how knowledge and mastery of various aspects of *wayang kulit* are then constituted as “tradition” in Balinese society. Inspired by Matthew Isaac Cohen’s call for analysis rather than descriptive accounts (*Performing Arts Across Borders*), I will focus on key elements of *wayang kulit* rather than attempt to do an exhaustive account of all the aesthetics and concerns involved in a *wayang kulit* performance.

The Puppet Box

Wayang kulit is not just the performance, but includes the many objects required for a performance, such as the puppets, the box in which they are kept, musical instruments, the screen, sound system, oil lamp, and anything else. These objects have meaning and status as “traditional” because of their use. The box or chest that the puppets are kept in (Figure 8), often called the *kropak* or *gedog*, is a good example of how an object acquires its meaning through practice in *wayang kulit*. The puppet chest is usually made out of the wood from the Jack Fruit tree, which is a rich honey color or darker. The measurements of the box are approximately ninety-eight centimeters long

and twenty-four centimeters deep, and the front side, at forty-nine centimeters, is shorter than the back side, which is fifty-nine centimeters. There is a lid that slides open on top of the box; typically, this lid is simple with a wood frame around the outside.

“In order to be a *dalang*, one must have a puppet box,” proclaimed Pak Tunjung on more than one occasion. Often around Bali, when I revealed that I was studying puppets or that I was a *dalang* (I realize there are implications in my claiming that title, and I will explore these in greater detail in a later chapter), Balinese people would ask me if I had a box. When I confirmed that yes I did, they would nod that yes then I must be a *dalang*. Occasionally, I would even get asked if I might perform for a ceremony at their temple sometime. Another time Pak Tunjung said that a friend wanted to borrow some



Figure 8. My puppet box. Unlike most boxes, it has ornate carving around the lid. Photo by J. Goodlander.

“In order to be a *dalang*, one must have a puppet box,” proclaimed Pak Tunjung on more than one occasion. Often around Bali, when I revealed that I was studying puppets or that I was a *dalang* (I realize there are implications in my claiming that title, and I will explore these in greater detail in a later chapter), Balinese people would ask me if I had a box. When I confirmed that yes I did, they would nod that yes then I must be a *dalang*. Occasionally, I would even get asked if I might perform for a ceremony at their temple sometime. Another time Pak Tunjung said that a friend wanted to borrow some puppet and also borrow his box. He let his friend borrow a few puppets but would not let him use the box, because as Pak Tunjung explained, it was necessary to own your own box in order to perform. The object and its use give the *dalang* his status as a performer.

Hobart writes that the box is often a family heirloom that is passed down from generation to generation; as it does this, it is believed to gain *taksu*, or spiritual power, from each subsequent generation (33). *Taksu*, which is related to age and use, then becomes an important qualifier for understanding something as “tradition” in Bali. The older the puppet chest and the puppets contained within, the more power these items are believed by the Balinese to possess for ritual and performance, and the *dalang*, as the holder of that puppet box and the one who conducts the performance, is therefore given status within Balinese society. A ceremony called *mesakapan*, which means “to marry,” is often conducted. This ceremony connects the *dalang* to his chest and puppets, confirming their status as sacred objects for his performance. Pak Tunjung had two boxes: one is old and from his grandfather, and the other one he commissioned to have constructed.

Early in my training, Pak Tunjung declared that I must have a box made, which is not a simple or quick process. First the proper wood had to be selected. Pak Tunjung wanted to find wood that was of a consistent quality and that would make a satisfying sound when struck during the performance. When he was having my box made he was uncertain about the size because he first thought that maybe a smaller box would be easier for me to use and transport, but then he realized that a smaller box might not fit the puppets or make a proper sound. After finding and buying the wood, he went to a friend who made boxes. Pak Tunjung visited his friend often while it was being completed to make sure that the work matched his specifications. He sometimes complained that he was worried that his friend would substitute wood of a poorer quality for the wood that was supposed to be used for my box. Pak Tunjung did not tell his friend that the box was being made for a foreigner, the implication being that a box commissioned by an outsider might not be given the same care as one commissioned by a Balinese *dalang*. Finally, months later, I was able to use the box in rehearsal.

Pak Tunjung decided he was not completely satisfied with our boxes because he wanted them to stand out and mark his performance as special; therefore, he had a friend, Pak Konrad, carve designs into the boxes. Initially, my box did not have thick enough wood around the frame for carving, and as a solution, Pak Konrad carved the designs into separate pieces of wood that were then attached to the box later. The decorated boxes often drew comments from spectators who appreciated how “rich” they look. Several people offered to purchase my box before I was able to arrange for it to be shipped home to me in the United States, but Pak Tunjung refused to sell it and kept it for me. Even

though the carving is a new addition, I've never seen other boxes similarly decorated; a frequent comment from audience members was about the "traditional" Balinese designs of flowers on the boxes. Marking my box as "traditional," even though it was a new innovation, demonstrates how tradition is a value judgment rather than an indication of age or a connection to the past.

Pak Tunjung said that the real value of my box was not in its fine appearance, but in that it also made a very good sound. The long side of the box that faces the *dalang* is hinged so that the side will swing loose. It does this so that when the *dalang* strikes it with the *cepala*, a small hammer that he holds between his toes, it will make a variety of sounds. If the *dalang* strikes the chest with the *cepala* only, the loose side also swings in and echoes the percussion sound, making a loud *tak-tak*. If he strikes the box with the entire surface of his foot, his heel and the *cepala*, the side swings in and reinforces the sounds of the percussion. The different options of striking the box each indicate a different cue to the musicians that will start or stop music. For example, a single *tak*, where only the *cepala* strikes to box, indicates that a character is going to speak. The foot and *cepala* striking the box simultaneously, making a *blak*, ends a sequence of action. The *cepala* and the heel might alternate striking the box to make a quick rhythm. More complicated patterns accompany fighting, singing, walking, and so on (Rubin and Sedana 34-35).

During one lesson, while I was practicing coordinating striking the box with the *cepala* held in my foot together with the movement of the puppets on the screen, Pak Tunjung decided he was not satisfied with the sound. He went to get some safety pins

and washers and used the safety pin to slide out the fastener that holds the swinging side of the box in place so he could adjust the number of washers holding it aloft, thus allowing it to swing. He disassembled and reassembled the box several times before he was satisfied, but finally, it made a clear, loud sound when struck by my foot. Several times during the months of my study he made similar adjustments. When I was preparing to return home, he told me that the box would work well for me in America because I was able to use it in Bali. The history of activity gave the box its identity as a good box, which in turn reinforced my identity as a *dalang*.

Puppets

The puppets, called *wayang* or *ringgit*, are the most prominent part of Balinese *wayang kulit*. They are the primary tools of the *dalang* for conveying the story. Pak Tunjung explained that the *dalang*'s relationship to his puppets is like that of a god to his creations, because the *dalang* decides who will live, who will die, and what actions the characters will take in the story. The *dalang* calls the puppets to life at the beginning of the performance, puts them to sleep at its end, and must care for his puppets. Like the puppet box, a *dalang* goes through a ceremony "marrying" him to the puppets (I will describe this ceremony in greater detail in a later chapter). Each day the puppets must be given offerings, and once a year on *Tumpek Wayang* a special ceremony is held with elaborate offerings. Hobart observes, "*Dalangs* say that if they do not take care of the puppets properly the gods or the ancestors may be affronted and punish them so that they become ill. It is also thought dangerous for a *dalang* to sell a puppet which has become consecrated" (68). Pak Tunjung warned me that I must not ever sell my puppets and to

use caution in allowing others to use them. He also promised to get in touch with me near *Tumpek Wayang* so that I would be sure to know how to properly honor my puppets. These practices do not mean that the Balinese regard the puppets as a kind of “god” or “spirit,” but rather I believe that the Balinese are honoring the “tradition” that those puppets represent. They are sacred objects because of their use in performance; they have *taksu*, and therefore it is necessary to honor that *taksu* through daily offerings.

Design and Color

Hobart asserts that the iconography of the puppets is unchanging and full of meaning: “The puppets are made according to a fixed scheme laid down in antiquity and sanctified by the force of tradition. This determines their forms, costume, and skin colors” (67). Hobart reifies the iconography of the puppets as “fixed” and parrots an appraisal of “tradition” that is timeless. My experience in Bali confirmed that there are recognizable characters and characteristics of the puppets, but that these are, however, by no means static. Puppet carvers and *dalangs* often experiment and add subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, variations,²³ often in response to the changing aesthetics of the audience and in relation to how those aesthetics are understood in Balinese society.

The first time I met Pak Tunjung he showed me a *kayonan*, a puppet sometimes called “the tree of life,” which is used to begin a performance and mark each of the three main sections of the story. He had recently finished creating the *kayonan* and proclaimed

²³ My colleague A.J. Predisik confirmed that this is also the case in Java. He worked with a puppet carver who determined that the old style of one puppet, Srikandi (a warrior who is born a woman but takes on the characteristics of a man), was not masculine enough. He developed a design that gave Srikandi pants and male decoration rather than a female costume. This new design became popular and was the one A.J. witnessed for sale in the tourist shops; but an older set of puppets would have the first design. His story demonstrated again how “tradition” changes according to both aesthetic preference and fluctuating perceptions about a character in different moments of history.

that the design was his own invention (Figure 9). This *kayonan* had the figure of Acintya carved in the center. Typically, Acintya is a separate puppet that is often placed in the center of the *kayonan* at the beginning and ending of a performance. Pak Tunjung did not often perform with this new *kayonan*, but would include it in his set, placing it to the side of the screen during performance as evidence of his innovation.



Figure 9. Pak Tunjung shows the *kayonan* he designed with the figure of Acintya in the center. On the right he holds a "traditional" *kayonan* that he also made. Photo by J. Goodlander.

Pak Tunjung often carved his own puppets, but most *dalangs* buy them from a *tukang wayang*, someone who specializes in making puppets. In addition to working with Pak Tunjung, I also studied puppet making with I Wayan Artawa, who learned how to carve from his father and every afternoon had several neighborhood children, mostly

boys, over to learn how to carve. Pak Artawa explained that it was important to him that there would be others after him to carry on the tradition after he was gone.

Puppet carvers take their designs from existing puppets. Pak Artawa often traced his designs from the other puppets in his collection. He would place the piece of leather over the pattern, hold them both up to the sunlight and would then use a felt tip marker to trace the design onto the leather (Figure 9). Many of the details were left out; they were added in as the puppet was carved. One day I was working on carving *ukil*, a design motif that is common in many puppets; it resembles a teardrop that is filled with little half-moons. I carved the outside first and then worked on filling the inside. Pak Artawa explained that it was acceptable if I did not follow the lines of the design, but instead it was important that the carvings worked with each other. Even the small details, such as the *ukil*, must work together in balance and harmony.

Hobart remarks, “A puppet craftsman should be seen not as an innovator, but as the guardian of a cultural tradition in which his role is subordinated to that of socially dictated ideals” (69). On one hand, she is correct that *tukang wayang* work within the established aesthetic set by the audience and *dalangs* who desire their puppets to conform to a certain standard of taste. But this does not mean that there is only one way to carve particular puppet. I’ve seen many variations of size, color, and ornament for the same character. Presently, puppet carvers will often borrow other people’s puppets and make photocopies of them for patterns, and then other puppet makers borrow designs and ideas from those photocopies. This new method allows ideas to be easily shared from one artist to another, but perhaps the accuracy of electronic reproduction will eventually lead

to designs becoming more static than they might have been if puppet makers continued to rely on memory to copy designs.



Figure 10. Pak Artawa shows two of the unpainted puppets that he keeps to use as patterns. Photo by J. Goodlander.

Some *dalangs* are known for their drastic innovations²⁴ to the designs of their puppets.²⁵ I Wayan Wijia introduced new puppets (such as a dinosaur and other highly articulated animal puppets) into traditional *wayang*. He also developed new puppet forms such as *wayang tantri*, which focuses on Balinese versions of the animal fables

²⁴ When the Balinese artists I worked with spoke of a noticeable change from the typical, they would call these changes “*inovasi*” or “innovations.” This term seems to show that they are recognizing this change as a break from the “tradition,” and yet they approve of this change as keeping with the intentions of that “tradition.” I only use the term innovation when it has been given to me in the context of my research.

²⁵ I provide a detailed analysis of the iconography of the puppets in chapter four.

known in India as the *Pancatantra* (Cohen, *Contemporary Wayang* 356). These puppets have additional rods, strings, and sometimes even motorized parts to aid their movements. Pak Wijia's designs and style of puppetry are being copied so that he is no longer the only one performing *wayang tantri*.²⁶ Pak Tunjung, who studied with Pak Wijia, was invited twice to perform this style and had to borrow puppets while he worked to make his own. Before the performance, Pak Tunjung complained that he was not as good as Pak Wijia at performing *wayang tantri*, but the next day he boasted that the sponsors praised his performance as being "better than Wijia." I believe these comments demonstrate that Pak Tunjung recognizes the importance of the tradition as established by Pak Wijia, and that he was able to adapt the "taste" of this new tradition and execute the performance with skill.

After carving, the next step is to paint the puppets, but someone other than the puppet carver usually paints the puppets. In the past, paints were made from natural materials and each color required many layers; it was a time-consuming process (Hobart 79). The painters I observed now all use acrylic paints purchased from the store because these paints not only allow the painter to complete the puppets in less time, but also allowed for more brilliant and longer-lasting colors. Whether the paint is made from natural ingredients or purchased at a store, as a puppet ages and is exposed to the flame in performance, it loses its color and often appears a dark brown. Many tourist shops will take puppets of lesser quality and "age" them so they can be sold as antiques.

²⁶ *Wayang tantri* is the story of a clever girl who tells 1,001 stories about animals to prevent the king from seducing her.

Quality

The quality of the puppet is an important consideration for a *dalang*, because it affects how the puppet moves, how easily it is manipulated, how long the puppet will last, and the details of the carving. I met Pak Artawa at the Museum Puri Lukisan, where I took a class to learn more about carving and painting a puppet. When I arrived he was sitting at a table in the garden with several puppets in a stand for display. Pak Artawa began by showing me the difference between the puppets. Even though they were of the same character, Bima, they were of vastly different quality. One was very small and the details were few and large, while the other one was much larger and had many more fine details carved into the body. Pak Artawa explained that the finer details cast a much better shadow on the puppet screen and would make the puppet appear “alive” or *hidup*.

Pak Artawa then showed me a few samples of leather. Balinese *wayang kulit* are carved out of cowhide and he explained that it was important to know how to pick the right leather for carving a puppet. The smaller Bima was made out of leather that was too thin; it would not hold a large design or fine details. Pak Artawa said the best leather was of a yellowish color with the same thickness throughout and that it needed to be stiff with some give. Another time, I was at Pak Tunjung’s when a leather seller visited with several pieces for him to choose from. Each piece of leather was approximately four feet by five feet. Pak Tunjung looked at every one carefully before choosing the one he wanted. Both Pak Tunjung and Pak Artawa emphasized to me the importance of having quality materials in order to make quality puppets.

Puppets should have long lives; a puppet that has been around for a long time is said to have a lot of spiritual power, or *taksu*. At one performance, for a family celebrating the final stages of a cremation ceremony, Pak Tunjung was given a very old puppet that had been in the family for generations (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Pak Tunjung is given an old puppet that has been in the family for generations. The puppet contained a great deal of *taksu*. Photo by J. Goodlander.

The puppet was kept in the family temple and given daily offerings. The family wanted it to be part of this ceremony because the person who had died was born on *Tumpak Wayang*; this is a dangerous day to be born because it is the day celebrating the birth of the puppets. People born on *Tumpak Wayang* must hold special ceremonies to ask the

puppet gods, known as *sanghyang ringgit*,²⁷ for forgiveness or else they will be plagued with illness and misfortune in this life and the next.

The old puppet was carried out on a platter and was hidden under a white cloth by some of the older members of the family sponsoring the performance. When they got to the area behind the screen, Pak Tunjung took the puppet. He later told me that when he touched the puppet it was as if a jolt of electricity went through his body. One of his assistants, sitting to his left side, began to shake; he was made dizzy by the power contained in the puppet. Pak Tunjung wanted to respect the puppet, but he also wanted to be able to give a good performance. So after blessing the puppet and giving it offerings, he set it to the side for the show. It was never used—but it stood at the edge of the stage like an additional silent audience member. At the end of the performance it was placed next to the *kayonan* for the ceremony to make holy water (a major priestly function of the *dalang* is to make holy water). Finally, the ancient puppet was recovered and carried back to its place in the temple.

Pak Tunjung explained that if a puppet contained enough *taksu*, it did not need to be used in a performance to have a positive effect. Often he would receive requests from people in the village to either sit near or meditate close to his puppets. Many of his puppets were very old and used in performance for a couple of generations; when he used them in performance it appeared as though some of them were in danger of falling apart.

²⁷ The Balinese generally speak about “puppet gods,” as if there is more than one puppet god. As I mentioned in the preface, Balinese and Indonesian are often unclear when it comes to establishing whether words are plural or singular. Because of this I have chosen to retain the plural, because when it was talked about in English this is the form that was used. However, the precise relationship and identity between the puppets god(s) and the puppets as objects is one that requires more research next time I am in Bali.

One important skill of a *dalang* is the ability to judge the quality of a puppet and the materials it is made of; his reputation is often connected to this ability. The criteria of a desirable puppet, like other elements in a performance, are not fixed. One day when I visited the ISI, I met a student in the *pendalangan* program (the name of the program that studies *wayang kulit*.) He was focusing his studies on how to make the puppets and was well-known for his beautiful and innovative designs. In fact, he received orders from many of the other students who desired his puppets. He showed me pictures of some of his puppets (on his digital camera.) At first glance these puppets looked Balinese, but closer inspection revealed that he was greatly influenced by Javanese puppets. The student included some of the elongated features and carving motifs that characterize the Javanese puppets as different from the Balinese ones. He said that the size of the puppets was bigger as well and that the *dalang* students at campus liked his puppets because they included the best from both of the styles.²⁸

Performance: Voice and Movement

The two primary elements in performance are the movement of the puppets on the screen and the *dalang*'s voice. Both of these elements work together with the music and depend on the other physical objects. Even more so than the actual puppets or other objects, a *dalang* is judged by his vocal and physical skills.

As I studied *wayang kulit*, I discovered that learning the art of puppetry happens in layers. In my first classes we covered the basics of a sequence of movement for the first *kayonan* dance. Every time I felt like I had finally learned a section, it changed because as I improved, Pak Tunjung increased the amount of material I needed to know

²⁸ The students in the *pendalang* program study both Balinese and Javanese *wayang kulit*.

and it would invariably become more complicated. A *wayang kulit* performance becomes longer and fuller as additional details are added.

The beginning of the performance was the opening of a ritual and through the incantation, “*sanghyang ringgit amlah cara,*” the *dalang* calls down the god of the puppets. This moment was an important part of the ritual, but I learned that it was also an important moment for establishing myself as a capable *dalang*. Pak Tunjung explained that the audience is watching the *kayonan* and listening to the singing and judging the *dalang*. The audience may even decide whether or not to stay for the performance at this point. If the *kayonan* is not good, and if the voice is not good, then the audience might determine the performance will not be good. These “nonstory” aspects are important for establishing the *dalang*’s expertise and skill as a performer. Pak Tunjung told me, “*kalau tidak bagus pemonton piker ‘bagaimana?’*” (“If this part isn’t good the audience will think ‘how is the rest going to be?’”) The opening is an opportunity for a *dalang* to show his vocal range because it includes the voice of every character. No matter how much I learned, we always went back to review the opening since it could always be better.

Each character in a *wayang kulit* performance must have a distinct voice, which requires a strong voice from the *dalang*. Pak Tunjung often sent me home with a puppet a few weeks before we began to incorporate it into a scene. He explained that I should spend time with the puppet and discover the “correct” voice for that character. In my room I played around with the puppet, making him speak to the ants in my room or the rabbits in the garden. I also had a recording of Pak Tunjung giving voice to the puppet

because it was important to learn the correct pitch and speed for the puppet's voice while making it my own. The *dalang* must share his or her own voice with the puppet. Pak Tunjung was happy with the voice I used for Twalin, one of the *panasar* or clowns. He cautioned me, "Do not ever use a Twalin puppet larger than that. Your voice will not match. The size of the voice must be appropriate for the size of the puppet."

After working on the opening and the *kayonan* dances, the next section I studied was the entrance of the puppets. There is a song called *Alas Arum* that accompanies the characters as they move onto the screen and greet each other. Pak Tunjung would sigh as he told me that I was still doing this section too fast. He explained that it was important for the movement of the puppets, the music of the *gender*, striking to box with the *cepala*, and my singing to all go together. I reset the puppets and we tried it again.

Hobart writes that the puppets "dance" on the stage or screen (35), but dancing is only one of many different movement styles a *dalang* must master because the puppets also walk, crawl, bow, sit, and fight. Refined characters, those that are *alus* like Arjuna or Kresna, move slowly and with grace, their arms are rarely raised above their head. *Kasar*, or unrefined characters, like a *raksasa* (ogre), make big sweeping movements across the screen. Most female puppets make small movements as they travel gently across the screen. Female puppets have a "dancing" scene and it is difficult to master the graceful movements.

The movements of the four clowns, or *panasar*, are individualistic (Figure 12). Twalin and Merdah are from the right, or the "good" side, while Delam, and Sangut are

from the left or “bad” side.²⁹ Twalin moves slowly, often both of his arms moving from side to side, bent at the elbow, as he walks; this is a movement that is difficult to master. Merdeh moves like Twalin, but faster. Delam moves very quickly and often leaps around the stage. As he talks he looks quickly from right to left and must always be in motion. Sangut is slower and has a sleepy walk. His arms might move from side to side but they



Figure 12. The *panasar* (from left to right): Sangut, Dalem, Twalin, and Merdah

hang down as he goes. These four characters are the primary storytellers, comedians, and conduits for philosophy. They spend the most time on stage and provide means for the *dalang* to demonstrate his sharp wit, moral character, and physical humor. I spent the most time practicing their movement and voices.

²⁹ A key structure in Balinese Hinduism is based on the ideal of balance; therefore, it is not accurate to label one set of characters “good” or another set “bad.” Often the division of refined, *alus*, and unrefined, *kasar*, is preferred. Each is understood as necessary and important parts of the human character.

Fighting is the next important skill for a *dalang* and these scenes feature puppets shooting arrows and grappling; they are at the end of the performance. Fight scenes are very popular with audiences. A *dalang* needs to be able to move many puppets across the screen with detailed motions in time to the music and the beating of the *cepala*, and also incorporate comedy and character as distinct elements. In one such scene a funny-looking *raksasa* is cleverly catching arrows in his mouth and eating them, even as the arrows come quickly one after another. All of a sudden a large rock comes his way instead of an arrow. He catches it in his mouth but is unable to bite down on the hard object. Instead, he ends up spitting out the rock with many of his teeth before turning and running away. A similar scene shows Dalem kicking away at the enemy and knocking them off the screen; he is successful until he happens upon a large rock. With a cry, Dalem stubs his toe and hops whimpering off the screen. A *dalang* must be able to judge his audience and mix the right amount of comedy, philosophy, and excitement through the movement of his puppets.

Story

The content of a performance, and the selection of that content, are other important skills for a *dalang* that are based within “tradition.” The stories come from many different sources, but the *Mahabharata* is the most common source material. These performances are called *wayang parwa*. Others popular types are *wayang Ramayana* (based on the *Ramayana* epic), *wayang cupak* (based on Balinese myths), *wayang Arja* (based on Panjii stories), and many others. Each kind has different musical accompaniments and might be appropriate for different occasions.

It is important for a *dalang* to select the proper play for each performance. The things to consider in this process are: “the event for which the *wayang* performance is being held, the location of the performance, the anticipated audience, the individual or group commissioning the play, past relations between the *wayang* troupe and the audience/client, recent events in the locality, current social and political preoccupations, and so forth” (Zurbuchen 232). The *dalang* will start to consider which story to use soon after he is requested to give the performance.

One time when I met Pak Tunjung before a performance he told me that he wanted to tell the story about when the Pandawas were exiled to the forest. According to the story, while the Pandawas were there, an evil king plotted to burn down the forest in order to kill the Pandawas. He was a very selfish king because destroying the forest would also murder the families and animals that live there; however, the king is defeated after a long battle and has nothing in the end. Pak Tunjung explained the story was about the importance of being content with what life gives you. The king had many riches but was still jealous of the Pandawa brothers and this jealousy led to his downfall; in contrast, the Pandawas lived in the forest and had very little but they were still happy.

Later that evening as I watched the story I was surprised to see a different adventure and on the way home Pak Tunjung apologized for changing the story. He explained that he did not have his usual assistants and was worried that these assistants were not very good. He did not think they would have been able to keep up with the planned story so at the last minute he changed his mind. A *dalang* must know enough stories and be able to read the conditions of the performance and be able to adjust.

Before we left that evening the hosts congratulated Pak Tunjung on his performance.

Even with the last minute adjustment, the performance was a success.

Tradition and Innovation

Pak Tunjung told me that for his exam to graduate from the ISI he had to give a performance. He began the performance by sitting in front of the puppet screen. He wanted to answer the questions: “Who is the *wayang*?” “Where does the shadow puppet come from?” “Why does Bali have special puppets for ceremony?” “For the audience?” “In order to complete the ceremony?” In his left hand he held a cabbage and in his right hand a carrot. He said the cabbage was a *Raksasa* (ogre) and the carrot was Arjuna. He demonstrated how they would each make different sounds. “*Wayang* is like that,” he explained, “it is like a herder who takes a rest under the coconut tree.” He took a napkin and used it to act out the stories of Twalin and Merdeh. To continue the story Pak Tunjung moved behind the screen to use the puppets; he showed the herder with his cows and completed the story. He then demonstrated how the music, voice, *cepala*, and movement of the puppets combined to make the screen vibrate with life. “All these things together are important,” he told me, “but everything needs to come from the heart: the power from the heart, that is first.” Pak Tunjung’s comment demonstrates that within the “tradition” of *wayang kulit*, the *dalang* is still an artist.

Leon Rubin and I Nyoman Sedana write about how *wayang kulit* must adapt and change. The creative element in *wayang kulit* is called *kawi dalang*: “the creativity (*kawi*) of the puppet master (*dalang*)” (Leon and Sedana 17). It is important that each performance is new or different from the previous performance; a *dalang* cannot just give

the same performance over and over or the audience would become bored. A *dalang* must know enough stories, philosophy, and know about his art to please many different audiences in many different circumstances: “*Kawi dalang* demands that each performance changes in accordance with the fluctuating place-time-circumstances, *desa-kala-patra*” (17).

One well-known *dalang*, I Wayan Nardayana, illustrated the use of innovation within his performances. For one performance I saw, traffic began to get really thick as my friend Kadek and I drove up to the field where the performance was going to be held. Searchlights pierced the sky and rock music blared over the speakers. Booths selling food and trinkets sat on one end of the field and the large screen was set up on the other. In front of the screen was a rock band performing on a stage. On each side was a large screen showing a video of the rock band and later they would televise the shadow puppet performance so the large audience would be able to see. I Wayan Nardayana, better known as Cenk Blong, is one of the best known and most popular *dalangs* in Bali. The atmosphere was like a rock concert.

Wayang Cenk Blong follows the typical structure³⁰ of a *wayang kulit* performance but is known for his clever humor, female singers, large musical ensemble, and special technical effects. He uses strobe lights, a smoke machine, and colored lights; his screen and puppets are also much larger than the usual size. The performance was sponsored by ABC Coffee, a popular brand of instant coffee, which had a large tent set up to the left of the stage with free samples (Figure 13). Several times during the performance the *panasars* would mention ABC Coffee as part of the action. About halfway through the

³⁰ I will discuss the structure of a performance in great detail in a later chapter.

performance there was an “intermission” with filmed commercials for ABC Coffee and a trivia contest testing audience member’s knowledge of Balinese history to give away prizes of baskets of coffee.



Figure 13. A large banner hangs by the side of the road to advertise an upcoming performance of *wayang Cenk Blong*. Photo by J. Goodlander.



Figure 14. A large crowd watches *wayang Cenk Blong*. Photo by J. Goodlander.

The next day I went with some friends to a temple, who also had seen *Wayang Cenk Blong* the night before and we talked about the performance. One of my friends, Ketut, admitted that he was disappointed. Ketut felt that *Cenk Blong* has been too busy performing in these kinds of commercial productions and has lost touch with the Balinese people. Ketut complained that the dialogue no longer combined philosophy, politics, and comedy and was instead too reliant on comedy. My friend explained that he felt a *dalang* should not just perform for money, but that *wayang kulit* must be connected to its spiritual significance. He said that he knew many people who felt that Cenk Blong was losing his *taksu* because he was not performing often enough for ceremonies. According to some of the Balinese I spoke with, it is not enough for a *dalang* to give fantastic performances, but he must also be connected to the spiritual present. Cenk Blong still gave a good show, but it seemed that some of the audience left unsatisfied. Ketut's comments reflect a notion that "tradition" loses its efficacy if it does not account for the past and the spiritual as well as speak to a contemporary audience in the current moment.

This example of *wayang Cenk Blong* demonstrates that there is flexibility within the "tradition" of *wayang kulit*. It also demonstrates that while there is room in "typical" *wayang kulit* for innovation and change, these innovations must still be tied to the purpose of *wayang kulit* in society. If a *wayang kulit* performance is just for entertainment, or to sell coffee, it loses some of its currency as "tradition;" this might be explained by saying it has lost its *taksu*.

Another example is a performance of *wayang kontemporer*³¹ that was performed after the bombings in a tourist section of Bali in 2002 as an intervention: “*wayang*’s exorcistic potential merged with modern artistic innovation to help make a shattered world whole” (Sedana, *Terrorism* 74). The performance depended on *wayang*’s status as a ritual performance with certain spiritual and social powers, but combined modern technology so that the performance might better speak to the concerns of its audience.

Tradition and Hierarchy

“Tradition” is a discourse, or a system that creates and maintains hierarchy informed by gender and taste. However, the systems of hierarchy in Bali are not straightforward and there is a long history of such relationships being challenged or reified.³² Leo Howe makes a convincing argument that “the relationship between hierarchy and equality is historically contingent rather than stable, and that, since 1900 egalitarian relations have gradually, but contentiously assumed greater significance in Balinese life” (59). Caste is an indicator of status and wealth, but it is not absolute, because Balinese are able to move beyond their caste through education and/or economic success.

Wayang kulit provides one such means to usurp the established hierarchy. Hobart conducted a detailed survey of *dalangs* and caste as part of her research, and she notes that in the district of Gianyar (where I also did my research), there were forty-five *dalangs* actively performing. Of those, thirty-four were Sudras, six were either Satria or

³¹ This modern form of *wayang* mixes technology, dancers, modern music, and many theatrical elements with traditional *wayang kulit*, or shadow puppetry.

³² See Schulte Nordholt, Geertz and Geertz, and Warren among others.

Wesia, and only five were Brahmana (27-28). A *dalang* is able to hold a privileged role in society because of his knowledge of philosophy and ritual and his ability to entertain.

Howe analyzes the use of low or high Balinese with regards to status in society. Typically a person of low caste must address a person of higher caste in high Balinese, but low Balinese is used among friends and when addressing someone of a lower caste. Howe examines why the use of stratified Balinese is still so popular and notes two major consistencies. One is that “refined Balinese should be used to priests, puppeteers, healers, and so forth” and then the other is, “there is slightly less pressure to speak high Balinese to women than to men of the same title” (87-88). This indicates the difficulty faced by women *dalangs* trying to be accepted in Balinese society because they do not neatly fit into the established and practiced hierarchy. I will build on my exploration of tradition and power that I developed in this chapter to explore the dynamics of gender within *wayang kulit* in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: PHYSICALIZING TRADITION

Two Bodies Dancing

It was a sunny day, and I was sitting in the family compound of a well-known female performer, Ni Wayan Suratni, who is famous for her portrayal of comic women roles in *drama gong* and other theatre forms. I was there to speak with her because she was also a *dalang*. As we talked, we drank tea and her young children played nearby and sometimes came to sit with us as well. Ibu Suratni explained why she liked performing *wayang kulit* by describing the relationship between the *dalang* and the puppets. She exclaimed that there are many characters in *wayang kulit*, yet the *dalang* must be able to transform herself into each one. When she took a character in her hand and set it on the screen, she and the character must “become like one” (*kita menyatu*). Ibu Suratni explained, “I see something in my hand — we must bring it to life (*menghidupkan*), the leather must come to life like a person talking. But myself, I make it alive. However, it is not just something in my hand, I must give it my voice. It is so interesting!” Jan Mrazek further describes this phenomenon:

The (constant) creation of characters happens on different levels: in the creation of the puppets, when the puppets are made to move and speak, in the ways the characters relate to other characters, in the ways they behave and misbehave, in the ways they dwell in the represented world. When seen with its theatrical function in mind, the *wayang* puppet outside performance is, as a representation of the character, incomplete. It becomes complete only in performance when the puppet is given voice,

when it is made to move and behave somewhat like a human being, and is integrated into the represented world. The puppet is only one of the means that would be used in performance to create a character. (*Phenomenology* 16)

The interaction between the *dalang* and the puppet is like a dance; they are partners executing the choreography of the performance. Hobart uses dance as the key metaphor for describing the movement of the puppets on the screen. She compares the *dalang* to a shaman, because he “is considered an inspired priest while performing, who has knowledge of the three realms of sky, earth, and underworld, and is able to mediate between them.” But Hobart continues, stating that unlike a shaman, the *dalang* does not dance: “He is remote and, for all intents and purposes, invisible to most of the audience (when in his booth during the night *wayang*) who watch the puppets ‘dance’. It is they who bring to life the mythic world of *wayang* for contemplation by others” (34-35). In my research, I also often heard the word *menari*, or “to dance,” to describe the motion of the puppets on the screen, and to describe the relationship between the *dalang* and the puppet. Likewise, Ibu Suratni articulates the relationship between the *dalang* and the puppet. They are two bodies that come together as one in the performance; they dance together.

In the previous chapter I examined how the objects and practices provide the foundation of what is considered the “tradition” of *wayang kulit*. In this chapter, I shift my focus to the body in order to examine how women’s bodies and women doing *wayang kulit* might function as an intervention into this structure. I will consider both the

puppets that are used in the performance as well as the women who have learned the art of “dancing” with the puppets. In these sections, I propose that the materiality of the puppets must be considered together with the materiality of the body; they work together to represent gender in the context of a performance that then reverberates back into the social structures of society.

Unlike theatre or dance, where the performer is watched by the spectator, in puppetry both the performer and spectator watch the object. The puppet is an uncanny material object that signifies life through its design, movement, and cultural significance. I use Freud’s term, uncanny, not because I want to attempt a psycho-analytic reading of the puppet in performance. Instead, I use the term “uncanny” as it refers to something that can be both foreign and familiar at the same time; it suggests life in the inanimate and endows the object with status as something strange.

The idea of the uncanny articulates the special relationship that puppets, especially *wayang kulit*, have with the audience and the *dalang*. John Bell writes that puppets present a conduit for humans to come to terms with the material world; puppetry allows, “a momentary alliance or bargain between humans and stuff of, or literally stuff *in* performance” (4). Bell theorizes puppets as objects that let us come to terms to death by allowing us to control the material, or “dead,” world. Bell illustrates this function through the performer/spectator relationship to the object:

Performer ->->->-> object <-<-<-<-<- spectator (5)

Both the performer and the spectator are focused on the center, which creates a tension between the puppet as an object and the puppet as a living thing; it is at once both and

neither. Bell adds, “With the movement possibilities of her body, and the vocal possibilities of her voice, the performer interprets, frames, and contextualizes the image in front of the spectators, and helps the communal experience of watching performance become one in which our own responses to the chosen objects are provoked” (5). The presence of the *dalang* is simultaneously emphasized and negated through the performance. This relationship between the puppet, the performer, and the audience, together with the religious and cultural significance of *wayang kulit*, creates the potential for women’s agency within the performance.

It has become cliché, and not wholly accurate, to say that the stage is a type of mirror reflecting society. It must be recognized that the power of the images onstage lies not in their reflexive quality, but in how a performance enters into the discourse of reality. As I established in the previous chapter, the puppets convey meaning to the audience through their iconography as well as their use. The size, shape, and decoration of the puppets function like a language, in that meaning is established by “collective behavior – or what amounts to the same thing – on convention” (de Saussure 965). These conventions are established through repetition and therefore develop currency as something “traditional.” Judith Butler calls this kind of meaning that is established through repetition “reiteration.” I choose Butler’s term because it points to the process by which meaning is established as an ongoing process; matter is not static, but is constructed. Of matter, Butler writes, “The classical configuration of matter as a site of *generation* or *origination* becomes especially significant when the account of what an object is and means requires recourse to its originating principle” (31). She argues that

matter is not only something produced, but rather must be understood within a context of history and culture. Matter is constructed; Butler explains that “construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both ‘subjects’ and ‘acts’ come to appear at all. There is no power in acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability” (9). *Wayang kulit* is based in highly codified and repetitious systems of convention, where ideals are displayed and reinforced within a public domain, requiring the performers to conform to the audience’s expectations, thereby creating a performance that thus reiterates and reinforces those expectations. Because of *wayang kulit*’s nature as a system of representation through the physical object, or puppet, before I examine women *dalangs*, I want to look closer at the discourse about Balinese women that is expressed through the puppets.

Analyzing the Puppets

Two bodies combine to make a *wayang* performance: the body of the *dalang* and the body of the puppet. In this section, I will consider the bodies of the puppets through an analysis of how the puppets, together with the story, communicate conventions of behavior and morality to the audience. Hobart makes a distinction between what she sees as the fixed iconography, the puppets, voices, and movement, compared to the fluid stories and that both work together to “articulate values, norms, rules, and ideals which relate to the social life of the people as well as certain features of the social structure” (173). I demonstrated in previous sections that the iconography of the puppet is not “fixed,” but that it adjusts to a society that is constantly changing. Even so, there are features of a puppet that can be read like a language or a text. This does not imply that

the iconography is static, but that through convention those details can be “read” for meaning. Because the puppets work together with the performer, it is necessary to understand what the visual details of the puppets communicate to the Balinese audience.

Characters are divided into two primary types: *alus* and *kasar*. *Alus* roughly translates into “refined,” and *kasar* is “unrefined.” Each character often has traits that are both a little *alus* and *kasar*, reflecting the dual nature of people. “Good” characters, often called characters of the right, such as the Pandawas, are often the most *alus*, in contrast to “bad” characters, or characters of the left, such as the *raksasa*, or ogres, and the Korawas, are often the most *kasar*. *Alus* and *kasar* do not equal “good” and “bad” in Bali, and those categories are not absolute. Arjuna (Figure 15) has very delicate features and is clearly *alus*.



Figure 15. From left: Niwatakwaca, Bima, and Arjuna. Photo by J. Goodlander.

In contrast, his brother Bima has bulging eyes and a large frame. Bima is far more *kasar* than Arjuna, but this speaks to his temperament, rather than a judgment of good versus evil. The third puppet, Niwatakwaca, is the king of the *raksasa* and is clearly *kasar*.

Many different features of the puppets communicate the personality of their characters to the audience. In his dissertation on Javanese *wayang kulit*, Jan Mrázek analyzed the *wayang* character as if it were a map because important details such as the face are crafted at a larger scale to provide greater detail.³³ This is similar to how a map of a state often includes a blow-up of important cities to show those individual streets and landmarks. The dimensions of profile as well as their forward facing position are mixed to contain as many details of the character as possible. The audience sees both shoulders, a side view of the head, both legs and arms, but the rest of the body is in profile. The key details are:

Table 1. Characteristics of *Alus* and *Kasar*.

	<u><i>Alus</i></u>	<u><i>Kasar</i></u>
Body	Small, slim, delicate	Fat, wide stance, big
Head tilt	Bowed, pointing down	Hold head high
Eyes	Long and narrow	Wide-open, big
Nose	Long and pointed	Big and round
Mouth	Thin and closed	Open mouth, huge teeth

Within these categories, the features can be mixed and matched with many shades of possibility in between the two poles. One feature cannot be read by itself, but only in

³³ Even though his analysis focuses on Javanese *wayang kulit*, it holds true for Balinese puppets as well and provides a useful way for thinking about the iconography of the puppets.

combination with all other features. The stylistic iconography is born out of practicality—there is a conscious effort to communicate with the audience as completely as possible. In order to understand the female character as portrayed in *wayang kulit*, one must remember that the key differentiation is *alus* from *kasar*.³⁴

For female characters, the range along the scale of *alus* and *kasar* is quite limited. In fact, many female characters, if observed side-by-side, show little variation. The shape of the eyes, the build, color, and height are all pretty much the same and the primary distinction between female characters is the tilt of the head. Some are looking down and others are gazing straight ahead (none of the females are gazing up.) So they might be divided between *alus* and more *alus*.

This raises the question: are female characters more *alus* than the male ones? The answer is not simple, and Marc Benamau notes three different answers to this question: “1) men are more *alus* than women, 2) women are more *alus* than men, 3) men are both more *alus* and more *kasar* than women” (176). The issue becomes complicated because to be *alus* is not only a physical attribute but also a sign of spiritual power that is therefore only accessible by males. Women are of lower social status, the argument continues, because they are not allowed the same spiritual power or authority as men, so therefore they could never be as *alus*, and men are more *alus* than women because they are allowed higher status in society and in religion. For females, *alus* is reduced to primarily a physical or outer trait; it is a sign of meekness rather than a sign of agency and power. Women, as expressed through *alusness*, are valued for their obedience.

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of the different parts of the puppet and their meanings, see Hobart 83-123.

For his research, Benamau asked several Javanese musicians and dancers to rate a list of *wayang kulit* characters as most *alus* and most *kasar*. The responses he received were very different, with some ranking a female character as most *alus* and some a male. However, several respondents expressed dissatisfaction at having to rank male and female characters together on the same scale because it was not possible to compare males and females (278). This reluctance demonstrates how *alus* has a different meaning for women than it does for men. In this section, I want to examine several female puppets and compare them to each other to determine what range is allowed for female characters between *alus* and *kasar*, and through an analysis of character I will determine the implications that range has for women in Balinese society. In order to do this, I will compare the female characters to the standards set by the male characters to better understand their iconography in the greater context of *wayang kulit*. In my examination I use Arjuna, the hero of the Pandawas and highly regarded for his refinement and spirituality, as a benchmark for *alus*, and Niwatakwaca, the leader of the *raksasa* and one of the most *kasar* characters in a standard set of *wayang kulit*, as a benchmark for *kasar*.

The typical female puppet is quite small in size. Figure 16 shows Arjuna with Supraba and Draupadi. Supraba is a heavenly nymph who helps Arjuna defeat Niwatakwaca in a battle in heaven. As a reward, Arjuna is able to marry her. Supraba's head barely reaches to Arjuna's shoulder when they stand side-by-side. Her face is a little smaller, but her eyes, nose, and mouth are on the same side and positioned at the same angle. This indicates that she is just as pious or humble as Arjuna. Her shoulders and the position of her head bend slightly forward, while Arjuna's are parallel with the

ground. The difference is slight, so it might be just a variation in carving, but it also indicates that she is slightly more refined or *alus*. Supraba's gaze and size give the impression that she is subservient to Arjuna. He could not defeat Niwatakwaca without her help, but she is there to serve him. At the end of the story, she is carried away like a prize.



Figure 16. Draupadi, Supraba, and Arjuna. Photo by J. Goodlander

Supraba has another detail that is worth noting. Hobart notes that the headdress “is the main item of apparel to indicate [the puppet’s] role and status” (85). Hobart gives a detailed description and illustrations of the common headdresses in her book, but only lists headdresses for male characters, noting that most female puppets only have simple hair decoration. Supraba is remarkable because she has an ornate headdress. It is most similar to the *kekenduan*, which is often worn by senior kings such as Drupada, and her

hair is wrapped tightly in a shrimp-tail style, or *gelung pusung*. The shrimp-tail hairstyle indicates self-control and restraint (Hobart 90). Her hair also cascades down her back in tight curls that are the same as Arjuna's. The tight curls indicate "order and a concentration of energy" (Hobart 86). But, because the scale of the female puppet is smaller, the hair falling down the back might have another meaning. *Raksasa* are also often shown with loose hair that denotes disorder, chaos, and temper. The entire hair and headdress taken together reveal Supraba to be a complex character of very high status, with self-control and restraint, as well as powerful spiritual energy. However, there is an element of danger; the loose hair indicates the possibility of unexpected actions. She is not just a passive object and might act out. Supraba's ability to trick Niwatakwaca confirms that aspect of her personality.

The other puppet pictured with Arjuna in Figure 16 is Draupadi. She is the daughter of king Drupada and was won by Arjuna in a contest; however, Arjuna's mother told him that he must share the prize evenly with his brothers, so Draupadi marries all five of the Pandawas. Her body is stockier than Supraba's but she is about the same height, and while her face and eyes are the same size as Supraba's, her nose is a little shorter and stockier. The effect of these things together indicates that Draupadi is not quite as *alus* as Supraba, even though they wear similar costume and identical jewelry. The only other difference is the headdress; Draupadi wears a simple version of the *supit urang aneh*. This headdress is often worn by young Pandawa princes and suggests her allegiance with the Pandawas. Like Supraba, her hair falls down her back in tight curls, but the contrast between control and chaos expressed through the hair is not as striking

because of the simple headdress and no shrimp-tail. Finally, it is worth noting that, in Bali, women wear their hair loose and down their back until they are married, while married women wear it up. Supraba and Draupadi are both supposed to be married in the story, but their hair indicates that they maintain a level of independence.

Kunti (Figure 17) is the mother of three of the Pandawas, and I will compare her to a servant character called *condong* (*condong* means “servant,” or “lady-in-waiting, and is not a proper name). These characters are both taller and broader than Supraba and come to eye level on Arjuna. They are not elegantly dressed. Both wear a simple sarong and have bare breasts. The eyes and details of the face are about the same size as Arjuna’s, but *condong* is looking up.



Figure 17. *Condong* and Kunti. Photo by J. Goodlander

In the *wayang kulit* and many of the dance dramas in Bali, *condong* is the servant of the princess and enters the stage before Supraba or Draupadi to announce her arrival.

Sometimes she will share a joke or a comic scene with Twalin and Merdah. Her hair, up in a tight bun, suggests that she is married and controlled, but her husband never appears. Her constant partner on the stage is the princess.

Ibu Nondri told me that Kunti, a powerful woman, was her favorite character.

She explained:

The character I like best is Dewa Kunti, because it is the story of the birth of the Pandawas. She has five babies. She treats them the same and she is very giving. I like her and I think she is someone who I must imitate. If it was not for her we would not have the Pandawa and then we would not have the *Mahabharata*. We must have her.

Kunti, like the *dalang*, gives birth to the story. Kunti does not do it alone, as she has a charm from the gods. Because of a curse, she could not lie with her husband Pandu. So, she uses the charm to call down the gods to lie with her and she bears their children. On her head she wears a turban similar to that worn by a wise man or sage, such as Narada. This turban is unique and indicates her special status amongst the female characters.

There are two unrefined female characters: Dimbi and *nenek*, or “grandmother” (Figure 18). The larger woman is Dimbi. She is the sister of Dimba, an ogre who Bima kills. Dimbi then marries Bima, with the permission of Kunti, and bears him a son. Dimbi is remarkable because she is often shown as this ogre figure before her marriage. She has big eyes, sharp teeth, a wide nose, and loose hair. All of these things reveal her temper and power; she is very *kasar*. After marriage, another female puppet is often used

to indicate her transformation through marriage into a more typical woman who is in “control.”

Nenek, or grandmother, is a female clown who is a little bigger than Kunti but has a similar body shape. The features of her face, like the protruding jaw and squat nose, are not that different from Twalin’s. Her eye shape is unique, but similar to Twalin’s. These features suggest that she could be the female equivalent of Twalin, even though she is never allowed the same status as him. In performances that I saw, *nenek* was often verbally or physically sparring with Twalin. In one scene I observed, he tried to molest her and she cleverly resisted. *Nenek*’s hair is up in a modified shrimp-tail, which aligns her with the Pandawas and suggests she is *alus* even though her other features suggest otherwise.



Figure 18. Dimbi and *nenek*. Photo by J. Goodlander.

It is difficult to classify *condong* and *nenek*. Hobart classifies *condong* with the clowns, even though her mouth is not articulated like the others. Hobart describes *condong* as, “a lady of easy virtue and enjoys frolicking with the male servants” (56). The clowns have a special status in *wayang kulit*. They originate are from the gods and they are the ones who translate the story and its actions for the Balinese audience by mixing comedy and politics to philosophize and to tell the moral of the story. It is difficult to determine if the *condong* and *nenek* are really clowns, or if they are like the princesses but more *kasar*. In performance they are often featured in scenes about sexual exploits and misadventures with the male clowns. Pak Tunjung taught me a sequence where *nenek* teased Twalin about his sexual inadequacy and she challenged him to a fight. Twalin sighed that women are impossible to understand. In another scene that I saw repeated in several performances, Twalin snuck up on the *condong* and pretended to be her lover as he stroked her breasts from behind. Suddenly she realized who it was and chased him off the stage. These scenes always received robust laughs from the men in the audience. Through story, the female clowns share the stage with the male clowns, but have little opportunity to comment on the story or to share philosophy. Instead they appear as secondary characters for comic effect only, as a counterpoint to the true romance between Arjuna and one of his many female companions.

Limited Representation

I was able to have a couple of lessons with the woman *dalang*, Ibu Nondri. I went to her house and we sat together on the *bale*. I brought some of my puppets and a tape-recorder, but Ibu Nondri was not sure what she should, or could teach me. Finally, an

idea came to her—I should learn *Rebong*. The song *Rebong* is used for the entrance of an *alus* female character, like a princess. The lyrics are about how beautiful her flowing hair is, how her eyes sparkle, how her walk is graceful, and so on. While the *dalang* sings the song, the female puppets dance on the screen in a graceful motion. The song is about the body. The woman sung about in the song is assumed to be a good person because she is beautiful rather than brave, strong, loyal or fierce.

Ibu Nondri sang the song in a clear, strong voice. My friend Kadek quietly sang along. Together they eagerly wrote down the words and helped me translate them from Balinese to Indonesian. Both women commented that this was one of their favorite parts of a *wayang kulit* performance. Their enthusiasm demonstrated that women in the audience of a *wayang kulit* performance relate to, and find representation in, the beautiful images that this song brings to the screen. I believe that the image offered by *Rebong* is limited because it values women for their beauty rather than their strength. The song does not allow women agency, but reduces them to an object. It is a limited representation.

Rebong is rarely included in performance anymore. When I learned *Rebong* with Pak Tunjung, he had to search to find a musician that still remembered how to play the song. I only saw it in performance once, and then as a truncated version. I wonder if this points to a change in the status of women in Balinese society. The song celebrates women for their beauty, but it was most popular when there were few women in the audience or working outside of the home.

The stories and objects of *wayang kulit* limit women's representation within the art form. Many stories, including the one I first learned to perform, do not even have any female characters on the screen. When scenes do exist with female characters, they are often treated as objects to be lusted after or teased. However, as my analysis demonstrated, certain details such as Supraba's loose hair or *nenek's* passable mouth suggest a possible, if limited, potential for women's agency.

The better space for creating women's agency within the performance is with the woman *dalang* because she is reiterating the tradition of performance and inscribing it with new expectations through the bodily connection with the puppet—it is a connection with tradition. Ibu Suratni's hand is that key point of contact, creating a kind of gap between her body and the body of the puppet. They are both separate and together. I propose that within that gap, the puppet is inscribed with meaning and life; the puppet dances the meaning that is embodied through the hand. In this gap there is the potential for intervention into meaning and power. It is a subversive space between the material worlds of the body and the puppet that comes to life through the action of *menyatu*. In this next section, I will explore tradition's relationship to the body of the *dalang* and the potential for agency within and through reinscribing the tradition by analyzing how gender affects the training, performance, and reception of the *dalang*.

CHAPTER 5: THE BODY AND TRADITION

The Dalang

The *dalang* is the ultimate performer because he³⁵ is the one that controls all aspects of a *wayang kulit* performance and ensures that all of the elements of the performance work together. He is the playwright, actor, director, orchestra conductor, musician, singer, producer, and priest all combined into one performer. He needs to be an expert in Balinese philosophy, religion, and myth, as well as a talented storyteller and comedian. The *dalang*'s skill as a performer, together with his knowledge and perceived wisdom, make him a respected member of Balinese society.

The *dalang* must have a command of three types of skills, which I call the skills of the body, head, and heart. The first are the skills of performance, or the skills of the body. A *dalang* must have a good voice for singing and speaking the words of the characters. His voice must be flexible in pitch and strong enough to last the several hours of a performance. He must have a strong body because it takes a great deal of arm strength to move the puppets for several hours. The more vigorous fight scenes are at the end of the play, when he is likely to be the most tired. He must be able to sit cross-legged for the performance. The right leg rests on the left leg so that he can use the *cepala* that is held between his toes. He uses his ankle and heel together with the *cepala* to create dynamic percussion throughout the performance.

³⁵ Throughout this dissertation I generally refer to the *dalang* as "he." The Indonesian and Balinese pronouns are gender neutral, so unless otherwise specified it is assumed in Bali that a *dalang* is a male. By using "he" in reference to the *dalang* in all but special cases, I hope to emphasize how much of an anomaly the women *dalangs* are.

The second set of skills involves knowing the logistics and structure of performance. These are the skills of the head, or mind. The *dalang* needs to understand the music in order to conduct the musicians with the *cepala*, or sometimes, with his voice. For example, the phrase, “*ariwawa-wat*” does not have a literal meaning, but it is a vocal cue signaling that musicians should begin playing the traveling music because one or more characters are going to exit. These vocal cues are part of the texture of a performance, very much like the calls drummers make in Japan for a *noh* or *taiko* performance. A *wayang kulit* performance has a set structure and if the *dalang* deviates too far from it, he will not only confuse his audience, but his musicians will not be able to correctly play the next piece, nor will the assistants know which puppet to hand him next. The *dalang* must understand the characters in the story and be able to speak the proper language for each. This involves the knowledge of several levels of Kawi, or old Javanese, and several levels of Balinese. He has to be capable of chanting in ancient rhyming schemes or in different metrical forms. Comedy is also an important aspect of the performance and the *dalang* must be adept at telling jokes to get the audience’s attention.

The final skill-set is the most important: the skills of the heart. A *dalang* must be knowledgeable about Hindu religion, philosophy, and ethics because these are the foundation of his performance and provide the means for connecting art to the daily life of the audience. People, even outside of the performance context, will look to the *dalang* for advice on how to behave or what to do. Many of the people I spoke with confirmed that this, the skills of the heart, was the most important aspect of *wayang kulit* in Balinese

society. Each *dalang* may have more experience or training in one set of skills over the other. Some *dalangs* are known for their philosophy (like Pak Tunjung), or their comedy (like Cenk Blong), or even their mastery of the puppet movement and voice (like Pak Wijia), but every *dalang* must be at least proficient in all three.³⁶

Becoming a *Dalang*

It takes a lifetime to master the art of *wayang kulit* and a good *dalang* is always seeking to improve his knowledge or skill. While I was in Bali, Pak Tunjung returned to university to get a master's degree, or S2, in Hindu religion and philosophy.

Additionally, he often borrowed puppets from other *dalangs* in order to study how they were made and how they might move. He would strengthen his voice by doing vocal exercises at the beach or in the mountains. Sometimes, Pak Tunjung might invite an older musician over to his house to teach him a new song or melody on the *gender*. He was a master teacher and performer but still continued to work on his craft and artistry.

A major change in *wayang kulit* in the past century is in how a person studies to become a *dalang*. In the past, the only way to become a *dalang* was to be a boy and have a father who was a *dalang*. The knowledge would then be passed down from father to son in many formal and informal ways. For example, Nandhu, Pak Tunjung's son, often sat nearby or on his father's lap during my lessons. He was just a toddler, but had paper puppets and a few real ones to play with.³⁷ Nandhu liked to sit and follow along with my lessons or take a turn at the screen and show me a story that he was working on. Pak Tunjung explained that he would often tell Nandhu a bedtime story using the puppets and

³⁶ For more on the skills of the *dalang* see Hobart pp. 30-31 and 33-34.

³⁷ Children are not allowed to touch "real" or sacred *wayang*; it was only after my initiation that I was allowed to use some of Pak Tunjung's puppets.

in this story, Nandhu would be a character in the make-believe world created by the puppets. Pak Tunjung made Nandhu the hero in the stories so he would be brave and sleep well at night.

If a child is not born into a family of *dalangs*, he might still become a *dalang*. I Nyoman Sedana writes about two additional options to become a *dalang*, one of which was always available and the other of which is quite new. The first way is for an eager youngster to be taken in by a *dalang* who is not his father. The student becomes like a son to his teacher and is called *anak murid*, or child student. The other option is to study *pendalangan* at the performing arts high school, or SMKI or the arts university, ISI. This method of training introduces the *dalang* to different styles and teaches a couple basic stories. Sedana notes that for a *dalang* to really be successful, he must seek additional training outside of formal education in high school or university.

Becoming a Woman *Dalang*

Watching performances and rehearsals is a major component of a would-be *dalang's* education. In the past, women did not typically watch *wayang kulit* performances; the audience for *wayang kulit* was primarily male. Hobart observes that:

Only a small number of women watch a show. In my area these tended to be older or Chinese women. When asked, women point out that it is inappropriate for them to be interested in such scholarly subjects as the shadow theatre, or for that matter the masked dance, *topeng*, or the chanting of classical literature. Nor do they enjoy the plays which focus on war and conflict. (126)

In my research, about twenty years after Hobart, I have noticed a shift in this dynamic. At performances I attended, I often observed women watching *wayang kulit*, but they were still in the minority. The further away the performance was from the town of Ubud, into the smaller villages that are more isolated from outside influence, the fewer women there would be in the audience. Occasionally, I would be the only female watching the performance.

In an interview with I Nyoman Sumandhi, then head of SMKI and a long-time member of the steering committee for the Bali Arts Festival (*Pesta Kesenian Bali* or PKB), Kathy Foley asked about women *dalangs*. She wanted to know how they began to practice and why the PKB was committed to giving them an opportunity. Sumandhi replied that Kathy Foley was a major inspiration, because he heard that she was learning *wayang kulit* in a class in America:

At that time I was thinking, how come an American girl is studying *wayang* and no *dalang* in Bali were female? It was like dance in the past: formerly they didn't let women dance in front of men, and female roles were done by a man. But now females perform and even the king, Rama, can be a girl. [. . .] Once I got back home in 1975, I wanted to find if any women were interested. Luckily my niece [Ni Ketut Trijata] was studying at KOKAR in 1975. I had no feeling that "she must be a priest when she performs *wayang*." I just wanted to give females a chance. I wanted to have women participate, because in America girls could study *wayang*.
(quoted in Foley, *Bali Arts Festival* 285)

This is not the first time that foreign influence has played an important role in women's achievements in Balinese arts. Catherine Diamond, in her article on women performers in Bali, asserts that women's expansion in the performing arts cannot be read as a sign of change in the gender hierarchy. Instead, Diamond stresses the "foreignness" of these performers:

This proliferation of *gamelan wanita*, and women's participation in the performing arts in general, has been both assisted and hampered by dualistic influences acting on Balinese culture. Female foreigners, residents and visiting students, have often been instrumental in breaking customary gender barriers by undertaking roles and genres not previously attempted by Balinese women. Sometimes the foreign artists simply have a strong individual interest in a particular form, and sometimes they want to demonstrate that local taboos about women not being able to perform them are unfounded. (232)

Diamond's argument implies that only women who are already outside of or are willing to break away from the culture are able to make substantial progress in the performing arts. I maintain that although influences might come from the outside, the results must be understood in relation to Balinese and Indonesian society, politics, and culture.³⁸

In order to make her the first woman *dalang*, the school spent money on Trijata's training and found her some "old" puppets to use. Pak Sumandhi says that she performed

³⁸ I am aware that over time, my own experience studying and performing in Bali might become another influence on the status of women within the performing arts. I am not in a position to make any predictions on what these might be, but I am aware that my involvement in Balinese culture and the arts is not completely benign. It is an area that will require further study as my involvement in Balinese performing arts continues.

very “nicely,” but, “Of course, you can’t count on the voice — the female voice can’t change like a man’s” (Foley, *Bali Arts Festival* 285). Others soon followed. I had the opportunity to interview some of these women *dalangs* and will discuss their work and training in *wayang kulit* in greater detail later in this chapter.

Opportunities to perform that are provided by local and national festivals have been crucial to cultivating the art of women *dalangs*. Kathy Foley notes that the PKB is one such venue:

For example, female *dalangs* (puppet masters) have existed in Bali only since 1975 and remain relatively rare in a form where ritual ceremonies and puppetry are intertwined. In this all-male hereditary art, village *dalangs* are often loath to share their knowledge with those outside their own family, much less with women. Inviting a female *dalang* to perform in the impressive festival venue, therefore, is quite significant.

Established *dalang* may share their information with these women more freely in the realization that they are preparing to play at the arts center.

Likewise, the legitimacy earned by having performed on the festival stage can earn women invitations to perform in the villages. Without such validation it would be very difficult indeed for female *dalangs* to advance.

(*Bali Arts Festival* 276)

Similar to Foley’s above discussion, the opportunity to play in a smaller festival, the Ubud Arts Festival, was crucial to my own development as a *dalang*. Because of that

first performance, I then received an opportunity to perform for a village temple ceremony.

As demonstrated in this section, women have been given the opportunity to perform *wayang kulit*, but in what contexts? An important part of *wayang kulit* is the ritual associated with it and its own status as a ritual. At the beginning, women performed for secular contexts only. Foley asked Sumandhi about his intentions regarding women and ritual performance, and he replied:

My innovation was just to have women participate. To do something else, to perform a ceremony is beyond the skill of manipulating the puppet.

There is no intrinsic problem, however, as ritual is really a different performance and requires a different knowledge. (quoted in Foley, *Bali Art Festival* 286)

A couple of things strike me as especially salient in his response. One is that the innovation of women performing *wayang kulit* belongs to him. It is an accomplishment for the male establishment of the performing arts, which erases the many hours of study and practice that the women have committed to become *dalangs*. Sumandhi, in his response, conveniently erases the connection between *wayang kulit* and ritual, a connection that other scholars have observed as intrinsic. Hobart writes that *wayang* is always “instructive, entertaining, and religious in intent” (172). Sumandhi is splitting these objectives, and in doing so he refuses to allow women the full experience of *wayang*.

If women are not granted access to the spiritual world of *wayang*, does that mean that they are not able to fully become *dalangs*? In her interview, Foley asked, “Would anyone teach the female *dalang* to do ritual performance?” to which Sumandhi replied, “That is up to their own village. Since the customs for ritual performances differ from one area to the next, we do not teach that material in the arts schools. Students must study it on their own” (quoted in Foley, *Bali Arts Festival* 286). For a *dalang* to be able to perform, it is generally expected that he or she is able to practice the ritual side of performance and, if a *dalang* has not undergone the ritual preparation and training, his or her opportunities to perform would be extremely limited. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, failing to give ritual performances means that the *dalang* does not have any *taksu* and is not considered very good. Most of the women *dalangs* I spoke with performed in both secular and sacred contexts, which implies a completion of ritual training.

Five Women *Dalangs*

In this section I will look at five women who have taken on the challenge of becoming a *dalang*. Each woman has had a different experience and reason for becoming a *dalang*. Dr. I Wayan Dibia, a professor at ISI who writes in English and is often quoted concerning Balinese arts, mentioned to me in an interview how each of the women’s stories are quite different. Ibu Nondri became a *dalang* out of necessity, as she had to do it to support her family. Ibu Tjandri became a *dalang* because it was the only way she could do what she wanted artistically. In contrast, Ibu Trijata, and a couple of others, became *dalangs* because of an opportunity that existed at the high school and college level. They were recruited to study *pendalangan* as part of an effort to

demonstrate gender equality, and sometimes had to be cajoled to commence with this course of study. I was able to learn more about each of these women and their experiences by interviewing them.³⁹

Interviews provide important information about a society, but they are limited by time and circumstances. I met with each woman once or twice for an hour or two. The interviews were semi-structured in that they happened at an arranged time with pre-planned, although not rigid, questions. I often changed the wording, order, and content of my questions depending on the answers the respondent gave. The women did not know me before the interview or outside the context of this rather artificial interaction.

Charlotte Aul Davies describes different views on interviews and their use to researchers. On one hand, interviews provide information and insight into the informant's social world because the person being interviewed is asked to serve as a representative of their culture. Davies warns against reading too much into one person's viewpoint, especially a viewpoint that is expressed in unnatural circumstances like an interview. Additionally, the interviewer cannot erase his or her own involvement in the meaning-making process. Aul Davies explains, "interviewing is better understood as a process in which interviewer and interviewee are both involved in developing understanding, that is constructing knowledge about a social world" (108-109). The interview creates a situation where the interviewer and interviewee work together to construct ideas about society.

The interviewee is answering questions as an individual, but that does not mean that the answers are unable to be generalized. Their words reflect both their individual

³⁹ Outside of my interviews, very little has been written about these women in English or Indonesian. I hope to conduct follow-up interviews with each of them on my next visit to Bali in order to provide more biographical details about their lives.

experience and provide insight into the construction of their culture and society in more general terms. Aul Davies clarifies this process:

I would argue that while interviews cannot be taken as a straightforward reflection of the level of the social, as opposed to individual interaction, there is a connection, an interdependency between the two levels that allows interviewing to provide access to the social world beyond the individual. This can be accomplished by ensuring that the analytical process takes into account the nature of the links and the inherently reflexive character of the knowledge. Thus both interviewer and interviewee begin with some necessarily incomplete knowledge about another level of reality—the social—and through analysis of the character of the interaction including, but not limited to, the content of the verbal interaction, they may develop this knowledge. (109)

In the interviews, I asked the women questions that required them to look critically at their choice and process of becoming a *dalang*. Their responses are reflections that may not have been voiced or thought before, and many of my questions surprised the women, who often had to think a moment before answering. The women are articulating thoughts about their society that is often only finding voice because of my questions, and through the interview we worked together to understand the context of their work as *dalangs*.

After the interview, the process of meaning-making is not over. I took away a recording, a digital archive of what was said, a photograph or two, and my memory of the encounter. Months later I sat in my room, listened to these recordings, translated the

words that were said,⁴⁰ and then decided which ones to share through my writing. Aul Davies explains this ethnographic phenomenon: “In analysis and writing, ethnographers move between their interpretations of what others’ construction of reality, their own creation of new constructions, and their expression of these evolving understandings in yet another, usually written, form” (255). Another level of meaning is implied because the text is written for a reader who will then draw his or her own conclusions or ideas. I do not wish to erase this process, but rather, make it visible in my writing. Because of this, in my accounts of the interviews, I have attempted to foreground my own experience and questions, and sometimes quote our conversation at length.

Ni Ketut Trijata

Ni Ketut Trijata (Figure 19) is often acknowledged to be the first Balinese woman *dalang*. She currently lives in the area of Tabanan with her husband and daughters, and she was the final woman *dalang* that I interviewed on my last day in Bali. My friend Kadek, a constant companion in my research, and I drove from Ubud on a small motorbike. We had to ask many of the local people before we finally found Ibu Trijata’s house. People were surprised to hear that we were seeking a woman *dalang*, but they knew of her and were happy to help point the way. Once at her house, we had to wait an hour, but finally Ibu Trijata came home and decided she would be glad to talk to us. Her husband and two of her children joined us and we all sat on a small *bale* in their garden.

⁴⁰ I conducted each of my interviews in the national language of *Bahasa Indonesia* and occasionally a little bit of *Bahasa Bali*.



Figure 19. Ni Ketut Trijata holds two of her favorite puppets: Arjuna and Twalin. Photo by J. Goodlander.

At the time of our interview, Ibu Trijata was about forty-eight years old and her daughters were twenty-six, twenty-one, and sixteen. Her youngest two sat with us. Ibu Trijata joked that if the youngest was already sixteen, it must be time for her to think about getting married! They all laughed, but marriage is serious business in Bali. Later in the conversation, she asked my age and was shocked that I was already thirty-four and had not yet married.⁴¹ They understood that I had been busy with my education, but

⁴¹ This question always gave me some difficulty. I am not married, but have been with my partner for over thirteen years. But, because Balinese and Indonesian feelings towards homosexuality are complicated, I did not want to worry about stigmatizing my already unconventional research any further. So, I usually chose to hide my identity as a lesbian and merely respond that I was unmarried. It is worth noting that the few Balinese with whom I was out with were very welcoming and I never encountered any problems. It is an issue worth exploring further in another venue.

hoped I would soon be finished so I could find a husband. This was a common reaction from many of the Balinese people that I met while doing my research.

When Ibu Trijata was growing up, she kept busy with school and at home. She said, “I lived in the village and had to help my parents. I had to help them with the cows and the temple. Often I would help them with the offerings.” She liked to play “when there was time” and “loved to study, to sing, and dance.” Ibu Trijata currently taught dance and Balinese language at a local high school and gave additional classes in the village. If there were students who wanted to learn *pendalangan*, she would teach it as an extra course, but that was rare. As a performer, she typically performed in *arja*, a drama form that features singing and is often considered a type of opera. She played the *condong*, or servant character. I asked her about the first time she saw *wayang kulit*, and she replied it was:

when I was little because my brother was a *dalang* and he often performed at the house. I loved to watch it. I was still young but I still was able to see it often. It was so interesting. When I began at the SMKI, I did not want to study *pendalangan*, because in Bali there was not yet women *dalangs*. Women were not brave enough to use the *wayang*—To touch them. They are sacred!

When Pak Sumandhi approached her about studying *pendalangan*, she was hesitant at first: “Pak Sumandhi said I should study it, but I did not want to. My brother was studying *pendalangan* and finally I decided okay I would try it. But there had never been a woman *dalang*. I had to be brave all by myself. So I tried.” The word *berani* or

“brave” was frequently used in my interview with Ibu Trijata and the other women *dalangs*. It points to the status that *wayang* has in Balinese society; if a *dalang* must be *berani*, it suggests that there is something possibly dangerous about the puppets. This potential for danger comes not only from the puppet’s status as sacred objects, but perhaps the role the *dalang* plays in society when he speaks through the puppets. The *dalang* is granted a special status to speak out about politics, religion, and society that no one else has. Zurbuchen describes how the *dalang*, through the characters of the *panasar*, is able to utilize this voice:

The duty of translation is for the *panasar/parekan* also an opportunity for audacious, pungent, moralizing, or critical commentary on the world and on the exploits of his noble lords. [. . .] In the days before widespread elementary education conveyed religious instruction, and even now in some areas of Bali, *wayang* performances are a major channel for moral and spiritual teachings . . . (192, 198)

A woman who desires to become a *dalang* must adapt a public voice, when beforehand she only had a private one. Through the *panasar* she must both delight and challenge her audience with a mix of comedy, politics and philosophy. This action is very brave indeed.

After high school, Ibu Trijata continued to study *pendalangan* at ISI. I asked her what was the hardest part of learning the art of a *dalang*, and she compared the skills of the *dalang* to those of a dancer:

It is all difficult! But if you study then you can do it. You have to dance and sing to be able to study *pendalangan*. If you want to be a *dalang* you must have a good voice. Also you need to be able to use your hands like in dancing. And your foot too. You need to be able to play the gender at least a little bit. You need to be able to hear and understand the music.

Because she was the first woman in the program to study *wayang kulit*, I asked about the reactions of the other students. She admitted, “Oh, there were people—some people thought ‘oh too difficult, maybe she can’t’ and some thought it was a good idea because there was not yet a woman *dalang*. But Pak Sumandhi wanted to show that women were advancing in Bali (*maju*) that they could do it. So, for the first time there was a woman *dalang* in Bali.” Ibu Trijata became a symbol of equality by studying *pendalangan* and performing *wayang kulit*.

Michael Bakan writes about issues of gender equality in his examination of women’s *beleganjur* in Bali. Because *beleganjur* is considered music for warriors, Bakan found that, “For some Balinese at least, *beleganjur wanita* is seen not as an inroad into, but rather an inappropriate and unwelcome invasion of, the musical territory of ‘the most masculine of Balinese genres,’ an invasion that shakes the tenets of Balinese cultural propriety at their roots” (48). In spite of that, Bakan does not view women’s *beleganjur* as a sign of women’s equality or a redefining of gender roles; he argues that it is quite the opposite:

as a musical phenomenon rooted in these two basic processes of marginalization. [. . .] The purposes of this examination are twofold: first,

to identify how gamelan performance by Balinese women paradoxically reinforces myths of female marginality while purporting to advance the cause of *emanispasi*; and second, to illustrate that beneath the observable complex of practices and dispositions that regulates women's gamelan to the margins of Balinese musical culture lies a rather broad range of subject positions which alternately empower, challenge, and problematize the hegemonic authority of status quo conceptions of women's subordinate status. (53)

Bakan notes why it is so difficult for women to gain a foothold in the performing arts: there are "practical constraints on women's time and freedom, the relative lack of self-sufficiency and solidarity of the women's arts community, and issues of propriety relating to women crossing over into men's domains" (57). He argues that there are broadly held "common sense" ideas that, "(1) Balinese women lack the inherent capacity to play gamelan with anything approaching the competence of men and (2) whatever musical potential Balinese women do possess in the area of gamelan performance will not likely be fully realized without the direct guidance and assistance of men" (57). Rather than giving women a platform to display the potential of their gender, he argues that *beleganjur wanita*, together with other forms of women's music, reinforce women's inferiority.

Keeping Bakan's analysis in mind, I wondered about the differences, if any, between a man and a woman *dalang*. I asked Ibu Trijata for more details about her

training and whether she found it difficult. Her responses were interesting and it is worthwhile to quote the conversation at length:

JG: What part of *wayang kulit* do you like to rehearse best?

IBU TRIJATA: If I am going to perform *wayang* it is important to practice it all. You need to practice the voice, dancing the puppets, and the foot also. You must become one (*menyatu*) with the puppets. It is very important. It is important to be able sing and do the voices. There are many different voices.

JG: There are lots of male characters—do you think those are difficult?

IBU TRIJATA: If the character is big, like *raksasa*, you must do a rough (*keras*) voice. It is definitely hard, because it is a big voice.

JG: Is *wayang kulit* with a woman *dalang* different or the same?

IBU TRIJATA: The same. But maybe a woman can't perform it quite as well (*kurang*). Like, for example, *raksasa*.

JG: But I think maybe a woman could do female characters better than a man?

IBU TRIJATA: (laughing): Yeah! A woman is able to better fill the voice of a female character. She does not need to practice that one as much.

JG: According to you: is it harder for a woman to become a *dalang* or is it about the same for all new students regardless of gender?

IBU TRIJATA: It depends (*tergantung*) on each student. Some will find it hard and some will find it easy, gender does not matter. My daughter here has already studied for one month to become a *dalang*.

JG: Next time I come back I want to see a performance!

IBU TRIJATA: She is going to do a performance later at the SMA.

Maybe another time she will do it more formal. In school it is not as formal.

In the interview, Ibu Trijata admits that there are differences between a woman *dalang* and a man *dalang*. The voice is the key difference that many of my informants mentioned, and women *dalangs* are often criticized for not being able to produce the same deep voices as the men for the male characters. Most of the characters in *wayang* are male, so this does seem to present a challenge. The key is that every *dalang* is different; voices and movement must be in proportion to the character and to the other voices that the *dalang* is creating.

Ibu Trijata gave her first performance in 1977 at a celebration being held for the school's anniversary, and as she gained recognition as a *dalang*, she had other opportunities to perform in the village. She performed both *wayang peteng* and *wayang lemah* (night and day *wayang* respectively). She still performed occasionally for local events, but was better known for her performances in *arja* and other dramas. She quite often appeared on Bali TV.⁴² She admitted, "When I was young it was easier to go from

⁴² Bali TV is the local television that broadcasts all over Bali. The station features local news and dedicates a great deal of programming time to local performances.

village to village.” Performing as a dancer or in dramatic forms was more appropriate to her status as wife and mother and did not require her to be out all night long.

Before I left we spoke more about women’s equality and the future of women *dalangs* in Bali. Most Balinese that I ask assure me that there is gender equality. I asked Ibu Trijata whether she believed in equality between men and women, and she replied, “according to me, I think that men and women are about the same in Bali. They both work. For example, like I am a *dalang*.” The details of our conversation, however, point to a possible different answer. When I asked how Ibu Trijata had time to practice her art, because women’s lives in Bali are very busy, she answered: “I have help from my family or from friends. Yes, my husband helps too, although I might need to push (*dorong*) him a little bit. There is a lot of advancement for women—but not that much.”

Before ending our conversation I asked:

JG: Do you have advice for a girl who might want to become a *dalang*?

What is it? (I gestured that the advice might be for her daughter and we all laughed.)

IBU TRIJATA: Yes, if she wants to, she can become a professional *dalang*. So that we will continue to have traditional art. The main thing is that she wants to do it.

JG: Are there many woman *dalangs* giving performances now?

IBU: No, but I am not sure. There is only me here in Tabanan.

JG: But maybe there will be a new *dalang*! (We all laughed when I looked at her daughter.)

HER HUSBAND: She has already had a performance.

JG: Anything else you want to add?

IBU TRIJATA: Women *dalangs* will not want to be defeated (*jangan mau kalah - mau maju*) and they need to keep going forward, not backwards.

Women can not only be in the kitchen and cook like in the past. They must advance (*maju*). Women could not do things before, it is still hard but still improving. Women have done a lot in Indonesia, like they have been president. They must not be defeated by men. You agree? Right?

Ni Wayan Rasiani

After only a couple of months in Bali, I met with Dr. I Nyoman Sedana to discuss my research. He is a *dalang* and a professor in the *pendalangan* program at ISI, is widely published in English and Indonesian about *wayang kulit*, and has held guest professor and research positions at numerous international universities. I was very fortunate to have his friendship and assistance in my research. He urged me that I absolutely must meet with Ni Wayan Rasiani (Figure 20) because she currently taught at the SMKI and was one of the most important early woman *dalangs*.

Kadek and I went to the SMKI one day in early February to try to meet Ibu Rasiani and set an appointment for an interview. Ibu Rasiani was the first woman *dalang* I met, and I was quite anxious that I should make a good impression. At first she was shocked and a little nervous to come to the main office and find an eager American hoping to meet her. Evidently she had not been overwhelmed by a mob of scholars seeking interviews, and I think she worried that something was wrong with me. With

Kadek's help, however, I was able to convince Ibu Rasiani to agree to an interview, and we arranged to meet her at her home in a couple of days. The office staff watching the exchange seemed quite amused. Later, at her house she seemed much more relaxed. We sat outside at a small table and over the typical tea and rice cakes, and I had my first interview.



Figure 20. Ni Wayan Rasiana sits with the author for an interview. Photo by Ni Made Murniati.

Ibu Rasiani was originally from the village of Tabanan. When she was young, she loved to spend her free time doing or watching art. Her father was a *dalang* and an

arja dancer. She told me she had loved *wayang kulit* since she was little, but her experience was not common for a daughter. She explained:

When I was little—I really liked to go to performances with my parents. I liked to watch *wayang kulit*. There were no women *dalangs* then. I was never afraid to go to performances, even at night. You had to be careful coming home because it was so dark and you might fall. In the *wayang* performances, there were many symbols, like of god. During every performance I would be happy because there was so much emotion in a *wayang* performance. In the voice, like crying. Stories were not as funny as they are now. When I was a kid, women and girls would usually have to go straight home after school to help their mothers in the home. But I was different. I could go see my father perform and he would tell me the traditional stories. It was like a hobby for me, to listen to and tell the stories of *dalang*. I also studied dance—not just *wayang*. I learned the basics, like how to be appropriate and clear “*cocok dan jelas*” for both. It was a hobby of mine to play *wayang*.

Like a son, she had early exposure to the art form and her interest developed from there.

She began her study at home with her parents, and commented: “that is only natural, right?” When she went to the SMKI, Pak Sumandhi also urged her to study *pendalangan*. At first she was nervous about doing a performance. She commented, “I needed to be brave (*berani*) to do a performance. At first I was not yet brave, but then my family had an *upacara* and wanted me to perform. It was my first performance—

tanggap wayang. You always need to do a beginning like that.” She began her career like any typical male *dalang*, but she was clear to differentiate her involvement as a “hobby.” She claimed, “If I wanted to give a performance, like for a festival or something like that, I could. But I do not perform for money; I do it for a hobby only. My husband is able to work.” Unlike the other women I talked to, she did not work as a dancer or actor and only performed *wayang kulit*. She continued, “But like if there is a *ngyah* at the *pura* and they need the women to dance, I will go dance. That is usual. I can do sacred dance. That is natural (*sifat* – “natural or something normal to do”). Like I will dance for the temple but not for something commercial.” Throughout our interview she made a clear distinction between her job as a teacher, which is secular, and performing. Performance, with its links to the sacred, could only be a hobby for her and never a vocation.

We continued to discuss her choice to study *pendalangan* and her experience teaching *wayang kulit* at the high school:

JG: Usually only men can become *dalangs*, so why did you want to become a *dalang*? Can women now become *dalangs*?

IBU RASIANI: I tried and became a *dalang* but it is rare, because I think that women also can join in (*mengikuti*) with men like that. It is a big thing. Like for example, a girl must think “why can’t I?” I tried and then I was able to do it. Now I work at the SMKI. I teach *pendalangan*.

Maybe if I picked a different major I would not be a teacher now.

JG: Are there any girls studying *pendalangan* right now?

IBU RASIANI: Oh no. Before there were, but right now there aren't. In the past there were some, but some of them went on to become dancers. Sometimes girls study *pendalangan* so they can develop their vocal skills for performing in other types of drama. They advance, but then they become tied up (*tambat*) and are not able to continue. They maybe do not have their own *wayang* to give a performance or maybe they do not have the motivation. To become a *dalang*, a person must have the things to perform, such as puppets and a box, and a lot of motivation. If they don't have all of these things then they cannot become a *dalang*. Quite often their voice might be really good, but that does not mean they can become a *dalang* because they are not competent with everything. Only 75% of the students in the program become *dalangs*. A lot perform in other genres like *arja*, or they become *penasar*, or clowns. The students have to pass a tough test to graduate as a *dalang*.

JG: Is *wayang kulit* performed by a woman differently or the same as performed by a man? How and why?

IBU RASIANI: Different? It is the same, because men and women both study the same thing, although it is rare for a woman to become a *dalang*. But both have to follow the same structure of performance. Women do have a boundary (*kerbatasan*) here. I see performances by men and they are freer. Women are more limited because of their ethics, they do not feel as free to be creative. But when I was a student, I had a big voice and

did not feel very limited. But for women the voice is hard. It is hard to really compare.

I Dewa Ketut Wicaksana (Pak Wicaksana), a professor at ISI, conducted a study about women *dalangs* that was published in 2000. He states that there are many obstacles making it difficult to become *dalangs*. He lists them as: physical/biological, technique, established conducts of behavior for women, family and environment, and the holy/spiritual properties of *wayang kulit* (88). Ibu Rasiani found that some people felt that she should not be a *dalang* because it would get in the way of her fulfilling her societal role as a woman. She commented, “Before I got married, my husband already knew that I did *wayang kulit*. That it was my job. When I first did *wayang kulit* others thought that maybe it would be a problem for me to find a husband and have a family.” Ibu Rasiani did not have this problem, but she consciously positioned her involvement in *wayang kulit* to ensure that she did not experience the problems Wicaksana alludes to. Ibu Rasiani continued, “But I did not do commercial *wayang*, I studied the academic side of things and wanted to teach. I did not feel it was a problem to do that and to get married.” Other girls did not want to study *pendalangan* because they felt they would not be able to get a husband and that studying *wayang kulit* was inappropriate for a woman. This is in contrast to other arts like music and dance that claim to make a woman more desirable for their husbands (see Bakan 71-72).

In order to better understand her decision to go against convention and become a *dalang*, I asked her why a woman would want to become a *dalang*. She explained:

It is a sensation, like a hobby for me. Because it is rare. It is so difficult. But women can do that. I was looking for a hobby, and I wanted something that would connect me to religion and society. It is much more difficult than dancing. *Wayang kulit* is so complex because it has many functions in society. It is art: you have to move the puppets, you have to be brave, you have to dance the puppet and play the *cepala*. You have to do the vocals and know the story. It is truthfully very difficult. But it is a skill that is worth a great deal. It is important for the *dalang* to understand society, because maybe there are people that are doing something that is not good. But then they see a *wayang* performance and understand that they must change to do good. Performing *wayang* is like a mission that is good to do.

I asked her if she had any advice for a girl who might want to become a *dalang* and she replied:

According to me, the process (*lakukan*) of doing *wayang* needs to be real and serious (*sungguh*). It is something that is often blocked or prevented. Even though there is opportunity for education, becoming a *dalang* is up to the individual. Change has to come from the individual. *Wayang* is something hard to start, but it is important to society. To do *wayang* you need to love it (*mencintai*).

It struck me odd at first that she used the verb *mencintai* to express her feeling for *wayang* because this word expresses romantic love and dedication. It is a word that

would generally be reserved for a spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend. The word *suka*, or “to like,” would be more expected here. I think her word choice better reflects the commitment a *dalang* must have to her art. She risked her marriage prospects to practice this “hobby.” In Bali, where a young woman’s worth is often judged on her ability to get married and have a family, this was not a risk to take lightly (see Jennaway).

I asked Ibu Rasiani if she felt there was gender equality in Bali. She laughed:

It is different, yeah? Now men are given more respect for their gender. Each has different things to do. Men are masculine and women are feminine. Women are domestic; they work at home and men work outside of the home. Men are dominant over women and have more economic freedom. Men get paid more, even though both men and women are capable. Women must give their husbands respect. That is Bali, according to *adat* (“custom”). Women have to wake before men and get the coffee. Women must “*tutup*,” or keep their mouth’s “shut.” Things are changing but it is not equal. It is not the same, but it was worse before. Before, women were told “don’t touch *wayang kulit* and don’t touch the *gamelan*!” But now they can.

Ibu Rasiani was not afraid to speak out even though she was careful with her actions and her achievement as a *dalang* gave her confidence. I ended by asking if she had anything else to add. She said, “What, yeah? Hmmm... I think if women are becoming *dalangs* it shows that maybe women’s status will rise too. It shows that women can do other things well. Women can work like men and they can do the same things.”

Ni Nyoman Tjandri

I read about Ni Nyoman Tjandri⁴³ before I met her. She has toured extensively internationally and performs as a dancer with Teater Odin.⁴⁴ Like Ibu Trijata, she plays the *condong* role in *arja* and is better known for those performances than as a *dalang*. I interviewed her in late August and met her at her house where she lived with her husband and members of her extended family. One of her daughters married a doctor and now lives in Australia, and her other two children are adults living in Bali. It was my shortest interview with a female *dalang*.

At the beginning of our interview, after I explained my purpose and the topic of my research, Ibu Tjandri apologized, “Right now I am not really a *dalang*. I can only do it a little, I am not that smart with it. I work more as a dancer for *arja* or like that.” I reassured her that I was interested in whatever she could tell me. Ibu Tjandri might not perform often or even identify as a *dalang*, but was the name most often mentioned when I would ask about women *dalangs*. As I interviewed her, however, I noted a discrepancy between her image and reality. Perhaps this demonstrates that many Balinese are more comfortable with a woman *dalang* who is not really a *dalang*, and her ambivalence might enhance her status rather than detract from it.

As a child, Ibu Tjandri studied and performed dance with her father, a well-known dancer and actor. Her love for dance and theatre inspired her original interest in

⁴³ In Indonesian there was a switch in spelling. The sound “ch” is now written by a “c,” but it used to be noted with a “tj;” therefore, there are many different spellings of Ibu Tjandri’s name. In English language publications it often appears as “Chandri or Candri.” However, she spelled it for me with the “Tj,” so that is the spelling I prefer to use.

⁴⁴ Teater Odin, in Denmark, is a highly regarded international company of theatre artists led by Eugenio Barba. Through the practice of “theatre anthropology,” he and the other members of the company articulate a vocabulary of the body in performance through a consideration of traditional western and eastern theatre forms.

pendalangan. She began studying *wayang kulit* because she wanted to learn Kawi, which is an important language for other performance genres. She explained:

But after my dad died I studied *Kawi*. I thought maybe I would just study the language. But my teachers in Sukuwati felt that I should study the practical as well, like the practice of *wayang*. So that is why I studied *wayang*. I studied the different voices for Twalin, Merdah, Sangut, and Dalem. Big voices and little voices. Before I thought I would only study *Kawi*—but once I started they had me learning the voice for Arjuna and for the *raksasa*. I thought then I should maybe try a performance. I studied for three months and had a performance.

She liked *wayang kulit* because “You must be able to be *alus* and *kasar*. It has so many things, so many shadows (*bayangan*). You have to make the *raksasa* so *kasar*.” The word she used for shadows, *bayangan*, translates into both the word “shadow” and the word “imagination.” Her use of this word indicates the combination of physical, mental, and spiritual realms used in performance. *Wayang kulit* is unique because it provides a means for a human, in this case the *dalang*, to act in both the spiritual and physical realms, and this gives the *dalang* a powerful public voice. Ibu Tjandri used her training as a springboard for other performance genres:

I like all of the different characters. They are all different. If you want a big voice, you have a *raksasa* or a small voice like Arjuna. It must be like that. Maybe it is easier for women to do the *manis* (sweet) voice, but you must study the other voices too. [She demonstrated the deep laugh of a

raksasa voice] You need to study like that until your voice disappears! Your voice must come from inside. But then your voice might not be good for singing... but then it comes back. It gets stronger. Before I could do it better, but now it makes me cough.

Women rarely perform *kasar* characters in other forms of drama or dance. Performing *wayang kulit* provides a rare opportunity to use a *kasar* voice and to embody those characters.

Ibu Tjandri did not continue to use the public voice of a *dalang*, at least not in Bali. I asked her if she continued to perform:

No, I am not strong enough. I do not know enough stories. But in other countries I will do a short performance like for an hour, or maybe just a demonstration for twenty minutes. Or maybe for a concert, I will do *wayang* for thirty minutes and they mix it with other things, like if they want a workshop. I do not perform an entire story. Usually if I perform *wayang*, it is in another country like with Teater Odin. They collaborated with some artists here in Gianyar for a workshop and a production. They did a mix of things, like dance and *topeng*, and there were a lot of students from other countries.

Many of the women complained that *wayang kulit* required more strength than they had available. While in Bali I studied both dance and puppetry and can attest that dancing also requires great strength. The basic dance position requires the dancer to hold up her arms and bend her legs for a sustained duration of time (Figure 21). I became tired and

sore after only a few minutes, but many women dancers could hold that position for hours, often while wearing heavy costumes, and I almost never heard a word of complaint. Even so, Ibu Tjandri felt that it is more difficult for a woman to learn *wayang* than a man. She said, “I think it is more difficult. Because men have a bigger voice that is already better for *raksasa*. But maybe for women the *alus* voices are easy? But for men it is hard to switch too. Because of my study in *pendalangan*, when I perform *arja*, I feel more brave and more smart. Many students study *arja* with me.” She still performed *arja*, “even though I am old. I tell them I am old but they say that I must perform.”



Figure 21. The author demonstrates *agam kanan*, a basic dance pose. Photo by Ni Luh Happy.

Ibu Tjandri did not study *wayang kulit* for very long. Her account demonstrates how a woman artist must balance many responsibilities in order to find time for her art. She told me:

I studied for three months, but my lessons and practice did not fill all my time. I still had to work at the office, so my days were very full! I would meet with a teacher for three days a week but then I would practice alone. I would sit and work my legs. If I went to work at the office I would sit and practice my legs. I could not take *wayang* with me, so, I would practice in my head. And then finally I could use the *wayang*. It is important, but even if you do not have a *cepala*, you can practice your leg without it. But I am very stupid with the *cepala*. My leg is not good. I get tired very quickly.

As a young woman she did not have free time as she split her time between work, dancing, and studying.

Ibu Tjandri, like Ibu Rasiani, was clear to define her participation in the arts as a “hobby,” not a career. They insisted on this differentiation, even though they would certainly be considered very successful professionals in a Western context. Calling their work in the arts a “hobby” seems to suggest a hesitation to assert themselves as artists and reduces the social and economic capital that might be made available to them through their art. I never heard a male artist make such a clear distinction or insistence about his art as hobby. Ibu Tjandri explained how much time her hobby took in her life:

IBU TJANDRI: If it is a hobby, you have to share your time. There are many ceremonies, and I have a lot of students to teach. People work at hotels or offices. When I worked in the office, I would then go directly to different places to teach or to study. I would go to hotels or to temples or other places. I would work all night and then have to go back to the office. I had to work very hard at the office! At night I could dance. I danced almost every night when I was still young and then I would go to the office.

JG: When did you sleep?

IBU TJANDRI: Oh, I slept in my car. It's true! I did! I would stay at the place after dancing and just sleep there. I was always sleepy, and it was normal for me. I would rarely sleep at home. It is the same now for my students. Lots of students come here to study and then stay here over night.

Ibu Tjandri could not have accomplished so much without the support of her family and husband. She said he would often help around the house or with the children when she would go to perform. I asked her about gender equality:

IBU TJANDRI: Oh, men and women are the same. Although there are differences too! Now, women want to do more things like men. Women can take the role of men, but like in *wayang*, there didn't used to be women *dalangs* and now there are. There did not used to be women

politicians, and now there are. Although there are differences in strength, women can still do a lot of the same things as men.

JG: Do you have any advice for a young girl who might want to become a *dalang*?

IBU TJANDRI: Yeah, if she wants, she must study hard. She must work otherwise. But if she wants to study *arja* and dance, it is hard for a woman to also have time to study *pendalangan*.

JG: Do you think it is good for women to become *dalangs*? Is it appropriate?

IBU TJANDRI: Oh yes. It is good and appropriate!

JG: Do you have anything else to add?

IBU TJANDRI: Yes, there are still other girls studying *pendalangan* in the school. There is a class. But when I studied *wayang* there was only one other woman. Now there is a scholarship for anyone to study *pendalangan*.

Ni Wayan Nondri

The first time I met Ni Wayan Nondri (Figure 22) was in the market at Sukuwati. Sukuwati is a village not far from Ubud that is known for its art market. Both Balinese and tourists come here to shop and buy a variety of items for the home or for souvenirs. The Balinese buy offerings, baskets, woven mats, and other practical items for daily life or ceremonies and the tourists buy cheap masks or puppets, t-shirts, and jewelry. It is a busy, sprawling center of activity. Kadek and I met Ibu Nondri while she was working at

a small stall selling candy, cigarettes, snacks, and drinks. Ibu Nondri was a small, frail-looking old woman, but her eyes were expressive and energetic. She wore a sarong and t-shirt with her white hair pulled back into a loose bun. I explained that I was doing research on *wayang kulit* and would like to interview her. Ibu Nondri smiled and told me to come the next night. She said she got home from work around 7:00 P.M. and that I should come then.



Figure 22. The author sits with Ni Wayan Nondri. Photo by Ni Made Murniati.

The next night it was raining as we drove to her family compound located on a street lined with shops selling puppets. When Kadek and I arrived at 8:00 P.M., Ibu

Nondri was already sleeping, but her family woke her up so she could come speak with us. Her family all sat on the larger *bale* watching a soap opera on the television and off to the side of the television was a puppet screen and puppets. I was sad we could not sit near the puppets, but we preferred a quieter spot off to the side for the interview. A baby could be heard crying in the distance and family members would come over periodically to see what we were doing. Ibu Nondri lived in a large, busy family compound.

Ibu Nondri was born only a few houses away from where she currently lived. She got married in 1972 and had three children who still lived with their mother. Two lived in the same compound, and the third lived next door. When Ibu Nondri was little she often had to help her parents around the house, but when she had time she liked to play and pretend she was putting on performances where she would tell stories from the *wayang*. Her father was a *dalang*, but he died when he was thirty, when she was still a young girl. She did not go to school for art, but like most girls she studied dance in the village and her favorite was *tarian parawa*. She explained, “It is a dance that tells the stories of the *wayang*. I think it is a good dance for someone to do before studying *wayang*.”

Soon after having her third child, her husband, a popular *dalang*, died in a motorbike accident. At that moment, she decided to become a *dalang*. She told me:

After my husband died, I felt I must study how to do *wayang*. I felt what else could I do? After my husband died I did not have any work to do. It was before I sold things in the market. When he was alive, I liked to stay up with him and watch him play with the *wayang* and read stories. I

helped him create stories. As soon as the other children fell asleep I would help him make stories. But then he died. I then took my own initiative to study *wayang*. Since I was little, the stories and the puppets made me happy. It was like I was married to all things *wayang* (*mekekawin*).

She studied with her younger brother who was already a *dalang*. He would play the *gender* and help her study. She worked on her skills every day after her children went to bed. She told me:

After I was done with the work around the house—I had taken care of the children and had prepared the food in the kitchen, sometimes I would then take a book and read a little. Every night when everyone slept I would rehearse. I would have to practice how to move the *wayang*. It was really difficult! The *dalangs* in Bali, especially Sukuwati, must be able to move their foot as well as use their arms and hands, and their voice. I had to study every day and every night.

Her husband died in January, and she gave her first performance in May.

I asked Ibu Nondri why she liked *wayang kulit*. She replied, “I definitely like *wayang kulit*. I always like to watch it and I like to perform *wayang kulit*. It fills my thoughts. Inside a story there is a lot of advice for the audience and you have to use that in the performance.” She performed often both at temples and for tourists, sometimes four times a week and other times only three or four times a month. She explained, “As long as I was able to fill my kitchen that was enough.” During my interview, she never referred to her performance as a hobby. She was clear that she was a *dalang* to support

her family by giving performances. Ibu Nondri thought that her audiences were pleased with her performances and that they did not mind that she was a woman *dalang*. She laughed, “If they did not like it, they wouldn’t have invited me back to perform at the next *odalan*.”

I was struck by her confidence; she needed to find a way to make money, and it only made sense for her to continue in her husband’s footsteps. That it only took her three months to prepare for her first performance attests to her previous experience with the *wayang kulit* as a daughter and wife. She did not think there was that much of a difference between a man and woman *dalang*; however, she did acknowledge:

Yeah, I think it is harder for women, because once a month women menstruate and they may not perform then. I always had to try to adjust my performance schedule around my menstruation (she laughed), because when I had my period I could not go out. I tried to find a doctor to help, but during that time I was not brave enough to perform. It is okay to rehearse, but I was not brave enough to use the puppets. You may not touch them during that time.

Women in Bali are considered polluted during the period of their menstruation and they may not go to temple or handle offerings (see Figure 23). Aware of this restriction, I took birth control in Bali and was careful to regulate my period around times that were quiet in the Balinese calendar, so I would not miss too many opportunities to see performances. One time I was dancing at a temple ceremony and my dance teacher was menstruating. We danced outside the main temple gate so she was able to be there with us, but she wore

a bright red ribbon on her *kabaya* broadcasting to the others that she could not go in to the temple or help with the offerings. My friend Kadek sometimes looked relieved when she said she could not go to the temple because she had started her period. For women in Bali, menstruation is both a time of limitation and a time of rest.

I asked Ibu Nondri if she thought that *wayang kulit* was different with a woman *dalang*, “is it still traditional *wayang kulit*?” Ibu Nondri exclaimed:

Oh, it is the same. What would the purpose be of it being different? Why would it be different? Their story is the same, the puppets move the same, and the voice is the same. The only difference is that women cannot perform during menstruation. Men do not have to worry about that.



Figure 23. A sign outside of a temple warns women not to enter if they have their period. Photo by J. Goodlander.

Like the other women *dalangs* I spoke with, Ibu Nondri locates the tradition of *wayang kulit* in the objects, context, and stories and not in the person doing the action. She exclaimed, “Well, like a boy I wanted to become a *dalang* since I was very little. It was a hobby—but I did it so I could make money. That was my main reason!” Her family was happy that she became a *dalang* so that she could support her children. She did not need the approval of her husband because he was deceased. I wondered if she ever thought about what his reaction might be to her performance. “Do you think a woman *dalang* would have a hard time finding a husband?” I asked. “No it would not be a problem,” she said, “everyone is free to make his or her own decisions. But I waited until after I was married to study to become a *dalang*. But then I was really happy that my little brother had studied to be a *dalang*, because when he studied to become a *dalang* I would always watch and practice. It meant I could become a *dalang* very quickly.”

I asked Ibu Nondri if she still gave performances, and she sighed, “I am too old. I cannot perform anymore. You have to be so strong. I did perform at the PKB a year or so ago, but that was the last time. It was only for two hours, before that I would perform for three or four hours. I was strong.” Finally I asked her if she had any advice for a young girl who might want to become a *dalang*. She replied, “If she wants to become a *dalang* then she must study constantly (*terus belajar*). She must study philosophy and read stories and work hard until she has a performance and can do it all alone.” Before I left I gave her a gift to thank her for her time.

Ni Wayan Suratni

Ni Wayan Suratni (Figure 24), like Ibu Tjandri, is a very well-known performer for her outrageous comic characters in *drama gong, arja*, and others. She was thirty-seven years old and the youngest woman *dalang* that I interviewed. She lived with her husband and three children; the youngest was still in preschool and sat with us during the interview.

I always began my interviews by asking the person I interviewed to sign a letter of permission as required by the Institution Review Board at Ohio University. At first Ibu Suratni was hesitant, because she did not know if by signing the form, if she would be hindering her own opportunities to do research in the future. I assured her it would not, as the letter was merely an odd requirement for American researchers, not a contract. She said she was happy to help me, but hoped to do her own research at a later time. As she signed the form, Kadek told her that I also studied *pendalangan* with Pak Tunjung. Ibu Suratni was delighted that we had that in common and she said she hoped to see me perform.

Ibu Suratni could not remember the first time she saw *wayang kulit* because she went to many performances when she was young. She began her study of *wayang kulit* with a *dalang* in her village, Pak Sijia, and then continued at ISI in 2000. She was already married when she began her study and explained that she needed to get permission from her family. During her course at the university, she gave birth to two of her children. She complained that it was difficult to balance the needs of her family and make it to campus to attend lectures. She explained:

The lessons at campus only allowed for a little bit of working with the puppets. You did not learn as much, so I kept studying with Pak Sijia. After lecture I would go right there to practice what I learned. If I wanted to complete my education in *wayang kulit* I needed to practice with the music. I had a lot of outside support. If I needed one thing my family or friends would help me and bring five.

Her family and teachers were really happy to help her, and did not think it was strange that she wanted to learn *wayang kulit*. Pak Sijia felt that if someone was willing to come, “*pasti akan dia ajar,*” for sure he would teach them. Ibu Suratni confirmed, “I am brave (*berani*).”



Figure 24. Ni Wayan Suratni performs a scene between Delam and Sangut for a *wayang lemah*, or daytime *wayang*. Photo by J. Goodlander.

Ibu Suratni also studied *topeng* (she completed the entire program in four semesters) and performed as a dancer and comedian. I wondered how she managed to find time to do all these things and be able to care for her family. When I inquired about this, she told me:

IBU SURATNI: I had my family at my side. After I finished all my work here at home then I could start to study to practice. It is like that in Bali, if you are an artist you are always very busy. And then there were *upacara* (“ceremonies”) as well and lectures at campus. If I had a performance at night I would get home very late but get up at five in the morning to make offerings. At 7:00 A.M. I would go to campus and finish there at noon. I would bring my costumes along with me and then go to give a performance at 1:00 P.M. To do this I had to change my clothes at campus right after the lecture and go directly there. Like I might perform for a wedding. After that, maybe I would not go right home, I would go to another performance before coming home. Then I might come home for a little bit before going to a performance that night. I would stop at the temple to pray and then go dance *prembon*. Then maybe starting at 10:00 P.M. I would have a *drama gong* performance. I would get home at 3:00 A.M. and then finally see my husband, I would get up the next day at 5:00 A.M. again. On the weekend I could sometimes sleep until 11:00 A.M., but as soon as it was morning my eyes would open and my mind would start working. I could not get back to sleep! I must get up. It was always

like that! Although then sometimes I would take a nap later in the afternoon.

JG: And does your family help you? Does your husband help you with everything?

IBU SURATNI: Yes. If I have to go and I can only get a little bit done at home, my husband will help. The children already know how to do some cleaning and they help a little bit. But before I go, I have to make the offerings, but he will put them out. Whenever I go out he stays with the children.

Her husband was not currently employed, so the family depended on Ibu Suratni's income from performing. He seemed very proud of his talented wife, but I sensed she was a bit frustrated that he did not work more in or out of the home. I observed this tension between wives and husbands in several Balinese households. Ibu Suratni revealed her attitude about this when I asked if it was harder for her to become a *dalang* because she was a woman. She replied:

No. But you must have a strong commitment. You need to study together with the other students on campus and study at home. You need to work on your voice and on the movement of the puppets. Sometimes the men are lazy (*malas*), however men are more capable than women (*mampu*) wants to do something, she definitely can because women work so hard.

Seemingly, the men could chose to work or not, and they could chose to help around the house or not, but the wife had to do these things. I asked her if she thought there was equality between the genders, and she told me,

Oh for sure it is still very different! Men do not have to have children, they do not have to take care of the home. They are able to go out more and do more things. Right now women still have to do a lot of things. For example if a child is sick, that has to come first. A woman might be late then going to the *pura* to dance, pray, or give offerings.

She sighed, “Maybe later it will get better and women will have more equality with men.”

Ibu Suratni also felt that some parts of *wayang kulit* were more difficult for women than men. She complained:

One thing that is difficult is the sitting position. Women are not strong in their legs and maybe their hips are too big! Too fat! Maybe women need a different sitting position. I practice and practiced. It is hard to sit like that. Pak Wicaksana told me never mind, we must come up with a way for women to be able to sit for a longer time. So we made a place to sit (*tempat duduk*) it raises me up and has a hole so I can use the *cepala*. It gets you up thirty centimeters and you can sit the regular way and sit much longer. You can be strong. Women cannot sit the normal way, they can sit kneeling with the feet to one side (*simpuh/bersimpuh*), but to be a *dalang* you cannot sit that way because you cannot use the *cepala*.

Ibu Suratni came up with a solution to make sitting more comfortable, but she had not gotten to use it in performance. Using the chair requires the *dalang* to be out of view of the audience, and she only performed *wayang lemah*, daytime *wayang*, where the *dalang* is in full view of the audience (see Figure 24). The feeling of discomfort about the sitting position seems to be more about propriety rather than a true difference in physical ability between a man and woman. At the *pura*, or temple, when they go to pray, women sit kneeling and men sit cross-legged, but in daily life, I have saw women sit cross-legged for many hours to make offerings without difficulty. However, for a ceremony, this position is not considered as polite; it is better to sit kneeling. A woman *dalang* therefore has a dilemma: should she sit the way necessary to play the *cepala* even though it is not polite? Many of the women, therefore, seem to make a point to complain about the sitting position in order to emphasize that they are only doing it because they must play the *cepala*.

Ibu Suratni shared the other women's feelings that the voice for a woman *dalang* was different: "the voice of a woman always appears like that of a woman, a woman *dalang*." She felt that men have a natural ability to speak in a deep voice and do not need to spend as much time rehearsing it. She told me about how she practiced her voice every day, even practicing out in the rain. Finally, she felt, "I am capable (*mampu*.) I can do the voice of Dimbi (Bima's wife), I can do the voices for *raksasa wanita*. I can do it very good. I did that for my final exam at ISI." Then she demonstrated her voice for the clown characters of Twalin and Delam. Her voice was deep and gravely. "I can do it. I am brave (*berani*)," she exclaimed.

Before I left she told me that in a week she would be giving a performance of *wayang lemah* for a village mass cremation and that I could come see the performance. She usually performed *wayang* about once a month. People asked her to perform more often than that, but she was so busy as a dancer that she usually had to turn down the invitation. Unlike male *dalangs*, she did not have a student that she could send in her place. Before I left I asked her about the responses she received from her family and community regarding her work as a *dalang*:

IBU SURATNI: There are a lot of positive and negative, some people might not like it, but they do not tell me that. People who feel positive about it might telephone me and they give me support. People who are negative might feel “why did you become a *dalang*?” People like that are not capable like me. I work hard to study. But I think that most people are supportive. The people in this area are happy they do not need to go outside to find a *dalang*; there is one right here, someone who is part of their family.

JG: What advice would you have for a girl who might want to become a *dalang*?

IBU SURATNI: You have to be careful. Even right after having my children I had to get up after only a week after having my children. You have to transfer your energy. Both girls and boys can be smart at making dance or music. But if you have a feeling for making art, you have to be brave, you must be able to memorize music really quickly. Like one of

my kids is studying *arja* because he likes to dance. It requires a lot of commitment, they must want to do it. If they want to do something else, that is okay. My children do not need to do just like me.

JG: Is there anything else you wanted to add?

IBU SURATNI: I think it is great that you are able to do this research, to get to know how things are for women in Bali. Things like that are important. Later I hope you will give me your book. I hope you have great success.

Tradition and Women's Agency

The five women *dalangs* I interviewed are each an anomaly within Balinese society. Through special opportunities and encouragement offered by their families and/or government institutions, they were able to learn and perform the art of *wayang kulit*. In this section I want to compare their experiences to demonstrate that *wayang kulit* has given them an opportunity for agency that has potential ramifications for Balinese women more generally because of *wayang kulit's* status and function as tradition.

All but one of the women I interviewed received the majority, if not all of their training, at ISI. Ibu Trijata, often considered the first woman *dalang*, was chosen by the university. She did not seek this program of study, but was instead convinced to undertake it by Pak Sumanthi. In her interview, she spoke about how important it was for women studying *pendalangan* to want to embark on that program of study. Ibu Trijata stressed this point, which suggests that becoming a *dalang* was for her especially difficult because it was not her choice. If the men at the university and the influence of

her brother were the deciding factors, is it possible to say that Ibu Trijata is a fitting symbol of equality between men and women in Bali? Did she gain or lose agency through her study of shadow puppetry?

In contrast to Ibu Trijata's experience, Ibu Nondri became a *dalang* by choice. I even feel that, given their relative similarity in age, it might be more correct to consider Ibu Nondri the first woman *dalang*. Why isn't she? Ibu Nondri became a *dalang* after her husband died; she took his place. She did not train at ISI but instead relied on her early childhood experience of watching her father and brothers. After getting married she continued to watch her husband, and would help him determine what stories he should share with his audience. Unlike Ibu Trijata, who practiced the art as a showpiece for the government to demonstrate women's equality, Ibu Nondri performed for herself, her family, and her village: not her government. Even though Ibu Nondri chose to become a *dalang*, it was only in response to circumstances beyond her control (the death of her husband) and it fulfilled the very real need of making money to support her children. Ibu Trijata did not choose to become a *dalang*, but is a symbol for gender equality in Bali; this is in contrast to Ibu Nondri, who chose to perform in order to support her family. These two women demonstrate how difficult it is to locate agency in their performance and to make generalizations about other women in Bali based on the actions of these few. In order to understand their choices, and the opportunities that each had, it is important to examine the notion of agency more closely.

Lyn Parker, in her study on the medicalization of birthing practices for women in Indonesia, especially Bali, attempts to create definitions of agency and resistance that are applicable in a Balinese/Indonesian context. Her conclusions are worth quoting in full:

I would argue that “resistance” is a term that is best used to describe actions that actors themselves describe as aiming to defy, subvert, undermine, or oppose the power and repression of dominant forces. Resistance should be directed against the perpetrators: it should have a goal other than (or as well as) immediate self-interest, and be principled. Feminist resistance should be that which is directed against the forces of patriarchy—whether they be individual senior males or an oppressive state. Agency has the potential to transform into resistance, but is perhaps more likely to be deployed towards ends that may be self-serving or pragmatic. Thus, agency may accommodate gender or other inequalities; it may enable short-term practical agendas to be served while strategic feminist agendas go unrecognized or neglected. Agency may reflect subjectivities which are conflicted (e.g., female experience may be exceeded by ethnic or class positionality) and which represent intersecting subject-positions. [. . .] Given the conditions and contingencies under which most women live their lives, agency may often be all that is possible. (Parker, “Resisting Resistance” 87-88)

Through an analysis of several case studies, Parker compares the role that women’s desires play in determining how and where they will give birth. These women have to

negotiate a complex system of state versus private medical practices versus more “traditional” birthing practices, including home births. Many of the women in her study exercised an opinion about what kind of medical care they wished to receive, even as their options were often limited by class/caste status, education, and location. Through these studies, Parker concludes that although many of these women are demonstrating agency over their bodies and the health care they receive, the women are not forming a part of a larger resistance against patriarchy. Parker feels that each woman is acting only out of her own self-interest and in response to an individualized situation, not as part of a larger movement or struggle (“Resisting Resistance” 85-87).

I feel her conclusions overlook acts of resistance because she is focusing narrowly on case studies without considering how one person’s actions might reverberate into society. She advocates a type of research that focuses on women’s “embodied experience, of their multiple, changeable, and open subjectivities and of intersubjective experience” (“Resisting Resistance” 86). Her research, focusing on individual women’s experience, speaks to the complexities of that experience, but Parker does not then expand that experience to account for its meaning to the greater community. In short, Parker does not find resistance because she is not looking for it.

My own research on women *dalangs* also perhaps favors agency over resistance because I am focusing on the individual rather than the community. I have spoken to the women themselves, and not the people surrounding or affected by their performance. But does this mean that women performing *wayang kulit* do not speak to a larger shift in the role of women in Balinese society? The women I interviewed became *dalangs* for a

variety of complex reasons, such as the reasons cited by Ibu Trijatta and Ibu Nondri. It might be possible to conclude that Ibu Trijata is a symbol of resistance, even though her actions did not have agency. Ibu Trijata finally agreed to become a *dalang* because she believed it was important to demonstrate to Balinese society that women were as capable as men. Her individual interests and desires were set aside in order to benefit a future generation. Ibu Trijata's daughter is now being given the opportunity to choose and study *pendalangan* with an agency that her mother did not have.

The action of being a *dalang*, not just the process of becoming one, is another important aspect to consider in order to determine if there is agency and resistance for women in and through *wayang kulit*. Megan Jennaway, in her ethnography on women, sexuality, and desire in Bali, offers another analysis of women's agency in Bali. Jennaway makes a connection between power and the ability to speak and express desire (sexual or otherwise). Women are often denied subjectivity or agency: "Women can never occupy the role of *cogito*, the subject of contemplation. Instead they are condemned to serve as its object, the object of male contemplation" (22). Desire, and especially the capability to speak that desire, is linked to political power. Jennaway is writing explicitly about sexual desire, which has both personal and societal implications in Bali, and can be extended to other acts of "speaking desire" by women in Bali. She concludes that, in Bali, as elsewhere, "societies which proscribe female sexual desire frequently proscribe women's political representation, or right of speech as well" (27). Her analysis of speaking has political and personal significance that suggests that through

wayang kulit women are appropriating the power to speak their thoughts and feelings, a privilege and forum previously granted to men only.

As I mentioned previously, when both men and women *dalangs* refer to the relationship between the *dalang* and the puppet, they use the word *menyatu*. This word essentially means to “unify” or “become one,” is a verb constructed from the word *satu* or “one.” It is significant because the “*me*” prefix indicates the transitive form of the verb. Often the word “*bersatu*,” which also means “to unify,” is used. For example, the Indonesian anthem includes the phrase “Indonesia *bersatu*,” or, “Indonesia unite.” The puppet and the *dalang*, as indicated by the language, are not uniting together. The *dalang* is acting upon the puppet; it is an active verb rather than a passive. This suggests a level of agency on the part of the *dalang* that is not usually appropriate with the action of uniting. The *dalang* has a special power in his or her ability to unite with the sacred object of the *wayang*, and therefore with “tradition” in a way that was previously not possible.

Gilles Deleuze’s concept of “becoming” explains how the relationship between the puppet and the *dalang* can be considered resistance. Adrian Parr explains the idea of “becoming” according to Deleuze:

Deleuze uses the term “becoming” (*devenir*) to describe the continual production (or “return”) difference imminent within the constitution of events, whether physical or otherwise. Becoming is the pure movement evident in changes *between* particular events. This is not to say that becoming represents a phase between two states, or a range of terms or

states through which something might pass on its journey to another state. Rather than a product, final or interim, becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state. (21)

“Becoming” suggests that there is a break in the structure of tradition and that it is an active force. Through this force, the relationship between the *dalang* and puppet is unstable and destabilizing. “Becoming” suggests constant movement or constant change, and is in stark contrast to tradition, which appears static and unchanging. Tradition is assumed to be stable while “becoming” is unstable. Parr concludes, “for if the primacy of identity is what defines the world of re-presentation (presenting the same world once again), then becoming (by which Deleuze means ‘becoming different’) defines a world of presentation anew” (21). “Becoming” explains the phenomenon by which women *dalangs* unlock the radical potential in *wayang kulit* because it articulates the inherently unstable nature of “tradition.”

In order to better understand the potential of “becoming” in a performance of *wayang kulit*, I would like to examine a performance of *wayang lemah* that I watched in Bali by Ibu Suratni, one of the woman *dalangs* I interviewed. Kadek and I met Ibu Suratni at a house by the temple where the ceremony, a large village cremation, was being held. There were several differences in both the performance and the treatment of the *dalang* that I noted between Ibu Suratni’s performance experience and my experiences going to see *wayang kulit* with Pak Tunjung.

When Kadek and I arrived, Ibu Suratni was sitting on the *bale* with the two musicians and her assistant.⁴⁵ She smiled when she saw us coming up the path and gestured we should come join them and share the cakes they were eating. After we sat down, Ibu Suratni got up to fetch a couple bottles of water from the host. This surprised me; when I went to performances with Pak Tunjung, he always allowed others to wait on him before a performance. As we sat there, Ibu Suratni studied a notebook that was filled with notes, probably phrases in Kawi and details of the story she was going to tell. Typically, before a performance when I was with Pak Tunjung, he sat relaxed and talked to the hosts of the event or the priest who would be conducting the ceremony. But no one came over to talk to Ibu Suratni while we sat there. After about thirty minutes, Ibu Suratni looked up from her notebook and said that we should head over to place the ceremony was being held (Figure 25). As we walked over, Ibu Surtatni carried a large basket of offerings on the top of her head, and placed it in front of a shrine honoring one of the dead.

Once we arrived at the space, Ibu Suratni and her assistants started to set the puppets and to get ready for the performance. I had seen *wayang lemah* several times with Pak Tunjung and many times at other ceremonies performed by other male *dalangs*, and the performance I saw with Ibu Suratni was in many ways similar to those other performances. The *kayonan* dance at the beginning of the performance was very good, with fluid movement of the puppet that matched the music. The opening incantation and song was not very strong, Ibu Suratni had a cold and it affected her voice. Throughout

⁴⁵ *Wayang lemah* performances only use two musicians and one assistant in comparison to the four musicians and two assistants used in the night performances.

the performance her voice became weaker and weaker, until finally it was almost gone. In spite of this, she still gave each of the characters a distinct vocalization. After the *kayonan*, she introduced the popular character of Bima and the first scene involved many puppets coming to talk to him.



Figure 25. The cremation ceremony. Photo by J. Goodlander.

Wayang lemah is typically performed at the same time as a *topeng* performance, and both of the performances must be timed to match the actions of the priest conducting the main part of the ritual; all three must also end at about the same time. Because of this, *wayang lemah* performances are typically shorter than the performances done at night.

Pak Tunjung made the adjustment by only performing the first section and sometimes part of the second section of the play; he ended the performance whenever it was necessary. In contrast, Ibu Suratni performed a shortened version of all three sections, including the fight sequence at the end of the play.

Ibu Suratni only had a small area in front of the stage, but over twenty people crowded around the stage to watch the performance. Usually there is no audience for a *wayang lemah* performance because audiences prefer to watch the more dramatic *topeng* performance or are busy participating in the ritual. I do not know if the larger audience was because of a woman *dalang* performing or if it was just indicative of a greater preference for *wayang kulit* in the area. It does suggest that even though Ibu Suratni only performed *wayang lemah* and was not able to perform at night, she was able to have a voice or agency in the performance. The audience laughed at the jokes Ibu Suratni made during the clown scenes; both of her children sat nearby for the performance, and occasionally would sit behind their mother and play with the puppets. The involvement of the audience and the children suggest that the performance acts as resistance because it is establishing new norms of “tradition” for women. Ibu Suratni’s performances are different, but they represent a difference that is accepted into the social and ritual world of Bali.

The circumstances of women becoming a *dalang* and the elements of performance demonstrate how *wayang kulit* is a site of agency and possibly resistance for women. However, does this agency translate into an understanding of equality for the women? At the end of our interview, Ibu Trijata noted that women should continue to

advance, or *maju*, that they “can not only be in the kitchen and cook like in the past.” Ibu Rasiani, on the other hand, was very careful about how she positioned herself as a *dalang*. She emphasized that it was only a hobby, even though she made her living teaching *pendalangan* at the SMKI, and this might suggest that she is hesitant to claim agency through her work as a *dalang*. Even so, she indicated that she saw *wayang kulit* as part of an important push for women’s equality when she said:

Hmmm... I think if women are becoming *dalangs* it shows that maybe women’s status will rise too. It shows that women can do other things well. Women can work like men and they can do the same things.

Through *wayang kulit*, women can demonstrate that they are also *manpu*, or “capable” like men. Both Ibu Rasiani and Ibu Trijata were chosen by others to be an example of equality for Balinese and Indonesian society; perhaps this context explains why they feel the most strongly that *wayang kulit* provides both a means and evidence for women’s equality within Balinese culture. These two women are also the examples that the other women *dalangs* referred to when talking about women *dalangs* in relation to the status of women in Bali.

Ibu Nondri, Ibu Tjandri, and Ibu Suratni studied *wayang kulit* and became *dalangs* out of personal desire. Ibu Tjandri became a *dalang* in order to enhance her vocal skills for other performance genres but performed *wayang kulit* rarely and did not really consider herself a *dalang*. She represents a trend of other female students in the *pendalangan* program that chose *pendalangan* because it offers a guaranteed scholarship for study and provides training in vocal and performance skills to perform *drama gong*,

arja, and other popular genres. Ibu Tjandri was perhaps the most hesitant to argue for equality between men and women; she felt it was possible, but admitted that women were weaker. Ibu Nondri and Ibu Suratni are the most active *dalangs* that I interviewed; Ibu Nondri retired a few years ago but Ibu Suratni was still performing. Ibu Nondri found both economic and social agency as a *dalang*. She performed *wayang kulit* in order to support her family, and was the woman who was the most articulate about using the performance as a platform to improve society through the stories she performed.

In the previous chapters I have focused on the objects and people involved in *wayang kulit*, but this physical realm is only part of “tradition” in Bali. Ibu Suratni not only performed a story to entertain, but recognized? that performance was a necessary part of an important ritual. She prayed, gave offerings, called down the puppet gods, and conducted the special ritual to make holy water at the end of the performance.

People in Bali recognize two different realms of action or being: *sekala* and *nisekala*. *Sekala* is the tangible physical world; it is what can be seen, heard, sensed, and touched. It is the world of everyday life. Just as important as *sekala*, though, is the world you cannot see. This invisible world, the *nisekala*, is both what is felt within a person and also what exists outside and all around. Actions in one realm have implications for the other. Balinese ceremonies are often done to bring balance between the energies of these two realms. *Wayang kulit* is one important way of mediating between the visible and invisible and bringing them into balance. In *wayang kulit*, through action of *menyatu*, the physical world can be understood as interacting with the spiritual. In the next chapter I will explore in greater detail the spiritual realm of *wayang kulit* as it relates

to tradition, power, and gender in Balinese society by examining my own experience becoming a *dalang* and performing *wayang kulit*.

CHAPTER 6: EMBODYING TRADITION

Panca Sembah - A Prayer

The following are instructions, found printed on the back of a popular brand of incense, for a common prayer in Bali that is done with flowers and incense often in the village or family temple.

Asana

Duduk dengan Nyaman Pranayana

Perhatikan Nafas

Om prasada sthiti sarira Shiva

suci nirmala ya namah svaha

Menyucikan tangan

tangan kanan di atas tangan kiri

Om kara sudhanam svaha

tangan kiri di atas tangan kanan

Om ati sudhanam svaha

Menyucikan mulut

Om ang vaktra parisudha ya namah svaha

Menyucikan dupa

Om ang dupa dipastra ya namah svaha

Munyucikan bunga

Om puspa danta ya namah svaha

OM, OM, OM

GAYATRI MANTRA (3X)

Om Bhur Bvah Svaha;

Tat savitur varenyam;

Bhago devasya dimahi;

Dhiyo yo nah prachodayat.

Muspa puyungi

Om atma tatvatma

sudhaman svaha

Surya Raditya

Om raditya sya param jyotir,

rakta tejo namostute.

sveta pangkaja

madhyaste bhaskara ya

namastute

Dengan kwangen

Om nama deva adhistana

ya sarva vyapi vai Shiva ya

padmasana eka prathista ya

ardhanaresvari ya namo namah

Mohon waranugraha

Om anugraha manoharam

deva datta nugrahakam

arcanam sarva

pujanam namah sarva

nugrahakam

Deva Devi mahasidhi

yadnyana nirmalatmaka

Lakshmi sidhisca

dirgayuh nirwigna

sukha wredisca

Penutup

Om deva suksma

Parama cintya

Ya namah svaha

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

I did not translate this prayer because the words are only part of this prayer; the actions, connecting the body to the intent expressed by the words, are what I was taught first. I learned these actions, which express the meaning of the prayer more so than the words, when I went to temple to pray with Kadek and Guru Made, and they explained what I should do. We went into the temple and sat on the ground, facing the main altar where the priest was standing. Kadek handed me a small basket with flowers and indicated I should set it in front of where I was sitting. She then handed me a lit stick of incense and showed me how to stick it in one of the cracks between the tiles that made up the temple floor. Incense is used in prayers and offerings because the visible smoke

going to the heavens is symbolic of the prayers going to the heavens. We waved our hands through the smoke of the incense as if we were “washing” our hands under a faucet of water and next we put our hands together to pray. This gesture of putting the hands together, palm-to-palm, with the fingers closed and touching, is common in Bali. The hands come together at chest level in order to greet someone, but if the person is a priest or of high caste or status, the hands are brought together higher, about chin level, and to pray to the gods, the hands come together at the height of the forehead (Figure 25).



Figure 26. People praying at a ceremony. Photo by J. Goodlander.

Praying in Bali follows almost the same pattern each time, and the motions are connected to, and expressions of, the meaning of the prayer. The prayer is made up of several smaller sequences of movements. At the beginning, the hands come together empty, which symbolizes that a person should come to god without anything, because

without god there is nothing. It reminds the Balinese of the importance of putting god first before money or personal concerns. The purpose of prayer is not to make a request, but it is an opportunity to show gratitude and to remember that people, the earth, and the gods are together in one universe; that is why the hands are empty. The second prayer in the sequence is with a yellow or white flower, which is symbolic of the sun, and the prayer is to give thanks for the sun's life-giving warmth and light. Kadek explained that flowers are used for praying because they are good; flowers have no bad karma.

The third prayer is with a flower or flowers that is multicolored, because this prayer is for the gods in all directions, and the fourth time is with a flower that is specific to the temple or ceremony. Different gods are prayed to for different reasons. I noticed that it was not that important to have the "right" flower; it is what is in the heart that matters. Each time and place has its own specific reason for prayer; for example, at an education ceremony the prayers would be for the god of education, or a *dalang* would pray to the god of the puppets before a performance, and so on. The prayer sequence always ends with a final prayer of thanks and the hands are again empty.

At the end of the ceremony, the priest or a helper comes around with holy water and rice. He sprinkles holy water on the people three times, gives them a little to drink three times, and then offers the rice. I learned to take a little rice, eat a few grains, and then put the rest on my forehead. The water and the rice together indicate a spiritual cleansing and blessing, as well as a promise to be cared for by the gods, but the rice never stayed on my forehead for long before it would fall off. Kadek laughed at me and told me her mother would go to bed at night with rice on her forehead and it would still be

there in the morning. Kadek seemed to be suggesting that the better you are at praying, the longer the rice will remain on your forehead.

Praying in Bali is sometimes a solemn affair, but it does not have to be, and often at the temple there are cell phones ringing and children giggling. I went to a ceremony at a local middle school one day with Kadek and her children. The students went through the prayer quietly and with focused concentration, but as they waited for the priest to come with the water and rice it became quite chaotic. The children remained seated but started throwing the flowers that they used in prayer around the yard; as they hurled them at each other across the courtyard, they laughed and yelled. The air was full of flowers, yet none of the teachers or attending parents scolded them for this behavior. Instead, the adults sat and chatted or watched all of the flowers flying through the air. I felt their attitudes demonstrated how much religion was a part of daily life and not something that needed to be separated with different or solemn behavior. Children were not expected to be quiet and still but could play and laugh as part of the ritual.

The prayer that I opened with demonstrates a major principle in Balinese cosmology and understanding of the world. In Bali, the two invisible worlds, the world of the gods above and the demons below, must be brought into balance through the visible world in the middle. Lansing explains:

According to the Balinese, the world before our eyes is the realm of illusion, or *maya*. It is the middle World, between the Upper World of the gods and the Lower World of the demons. The gods are the forces of growth, while the demons are the powers of dissolution. It was by an

agreement between these pure forces that the Middle World came into being as the realm of Life. The forces which shape life in the Middle World come from outside it and are ordinarily invisible—that is why the Middle World is the realm of *maya*. (52)

The normally invisible forces are made visible or present through ritual and prayer in Bali, which are moments of connection and require the participation of bodily action, thought, and feelings. In the next two chapters, I will examine how *wayang kulit*, like prayer, provides an opportunity for combining the visible and invisible worlds that construct Balinese identity and society.

What is a Balinese?

“*Om swastiastu!*” I called out to my friend Eka. We met at Ohio University when he was a student there and I was taking my coursework. Now, after living for a few years in Washington D.C., he was back in Bali, and after seven months, I was happy to see a familiar face from Ohio. “*Om swastiastu,*” he responded with surprise in his voice. *Om swastiastu* is a Balinese rather than Indonesian greeting typically not known by foreigners. “You speak Balinese?” Eka asked me. “*Abidik sajaan,*” I answered in Balinese, meaning “only a little.” Eka laughed at me as he came up the stairs to my balcony.

We sat at the little table on my balcony and sipped hot tea, while Eka admired the view of the garden and rice fields that I had from my room. We talked about my research in Bali and about my upcoming *wayang kulit* performance that was now less than a week away. I told him that I had studied dance and performed at a couple of temple

ceremonies. He was especially curious about my experience with the *wayang*. He peppered me with questions: “Do you perform in *Kawi*? What story are you doing? Are you using an oil lamp? What kind of music? Do you have your own puppets? How often do you go to the temple? You mean you are learning to make the puppets too?” Eka was truly surprised with all I had been doing. Finally, before he left, he exclaimed with a smile, “My goodness! You are more Balinese than me!”

On the one hand I knew Eka’s comment was purely out of admiration for all I had been learning and doing over the past year, as there are a lot of foreigners in Bali but very few of them learn Balinese language or spend time doing “Balinese” things. Eka’s comment also reflected an awareness that many more Balinese are spending less time doing traditional performance and art. I am aware that the artists I spent my time with do not represent “typical” Balinese. Many people in Bali have to work in a hotel, a shop, or for the government and do not make their living as dancers, puppeteers, or musicians, and many prefer television or radio to *topeng* and like pop music better than *gamelan*.

Eka’s exclamation, which I received occasionally in some form or another from other Balinese, reflects a perception that language, culture, and the arts, especially *wayang kulit*, play a role in the formation of a “Balinese” identity. Eka articulated an understanding that these things constitute “tradition” and therefore play a role in the formation of Balinese identity; that there are specific actions that create a “Balinese.” As an outsider, can I participate in and contribute to Balinese arts and “tradition”? What implications does my participation have for forming a definition of “tradition” in Bali?⁴⁶

⁴⁶ I need to credit my committee member, Andrea Frohne, for helping me to articulate those last two questions.

In this section, I write about my process of learning *wayang kulit* and undergoing the practical and ritual processes necessary to become a *dalang*. I will read my experience through Catherine Bell's notions of the ritual body in order to form an understanding of my body performing *wayang kulit* as it relates to "tradition."

Ritual

A *wayang kulit* performance connects the invisible world to the visible, or the *nisekala* with the *sekala*, and it should not only be understood as performance, but as ritual. I am using the term "ritual" to denote an activity or practice that is separated from the ordinary activities of daily life, which is often considered mysterious and shrouded in tradition, but which also relates to the present world. Tradition, it could be said, connects the past to the present, while ritual connects the spiritual to the secular; these two functions constantly overlap and inform each other in *wayang kulit*. Because of this, in order to fully understand the function of gender in *wayang kulit* and how women might intervene into existing structures of power, it is necessary to understand *wayang kulit*'s status and function as ritual.

Catherine Bell, a religious scholar, develops a frame for examining ritual by exploring "what makes us identify some acts as ritual, what such a category does for the production and organization of knowledge about other cultures [. . .]" (4). In the first chapters of this dissertation my examination focused on the physical and visual elements of performance for *wayang kulit*. Next I described how that physical realm of objects and skills combines with the individual person in the moment of *menyatu* in the performance. In this final section I will now focus on my own experience as the cornerstone for

analyzing the structures of *nisekala*, the invisible, as they connect to *sekala*, the visible, by interrogating how ritual functions and then locating the body within “tradition” in order to argue for the potential of agency within the ritual.

Writing from *My Body*

In his response to the Theatre History Symposium at the 2010 Mid-America Theatre Conference, noted theatre historian Odai Johnson issued a challenge. He asked theatre scholars to resist conventional structures of scholarship and to tell a story through their writing. Johnson urged that there is no “correct” format for a conference paper (or article, book, etc.) and instead called for dynamic approaches to history and scholarship that are grounded in the artifact or evidence. In this chapter, my own experience and body provide the artifact of study, and I seek a dynamic form in which to deliver my analysis that will fulfill my aim to be reflexive and performative in and through my writing.

Reflexivity in ethnography means acknowledging that my knowledge and insights into Balinese culture, *wayang kulit*, and tradition comes from my involvement with others; it is knowledge that is constructed together between my informants and myself. I have attempted throughout this dissertation to foreground my informants’ insights, observations, and actions together with my own actions and an awareness that I am the one observing and interpreting. The act of writing ethnography is not an objective action; rather, there is a level of subjectivity that is inherent in almost any human experience, interaction, and knowledge, and in my writing I wish to celebrate rather than obscure this fact.

In this chapter I use my own experience as a student and then performer of *wayang kulit* as an opportunity to gain additional insight and commentary into both the nature of tradition and gender in Bali. This opportunity presents itself naturally from one of my primary research methods of participant observation. Participant observation “involves being with other people to see how they respond to events as they happen and experiencing for oneself these events and circumstances that give rise to them” (Emerson and Fretz 2). To conduct ethnography about performance means that the researcher must be involved in that performance. Theatre scholar Joan Erdman writes:

To be a participant-observer in a musical, dance, or theatrical tradition means a commitment to practice as well as research; it entails discussions about professionalism which sometime leads to conflicts, internal or otherwise. Each scholar-performer or performer-scholar has to choose a path which suits the particular combination of practice, performance, and scholarly production espoused. (113)

Studying and performing *wayang kulit* in Bali has given me unique access to teachers and artists, which allows me to better understand performances. Erdman continues, “I am convinced that the voice of the outsider as insider, understanding and analyzing traditions undergoing change, is provocative and informative” (116). Following with Erdman, being a participant observer in the arts produces especially “provocative and informative” information.

Carrie Noland describes using the body through gesture as a tool for generating knowledge about both an art form and a culture. She writes “that by retrieving gestures

from the past, or by borrowing gestures from another culture, subjects can actually produce new innervations, discover new sensations to feel” (x). Gestures describe bodily motion that is at once learned, rooted in culture, accidental, and ever changing; gestures also suggest a transmission of bodily knowledge while maintaining an awareness of an individual body (Noland xi). Writing about gesture creates a hermeneutic tension between two poles: “gestures as indexical of subjectivity and presence versus gestures as signifiers for meanings generated by the mechanics and conditions of signification itself” (Noland xii). Noland proposes that the necessary:

critique [of a purely semiotic perspective] should not be construed as negating the study of signs with respect to the body, but as making a place for complementary appreciation of embodiment and being-in-the-world alongside textuality and representation. [Semiotics and phenomenology] are complementary and not mutually exclusive standpoints.... (xiv)

In my account of becoming a *dalang* I will therefore consider gesture as both a sign-system and a phenomenological bodily experience discussed through detailed description and analysis.

Through the form of my description and analysis, I wish to invite my reader to share my participation and journey as I learned *wayang kulit*. Dance scholar Sally Ann Ness described her experience doing ethnography, noting:

My process of physical, subjective, and dynamic attunement to choreographic phenomena is what I seek to expose and illustrate, toward the end of creating a shared voice for readers who may wish to discover in

the rest of this text something new, both about an “other” culture and about their own. In Paul Stoller’s words, I invite the reader to “dwell within” me as I walk along my solitary path in a foreign culture field—a field of dances, both familiar and strange. (3)

Like Ness, I share the story of my bodily experience so that my reader might better understand the process of becoming a *dalang* and therefore, *wayang kulit* in Bali.

First Lessons

I arrived in Bali in the middle of December 2008 after working with Pak Tunjung for a couple of months the summer before. In our previous lessons we had worked on the opening dance of the *kayonan* and had started to work on the entrance of Arjuna and the two clowns, Twalin and Merdah. The first few times that I met with Pak Tunjung in December, we started by reviewing what I had learned the past summer. The story I was working on was *Arjuna Tapa*, the story that I use to open this dissertation.

A *wayang kulit* performance begins with a dance of the *kayonan* puppet, and it is in this dance that the *dalang* calls the theatrical world into being. I began this dance by holding the *kayonan* close to my face. In those moments, my breath slowed, I listened to the music, and my awareness of my surroundings dissipated—I created a connection with the puppet and was prepared to perform. Using the *cepala* that I clutched in my left hand, I knocked slowly on the puppet box and then knocked faster and faster. Pak Tunjung taught me that the knocking must begin in time with the music and then as it gathers energy it should surpass the music’s tempo, until it suddenly stops with one forceful final *tak*. I remembered this lesson as I took a breath and began the knocking

sequence one more time, which indicated to the musicians to make the shift in music that would break the *kayonan* from its position of peaceful contemplation in front of my face and begin an agitated motion on the screen. The *gender* played two sequences of three beats as I touched the *kayonan* to the center of the screen, and then music and puppet joined together as I brought the puppet over to my right for two small circles. At the top point of each circle, I paused to take a quick breath with the music before the next circle. Next, the puppet slid over the left and repeated the motion on the other side of the screen. After the *kayonan* repeated this movement again, once on the right and once on the left, I lifted it from the screen. To the audience, the motion looked as though a great gust of wind came up under the *kayonan* and knocked it from its place. The *kayonan* then swept around the screen in large figure eights. These figure-eights are the first thing that I learned and practiced as a *dalang*, even before I began to rehearse with a screen, because I had to teach my body and make my muscles strong in order to gracefully execute the correct movement.

The *kayonan* dance demonstrates balance between the different dimensions of the universe as it moves around the screen. Movements on the left are balanced with movements on the right, and there is also balance between the top and the bottom of the screen. Pak Tunjung often adjusted my hand in order to facilitate this balance; I did not automatically create the same movement on the right and left but had to practice it again and again. When I first learned this section, often on the right side, the tip of the *kayonana* tended to slip too far down while on the left it stood up too straight. Pak Tunjung reminded me about the importance of my wrist; he explained that I needed to

always keep the *kayonan* in constant motion. The *kayonan* puppet is large, but is made of thin leather that quivers with a slight wiggle from the wrist. I learned that it is important to coordinate this vibration with all of the movements of the *kayonan*; it must look alive.

The next important motion of the *kayonan* dance I learned was to spin the puppet in the palm of my hand. Pak Tunjung demonstrated how I needed to set the point of the stick in the center of my palm while wrapping my fingers around the upper part of the stick. I needed to balance the *kayonan* in my right hand while using my fingers to make it twirl off to the sides of the stage. During this twirling, I again used the *cepala* in my left hand to knock against the puppet box.



Figure 27. The oil lamp hangs directly in front of the *dalang* during a performance.
Photo by J. Goodlander.

Most of my lessons were in front of the screen, during the day, without an oil lamp. Finally, when we rehearsed with the lamp I had to again learn how to adjust my

body to complete the motions with something hanging directly in front of my face (Figure 27). I learned that it was important to watch both the puppet in motion and the shadow being created on the screen. Twirling the *kayonan* near the lamp forced me to be aware of my body in relation to the puppet in a new way. The motions were no longer just about the motions; I now needed to watch the result of those motions, and the shadow was the visible result of the invisible intention that resided in my body.

As the dance is completed, the *dalang* and his assistants take out the rest of the puppets and put them into their places around the stage. There is another section of the *kayonan* dancing before the puppet characters enter the scene and begin the story. The entrance of the puppets is called *Alas Aram*, and it is accompanied by music and a song. The length of the song can be adjusted depending on the number of characters entering. The version that Pak Tunjung taught me for *Arjuna Tapa* is:

ALAS ARUM: puppet entrance

rahina tatas kemantian humuni

“Every morning the *gamelan* music begins to play”

mredanga kala sangka gurnitan tara

“The voices of the instruments are beautiful to hear.”

gumuruh ikang gubar bala samuha

“The sound of the crashing cymbals brings everyone together.”

(Arjuna enters)

Mangkata pada nguwuh seruh rumuhun

“And the one with the thunderous voice progresses to the front of the line.”

(Arjuna ties his sash and fixes his crown)

Para ratu sampun ahyas asalin

“The kings change into their grand clothes.”

(Twalin enters)

Lumanpaha pada hawan rata parimita

“He that drives the chariot that is without compare.”

(Merdah enters)

Arjuna is the first character to enter from the *dalang*'s right. Pak Tunjung demonstrated how I must combine singing, the motion of the puppet, and the *cepala* as percussion in this short sequence. He taught me this section by taking my hand and allowing me to feel the movements in my body; he wanted me to sense the tension of the puppet on the screen. When Arjuna stopped moving, Pak Tunjung pushed down on my hand, pushing the Arjuna puppet into the screen, and then quickly he relaxed the pressure. Next he tilted my hand in order to make Arjuna look down. “Arjuna is looking at the place around him,” explained Pak Tunjung, “he is acknowledging the world that he has entered into.” Arjuna then slowly moved counter-clockwise, to take his place on the right side of the screen where I then stuck the puppet into the banana log.

Arjuna's entrance was also a point in the story where the addition of the oil lamp caused me to be very aware of my body. As Arjuna rotated backwards, I learned to lift his feet further from the screen at the high-points of the rotation in order to prevent the

puppet from looking like he was “flying.” I now needed to watch the shadow of the puppet together with the actual puppet. In a performance, after Arjuna is positioned, the *dalang* takes the sticks of the arms so that Arjuna can adjust the sash around his waist and adjust his crown. In my own performance, these movements were coordinated with the knocking of the *cepala* in my foot. Overall, it is important for the *dalang* to handle the puppet so that his hands and arms do not cast shadows on the screen, and it was difficult for me to find the correct position for my hands when Arjuna fixed his crown.

I took Twalin and Merdah and had them enter next and take positions on the left side of the screen, facing Arjuna. Twalin entered first; the puppet was in my hand, but he began to act as his own character. Sitting in front of the screen I was at once aware that I was controlling the puppets, but as they became more comfortable in my hand, I was less aware. The puppets became characters in a drama that moved from my mind to the screen—that is the “becoming one,” or *menyatu*. Twalin appeared briefly behind Arjuna before I lifted him off the screen and then placed him center. Twalin faced away from Arjuna, and I learned how to turn my wrist to rotate the puppet around to face Arjuna. In a performance, when a puppet changes direction, it is important to keep the face resting on the screen; therefore, a puppet always turns in, and the nose never is lifted from the screen. Pak Tunjung taught me how to dip my arm so that the puppet made a fluid motion on the screen while turning. Next I took both of Twalin’s arms sticks into my right hand, lifted his arms up as Twalin bowed to Arjuna, and then returned Twalin to a standing position. Twalin then walked backwards into his position on the left side of the screen; when he walks backwards, his arms bend at the elbows and move back and forth,

indicating motion. Pak Tunjung often had to adjust my fingers so that I gripped the sticks properly in order to make each arm move at the same time but in opposite directions. It was difficult for him to explain the instructions with words; again, the knowledge had to be passed from body to body. At home I practiced this motion with both Twalin and Merdah until I could do the action without thinking. My body needed to join together with the body of the puppet without conscious effort: this is *menyatu*.

After the puppets enter, there is a stop in the action because before the *dalang* continues, he must thank the gods and beg forgiveness for any errors in the performance.

This section is called *Penyacah Parwa*:

PENYACAH PARWA:

Dadyata Pi... Ra. Tihwa. Ta pira.

Caritanan, kunang pwa samangke.

“Once upon a time, it is not even known how long ago,”

Yata. Ri pajangkepaneru. Sang hang asta dasa parwa.

“the eighteen Parwas were composed,”

Yata riniket. De rsi Kresna dwipayana.

“by the holy man Kresna Dwipayana.”

Mijil. Sanghyang ringgit amlah cara.

“In them appears the sacred shadow figure,”

Kadi gelap kumerasah – Anusuping rangdu praja mandala.

“like a sheet of lightning penetrating the entire cosmos.”

Yata mijil niro. Sang hyang suniantara. Amunggel punang carita.

“Then suddenly appears the mighty lord of poetry to create the story.”

The next section introduces the specific story that will be told in the performance:

Warnanan ariwijil... nira. Sang nararya partha.

“Now Arjuna enters,”

Agendurasa lawan caraka maka rwa

“to discuss with his two servants,”

Agya lumawada anangun tapa haneng Indrakila Giri.

“that he desires to go to the mountain, Indra Kila Giri, in order to meditate.”

Yata ni mitanian wawang anginyim nadak abawarasa sanang.... kana.

“That is why they meet together here.”

Up until this point, my concentration was primarily on the body and not the voice. Even though *Alus Arum* is sung, the focus is on making the voice like the *kayonan*; the voice must match the movement of the music, and then transfer that connection to the puppets on the screen.

Matching my voice to the music was not the same as following a melody or hitting the right note and tempo. Balinese music does not have a melody and harmony; rather, it is two equally balanced parts playing in counterpoint. These two parts are called *polos* and *sangsih*. The music for most *wayang kulit* is played on two pair of *gender*, and require a two-handed technique where the musician strikes the keys with a mallet, playing both *polos* and *sangsih*, while dampening the previous notes with the sides of

his⁴⁷ hand and wrist. The instruments are deliberately tuned so that one is high and one is low, creating a “shimmering effect” in the music that perhaps sounds dissonant to Western ears (Heimarck 255-256). I learned to listen to the music and sometimes match a key note and then to sing in counterpoint to the notes being played. I found that I needed to think of balancing my voice to the music rather than singing along with the music.

In *Penyacah Parwa*, I was waking up my voice and discovering the voices of the characters. Each day I found that my voice was a little different. Sometimes it was high and sometimes it was low, or strong or weak; the sound of my voice depended on many things like the weather or what I might have eaten. *Penyacah Parwa* allows the *dalang* to focus on the voice and find the different registers for the characters. It is not only a demonstration of skill, as I discussed earlier, but also another step in the process of *menyatu*; the *dalang* embodies the characters in voice and action.

After *Penyacah Parwa*, the puppets finally begin to speak. Twalin comes forward and bows to Arjuna, first asking for his blessing, before inquiring why Arjuna brought them to this place. Twalin is worried because Arjuna looks unhappy and pensive, and Arjuna responds in *Kawi*:

Uduh, ceraka makerua.

Tanlen kaginucara kaya mangk-e.

Ulun arep anangun tapa,

⁴⁷ Like other forms of dance and music in Bali, there are some women playing the *gender*, but it is very rare. Like *wayang kulit* it requires the performer to be out late at night, and to travel with mostly men, so very few Balinese women learn this instrument. Additionally, like *wayang kulit*, the general attitude is that *gender* is too difficult for women. I only met two female *gender* players while in Bali, and one was from Japan.

haneng Indrakila Giri.

(Arjuna gestures over his shoulder as he says the name of the mountain.)

Moga-Moga - Raharje ikanang jagat kabeh.

Mangkana pamurwaning kunang cerita.

Merdah comes forward to the center of the screen to explain that Arjuna wants to go up the mountain to meditate and gain wisdom from the gods. Merdah adds that he thinks it is a very good idea, and that he and Twalin will make the journey with Arjuna. Next, Arjuna exits and leaves Twalin and Merdah to talk about the upcoming journey. Twalin expresses concern about food, where they will sleep, and encountering frightening animals. Their conversation is about the scene, but it also provides the *dalang* an opportunity to teach the audience things about politics or philosophy.

The opening of the story is very different from the scene between the two *panasar*, Twalin and Merdah. Pak Tunjung wanted me to be very precise in my movements and speech. He would often stop me to demonstrate a small movement of the puppet or because he wanted me to adjust my pronunciation. This part of the “tradition” is fixed, and must be executed exactly the same for every performance. This part of the story only takes thirty minutes in a performance that might last for two or three hours, but we spent more than half of our lessons on those details because they provided the foundation of the performance.

In contrast to the opening of the story, the scene between the *panasar* provides an opportunity for the *dalang* to improvise. During an early lesson, Pak Tunjung demonstrated a possible conversation between Twalin and Merdah for me:

TWALIN: Oh, I hate to go up the mountain for such a long time. It makes me think of my wife—maybe she will forget me while I am gone. You do not need to worry about that because you are not yet married. Why is that? I am concerned because you have taken so long to find a wife.

MERDAH: Father, do not worry. I am still young and there is still plenty of time for me to get married. Right now, it is important for me to first study and work. After I graduate I can find a wife.

TWALIN: But son, I am older than you and wiser. If you wait too long it will be too late and then what will you do?

MERDAH: Father, I am too busy right now for a wife. Do not be concerned, there will be time for me to have a family later.

TWALIN: Okay, but do not forget. Once you have completed school it is very important for you to find a wife and be happy.

As Pak Tunjung performed this dialogue for me I felt that he was commenting my choice not to be married.⁴⁸ As I've discussed earlier, many of the Balinese I have met were very surprised that I do not have a husband and children, and Pak Tunjung was no exception. Through Twalin and Merdah he was also able to express concern that I should not wait too long, and that he hoped once I was done with school, I would get married and have some children; however, he also expressed acceptance of my choice. It reminded me that

⁴⁸ Like with most Balinese, I did not tell Pak Tunjung that I was a lesbian and had a partner. When he asked if I was married, I responded "*belum*," or "not yet," and explained that I was too busy with school and work to find a husband. Later in the year, he met my partner Tina when she was visiting. He gave her music lessons and recognized that she was a very good friend who often helped take care of me. Even so he continued to express his desire that I might marry and have children in the future.

no matter what my actions or what I am studying in Bali, I am always viewed first as a woman. They were happy to let me study their art, and respected me as a scholar, but there was still the expectation that I would fulfill my obvious role in society—that I would get married and have children. If I felt this pressure, and if it influenced my work in Bali, I realized that it must be even more so for Balinese women.

Enough for a Woman—Enough for a Foreigner

A few weeks later, during my lesson, another student came to study with Pak Tunjung. The visitor was a first-year student at ISI and hoped that Pak Tunjung could help him prepare for the upcoming exams. I sat off to the side and worked on carving a puppet. Every now and then my eyes wandered over and I watched them rehearse. While they practiced the second *kayonan* dance, I noticed that the student added many flourishes and movements, making the dance more elaborate than the one I had learned with Pak Tunjung. The next time I saw Pak Tunjung I asked him about the differences in the dances.

Pak Tunjung explained that he taught me the appropriate version for women *dalangs*. He said: “it is enough for a woman to do it that way, because many women find the complete version to be too long and difficult. Women are not as strong as men.” After pausing for a moment to think, Pak Tunjung suggested that if I wanted to learn the full version he would teach it to me. He remarked that one woman, Ibu Nondri from Sukuwati, the woman who had become a *dalang* after her husband passed away, had done the complete version in performance. “She used to be the best woman *dalang*,” he commented, “but she does not perform anymore.” I asked why, and he replied, “She has

become too old and no longer has enough strength.” He reasoned, “it was difficult for her to keep her strength because often when she was asked to perform she could not because of menstruation, and now her arms have become too weak and thin.” Pak Tunjung’s comment was interesting because there are several male *dalangs* who are still performing even though they are about the same age as Ibu Nondri. The distinction of being “too old” or “too weak” was one made for women *dalangs* only; I never heard that said of women dancers or musicians.

Pak Tunjung expressed his desire for me to give a performance in Bali before I went home. He hoped that when I performed, it would be by the banyan tree for an *upacara*, with a big screen, an oil lamp, and many musicians. I was given the impression that people in the area were beginning to hear that I was studying *wayang kulit* with Pak Tunjung and were curious to see the result because I am not only a woman, but also an American. Pak Tunjung first said that I would wear an *udang* (the wrap men wear when dressed in *pakian adat*), but then he was unsure about whether it would be appropriate for me to be dressed in *pakian adat* as a man or a woman. He felt that maybe I would wear the traditional dress of a *dalang* (male) but without the hat, and instead I would tie my hair back like a woman. That seemed to be the compromise that made him happy.⁴⁹ Later, I was able to observe several woman *dalangs* perform and they wore the regular *pakian adat* of a female.

Pak Tunjung taught me several Balinese folk songs to include in my performance. One of these songs was called *Tikus ke Pantai*, and was about a farmer harvesting or

⁴⁹ When it did come time for me to perform, this is not what I wore. I describe what I wore in the section about my performance, but this section demonstrates that how I would appear as a woman *dalang* was not something to be taken for granted.

tending certain crops on different days of the week. The words of the song indicate that each person has different duties that they must do at different times, and that not only the farmer, but everyone should live their lives like that. While I practiced my singing, Ibu Budi and Nandhu often sat by us and listened. Pak Tunjung would sing a line and I would sing it back for him, and then we would sing an entire verse of the song together. Ibu Budi wondered why Pak Tunjung was spending so much time to teach me a Balinese song; she wondered why I did not just sing the song in English. Pak Tunjung replied that it was important for me to learn different Balinese traditions such as this song because he felt the audiences in Bali would be surprised and pleased to hear a Western woman singing the Balinese song. He remarked that my voice was just like that of a Balinese, and that was a surprise to him.

In addition to learning how to perform, Pak Tunjung wanted to teach me how to carve puppets so that I would better be able to identify a puppet of high quality. In these lessons, I did the basic parts of the design on many puppets such as the elephant, and then Pak Tunjung would fill in the details. I practiced the technique of making rows of little holes that are a common part of most puppet designs. In order to make a hole, I used a chisel with a curved end and tapped it lightly with the hammer as I spun it in a circle. After about three or four complete rotations, I lifted the chisel up to reveal a small, perfect, hole in the leather. My hammer had wax stuck to the end so after every third hole or so, I poked the chisel in the wax to ensure that it smoothly rotated in the leather.

One day, while we worked on carving puppets, a man I had never seen before, dressed in *pakian adat*, came to speak with Pak Tunjung. After the man and Pak Tunjung

spoke a moment in Balinese, Pak Tunjung turned to me and explained in English that he told the man that I was only there to learn a little more about *wayang kulit*. The man glared at me and I did not speak to him. From the way Pak Tunjung spoke to me in English I felt that perhaps I should not reveal my ability to speak Indonesian, or try to get into a conversation with him. The stranger made me uneasy because he gave me the impression that he was here to check up on Pak Tunjung. Finally the man left and we did not talk about it; instead we sat in silence and continued to work on the puppets. I worried that Pak Tunjung might be receiving criticisms from others in the village because he was teaching *wayang kulit* to a foreign woman. I did not see this as a reluctance to share Balinese culture as much as it may be jealousy over money. Foreigners are able to pay for music and dance lessons, while many Balinese cannot; teaching foreigners is therefore a good income source and often provides the teacher with a greater degree of notoriety and respect within the community. This opens the door for others to feel jealous, and it is possible that this jealousy might be more keenly expressed because it is very rare for a foreigner, especially a woman, to learn *wayang kulit*.

Pak Tunjung often commented that I was the first foreign woman to perform like a Balinese *dalang*.⁵⁰ He expressed a desire for me to try different things in my performance because he felt that I must make the stories resonate with an American audience. He suggested that I wear a hat with different colored lights on my head, such as white, red, and blue, and then during different scenes I could adjust the angle of my

⁵⁰ I am not sure whether this is true or not. Kathy Foley and others have studied *wayang kulit* in Bali, but I may be the first Western woman to study *wayang kulit* for a long period of time and to then go through the ritual ceremonies before performing. Instead, Pak Tunjung's perception that I was the first is what I am emphasizing rather than making any claims about the truthfulness of his statement.

head to change the color of the light that struck the screen. As he explained his ideas, I wondered: was there a point when my performance ceased to be “traditional?” It seemed I was allowed certain things because I am a foreigner, but there are also aspects of the performance that need to be a certain way. Pak Tunjung cautioned me: “never forget the basics. It is important for your performances back in the United States to still be traditional.”

Improving

One day, I arrived at Pak Tunjung’s house a few minutes after ten, but he was not there yet. I sat and waited for a few minutes and then decided to move over to the screen to practice by myself. It was really useful to practice the manipulation of the puppets with the screen and I practiced the details of moving my hands in conjunction with the voices. I set the puppets in their positions on the screen and practiced picking each one up, having him walk across the screen, and then repositioning him again before I let go. Pak Tunjung had explained that it was important for the puppets to “stand” leaning slightly forward as to look “alive.” If the puppet leaned too far forward it looked like it might fall on its nose, and if it leaned too far back Pak Tujung complained that the puppet looked like “it will fall backwards, dead.” I repeated the motions many times so that the proper positions might become ingrained into my body. Sometimes I grasped the puppet with my left hand and then realized that I was in a poor position to grab the puppet on the left with my right hand, my arms twisted like pretzels as I tried to bring both the puppets to the screen. Finally I had to admit failure, set the puppets down, and try the scene again. I needed to remember to hold the puppets on the right with my right hand and the

ones on the left with my left hand, and anticipate which hand would need to be free for the next puppet. I only had three puppets on the screen, but the combinations of movement appeared endless as I sorted through the correct movements to connect my body to the body of the puppet.

After I practiced the opening movements, I skipped to the end of the performance in order to practice the fight scenes. I took Arjuna my left hand and the *raksasa* in the right and practiced crossing them in front of me to the steady beat of the *cepala* from my foot. The puppets needed to cross the front of the screen at the same time, and then on the next beat turn to face each other before crossing the scene once again. If the *raksasa* crossed in front on the way over, the puppet needed to be in the front on the way back. It was important to hold the puppets close to the screen but if I held them too close they would become twisted and stuck together. The puppets and my body swung together in motion; it was a dance that engaged my person from head to toe. After only a minute of this sequence I was covered in sweat and breathing hard. I paused to catch my breath and then resumed the sweeping dance across the screen. This was not the only movement I learned to depict fighting; I also rehearsed another fighting sequence in which Arjuna hits the *raksasa* and knocks him over. Each beat of this sequence needs to be punctuated with a *tak*, as the puppets grapple across the screen. As I practiced, the other family members in the compound were busy cleaning, preparing food, and making offerings. I rehearsed alone for over an hour and then waved goodbye to the family. I learned later that Pak Tunjung had gone to take his wife to Denpasar so she could fly to Jakarta for a conference.

A few days later we began my lesson, as usual, with the first *kayonan* dance and continued to run the entire first scene. Pak Tunjung remarked that he was happy with my voice, but reminded me not to rush “because the musicians can always play slower, but they will have a hard time skipping around and keeping up if you get ahead of the music.” He also commented on my clown scene. In the scene, I had Merdah explain that Arjuna declared that he wanted to go up the mountain to meditate, make offerings, and pray. Pak Tunjung felt I should only say that Arjuna wants to meditate and desires blessing from the gods; he did not want me to talk about making offerings or praying because he worried that an American audience would then think that this is only a Hindu story. Pak Tunjung felt that the story could resonate for people no matter their religion and culture, and he wanted me to tell the story so that it would have universal appeal. He told me to shift the emphasis from offerings to world peace and an appreciation of nature, which would communicate the importance of seeking wisdom and having reverence for the things we cannot understand or control, whether we call those things gods or nature. I learned that it was important to respect the tradition, or the “basics” as Pak Tunjung would call them, and that the performance must speak to my audience as well.

Taksu

When I saw Pak Tunjung at a morning lesson in May, about five months into my time in Bali, he said he had been very sick while I was in Jakarta.⁵¹ The day before I left he had done a *wayang kulit* and *topeng* performance, and he thought that the food at the performance probably made him sick. It had a yellow spicy sauce on it that he did not like, but because his friends were also eating it he did not want to seem rude and ate some

⁵¹ I was in Jakarta for about a week in the month of May for a Fulbright meeting and to do some research.

of it anyway. He said right away his stomach felt uncomfortable, and the next day he got medicine from his wife but was still very sick to his stomach. He said he lost some weight, and I agreed that he was looking thinner than usual. He said when he was younger he would recover quickly, and that now that he was older it took longer.

Pak Tunjung told me about an older student who visited while I was gone. Pak Tunjung sighed that the student did not want to learn one thing at a time, but instead wanted to learn everything at once, and that because of this the student was not very good at anything. Pak Tunjung said it is very important for all of the elements of the performance to balance together, and that one of the hardest things for a *dalang* to do is to get the voice, the *cepala*, and the puppets to all work with the music. If these things do not work together, then the performance is not good. Pak Tunjung explained that it requires patience in order to become a good *dalang*.

In order to clarify this point, Pak Tunjung showed me an article in the local Balinese magazine on art, religion, and culture called *Taksu*. It was a two-page article about what a *dalang* prays for at the beginning of a performance: he prays for his voice to be clear, his head to remember, and his body to be strong. These are the most important skills of a *dalang*, and if a *dalang* has these things there is not much else he needs. Pak Tunjung said a performance could be given with just one other person to play music and that the most important puppets to own were the ones necessary to tell the stories from the *Mahabharata*. If a *dalang* has those puppets he does not need much else to tell any of the other stories.

Pak Tunjung said that he really liked the magazine *Taksu*, a local magazine that was published about once a month, because it talked about how culture and religion are important and intermixed in Bali. He demonstrated with the puppets:

TWALIN: Okay, I would be happy to answer a question from someone in the audience. Who has a question? Yes, go ahead, where are you from?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am from America. I was wondering if you can tell me about the difference between culture in Bali and culture in America?

TWALIN: Yes, I can answer that. I think sometimes Americans feel like they do not have any culture—but that is not true! Americans have culture, but it is just different than culture in Bali. There are lots of different kinds of culture in America and each person can do different things. In Bali, culture is important because it is close to their religion. We have many different performances in Bali, like *wayang*, *topeng*, and *gambuh*, and these are important because they bring people closer to their spiritual side. Perhaps that is what is missing in America? They do not have something like that to make them more spiritual.

Through this scene, Pak Tunjung demonstrated the close ties that art, culture, and religion have in Balinese society, and that the Balinese rarely consider one without the other two.

As Pak Tunjung thumbed through the magazine he showed me a picture of a friend of his and explained that they went to school together and were close like brothers. He said this friend once performed *wayang Calanorang*. This performance, whether

done with puppets or live actors, tells the story of Rangda the witch and the Barong; it is one of the oldest and most potent of the ritual performances in Bali. Pak Tunjung warned his friend not to do the performance because it was dangerous, but his friend performed the *Calanorang* anyway. After the performance his friend became very sick; his skin turned black and he had to spend several weeks in the hospital. Pak Tunjung said his friend's illness was because of the "black magic" in the *Calanorang*, and after that experience his friend no longer performed *Calanorang*. Pak Tunjung commented that occasionally someone would ask him to perform *Calanorang*, but he would not do it and instead would offer to do any other kind of *wayang kulit*. As I learned more about *wayang kulit*, I realized that there was also a "magical" or spiritual aspect to this art form, and that these are just as important as the performance techniques.

An Invitation

As I sat in the grass eating *sate* with some friends my phone beeped to tell me I had received a text message; I looked at the screen and saw that it was from Pak Sedana, my friend who was a professor at ISI. In the message, he explained that he had just come from an organizing committee meeting for the Ubud Festival and wondered if I would be interested in performing *wayang kulit* as part of the festival in August. I replied that "yes, I would love to perform," although inside I felt nervous about getting ready in time as August was only two months away. I had been studying with Pak Tunjung for almost a year and we were still working on the beginning of the second section of the play; if I was going to perform, I would need to know all three sections including the fight scene at

the end. Pak Sedana was delighted that I agreed to perform and texted that he hoped we would be able to meet soon and discuss the details.

The next day at my *wayang kulit* lesson, I told Pak Tunjung about Pak Sedana's invitation, and Pak Tunjung thought it was an excellent idea because the audience would be thrilled to watch a woman *dalang* from America. We decided that I would perform the story I was working on, *Arjuna Tapa*, and I would use Pak Tunjung's musicians and assistants. He was sure they would be excited to help me. There was a lot that I needed to do in a few months to get ready for the performance. Learning the rest of the story was part of it, but I soon learned that it was not the only thing that I needed to do.

CHAPTER 7: SPIRIT OF TRADITION

Getting Ready

A few days after receiving the invitation to perform, Kadek and I were able to meet together with Pak Sedana at his home in Denpasar. He said that the steering committee for the Ubud Festival has just left a couple of hours ago and that they were very excited that I was going to perform in the festival. Pak Sedana wanted to talk about some of the logistics for the performance. He asked how long did I think I could perform, would I want an LCD projector, how many musicians, and so on. I told him I thought the performance would be about an hour, that I preferred to use an oil lamp and not an LCD projector or electric light, and that four musicians, as usual, would be enough. I also explained that I needed to confirm with Pak Tunjung before finalizing any of these decisions.

Pak Sedana explained that I needed to go through a ritual cleansing before performing, and therefore I needed to consult with a priest to determine the proper procedures. Kadek promised to help and said that Guru Made would be able to provide leadership. Pak Sedana reiterated that it was very important for the *dalang* to make an offering before the performance that asked for the help of the gods, while after the performance, the *dalang* must make another offering thanking the gods for the performance. It is not a prayer for a good performance as much as it is an acknowledgement of the energy and the cooperation of the gods that is required. Pak Sedana told me that as part of my preparation I would need to go to several holy springs and that it depended on which day of the week one was born in order to determine how

many springs were required. Pak Sedana boasted that he had gone to thirty-seven holy springs. Later, I consulted with Guru Made, who determined that because I was born in a Friday I would need to go to nine springs. Kadek smiled and explained that nine was a very auspicious number because it is the number three, three times; she felt this was very lucky. Guru Made promised to organize the trip and Kadek added that her mother was an offering expert and she would consult with her about what offerings we would need.

The next day I went to Pak Tunjung's and told him that I had met with Pak Sedana and we had talked about the plan for my performance at the Ubud Arts Festival. Pak Tunjung was very excited about the opportunity. He agreed that it would be better to use a lamp with fire rather than electricity because fire made a better shadow. He explained, "If you use electric light the technique is different. It changes the way you move the *wayang* and it changes the voice. Often with electricity the *dalang* must play with his hands over his head." Pak Tunjung acknowledged that in America I might use electricity, but he was eager for my debut in Bali to be a "traditional" performance.

Pak Tunjung told me that a few weeks earlier, Pak Sedana had asked him, "Can Jennifer already play *wayang*?" Pak Tunjung told him, "Yes, Jennifer can." He said that Pak Sedana was surprised that I was an American and could already perform *wayang kulit*. Pak Sedana hoped that people would watch the performance and realize that Pak Tunjung had an American student who was already good at performing. Pak Tunjung emphasized that it was important for me to do a good job in my performance so that others would think well of him, because people often judge a teacher based on the performance of his student.

Ritual Initiation

Hari Raya Saraswati is a special day to honor the goddess of knowledge and learning. Guru Made said that it would be an ideal day to hold a special ceremony in order to help me become a *dalang* and to “marry” me to my puppets. As the performance date got closer, I was plagued by nightmares and often didn’t sleep at night because of barking dogs—dogs are more sensitive to invisible spirits and their barking means that there are more spirits around. Guru Made reassured me that the ceremony would give me confidence and a strong spirit. He explained that because of my training I was becoming much more sensitive to the *nisekala* realm, and that after the rituals and the performance I would be able to sleep because I would be protected.

On the special day, I dressed in *pakian adat*, and went over to Guru Made’s house a little after lunch. Tina, my partner, was visiting and took part in the ceremony because Guru Made told me that Tina had a strong spirit, and he wanted her there to be able to always protect me.

Guru Made lived just a little north of Ubud. It was a short trip on the motorbike, and when Tina and I arrived, Kadek still unloading the offerings from the car and getting set up. She brought an orange in her purse and made us a tasty beverage called hot orange to drink as we sat and waited. I offered to help, but Guru Made assured us that the best thing we could do was to stay out of the way, so we drank our hot orange and watched him place the offerings and incense. Guru Made had a family temple up the stairs from his garden, and next to the temple was a room with another shrine where he worked with patients and performed healings. I had been to his house numerous times

for both ceremonies and to visit, but I had never been this nervous. Guru Made placed offerings in the temple and at the shrine; as he set out the offerings he chanted mantras and lighted the incense.



Figure 28. Guru Made and his wife work together during the ceremony. Photo by J. Goodlander

Finally Guru Made smiled and told us it was time for the ceremony to start, so we took off our shoes, walked into the temple area, and sat on the cushions next to Kadek. Guru Made and his wife sat together facing the offerings, and they performed many steps of the ceremony together. Tina and I stood up so that Guru Made's wife could put water

on our feet and palms. Next, she used different objects, like rice and an egg, to bless and “clean” away any bad energy from our bodies. At the end of the cleaning we had to move our arms in order to clear our auras, as Guru Made explained. The motion looked to me like we were trying to wave away smoke at the height of our waist. Then we sat back down.

The next step involved the five tastes. We were presented with a basket of five little green banana leaves, and in each leaf was a different thing that we needed to taste as part of the ceremony. They were bitter (coffee), salty (salt), sweet (sugar), savory (they would not tell me what that was), and sour (lemon). As we tasted each item Kadek and Guru Made would giggle and try to make us guess what it was we tasted. It surprised me that they were joking because I felt that this was my “Big Important” ritual, but for the Balinese, ritual is not that separate from everyday life. It is not a solemn occasion, but a happy event shared with friends.

Later, Kadek explained that usually the ceremony would substitute spicy instead of one of the others, but because my stomach cannot tolerate spicy food, they decided it would be better to replace spicy with something else. I asked if this would affect the efficacy of the ritual: shouldn't there be a “right” way to do it? Guru Made assured that each ritual must be suited to the time, place, and circumstances of the moment. His explanation made me think that doing ritual in Bali was more like making a stir-fry rather than baking a cake because it is acceptable to change some of the ingredients and still have a good stir-fry. If one is baking a cake it is important to follow the recipe exactly, or the cake will end up a disaster.

Following the tasting, I sat in front of Guru Made with my eyes closed, while he chanted mantras and touched my chakra points and the palms of my hands with water. I opened my eyes and mouth, and he wrote a character on my tongue with his finger. While he did this I felt a surge of energy, like there was electricity flowing through my body. Then I moved to the side so he could repeat the same actions with Tina.

After we had both been blessed in this manner, we turned our attention to the two largest offerings sitting on the altar in front of us. The first offering was for confidence and physical strength. Guru Made said a mantra and we waved the energy from the offering towards our bodies. Next, the second offering was for the strength of spirit; again we waved the energy of the offering towards ourselves. Then we each ripped a leaf on the first offering, which symbolized that the offering had been used, and we each took a small bundle of flowers from the offering and tucked it into our shirts. Guru Made indicated that we should stand again so that he could anoint our heads with water from the ladle he used in the ceremony. Next, Guru Made and his wife each took some red, white, and black string (to represent Vishnu, Siwa, and Brahma) and tied it around our wrists. After the ceremony we did not take the bracelets off, because they would eventually fall away. I had this memory of the ceremony tied around my wrist until December, and Tina had hers even longer.

Guru Made sent me outside of the temple to get the puppets, so I retrieved Twalin, Merdah, and the *kayonan*. He then repeated each step of the ceremony with the puppets, anointing them with water, the egg, and rice; he gave them each the five tastes and chanted the same mantras. At the end he tied the same red, white, and black strings

to the sticks of each of the puppets, and then the remaining puppets I brought were blessed with water. Finally Guru Made handed me each of the puppets along with a bundle of flowers, which I placed in my puppet bag. This ritual symbolized that the puppets were “married” to me; they were no longer just objects, and I was spiritually tied to them as their *dalang*. Guru Made explained that I needed to ask permission each time before using them and give them offerings regularly, even after I returned to the United States. After the ceremony, I felt a special connection with my puppets.

After Guru Made was done with puppets, we set them aside and then we prayed the prayer that I included at the beginning of the previous chapter. We prayed with empty hands, to the sun, to Sariswati, and then to say thank you. Finally, Guru Made blessed us with water (one from a regular holy water and another from a special jar of water for Sariswati), and then he placed rice on our foreheads. At that point, the ceremony was over, so we each ate some fruit and took a piece of cake from the offerings; later, we ate some rice and the chicken that was in one of the offerings.

Kadek left right after the ceremony because she still had to do offerings at home and at the village temple and she looked tired. Tina and I stayed to chat a bit, but then Guru Made and his wife gave us back the puppets and some fruit and sent us home. On the way home I rode sideways on the back of the motorbike while Tina drove, and many Balinese smiled to see us dressed in *pakian adat* driving down the road. We even passed Nyoman, Kadek’s husband, and he later commented that he thought we were really clever to be going around like Balinese women on the back of the motorbike.

Final Rehearsals

Saturday night, one week before the Ubud Festival, was a big rehearsal because it was my first time doing an entire runthrough with the musicians and assistants. Kadek and her husband came to watch and Pak Tunjung's family gathered around. We brought food for everyone: *nasi bungkis*, cakes, and drinks. A few members of the committee for the Ubud Festival were there as well. I was excited and nervous to be performing for an audience for the first time.

The beginning was a little confusing because it was the first time I had to take my puppets out of the box and set them correctly. Pak Tunjung showed me how to pray before the performance and we went through each step slowly. I had to listen to the music and hear my cue to begin, yet I missed it the first time and we needed to try it again. The melodies and rhythms of the *gender* are hard to comprehend. The other distraction was working with the oil lamp because it hangs right in front of the *dalang's* face and makes it impossible to see the entire screen. One time during the *kayonan* dance I misjudged the distance from the lamp and the screen and bumped into it, which sent sparks flying; I burnt my hand and spilled some oil on the ground. Finally, I made it past the beginning and slowly began to bring my puppets on the stage. As I sung the first few lines of *Alas Arum*, everything but the puppets fell away and at last it felt like I was in charge of the performance. The opening is difficult, but it provides a rhythm for the rest of the performance. It keeps the *dalang* from rushing, it warms up the voice, the set movement allows your hands to adjust to the puppets, and it shifts the focus from any

distractions into the performance. Each time I performed I realized that the opening lines and motions provided a sanctuary that could take me into the rest of the performance.

That rehearsal/performance went really well. The audience laughed at my jokes, and I was able to execute the complicated movements at the end in the fight scene. When the *kayonan* was set into place everyone burst into applause. As I helped put away the puppets, I felt relief wash over my body; Pak Tunjung and Kadek were really excited about my performance. I had one more dress rehearsal scheduled and Kadek said that I should do it at her hotel, because then we could invite the professors from ISI, some of the *dalangs* I knew, and of course the hotel guests would be there.

After everyone left, I stayed behind with Pak Tunjung so he could give me some notes on my performance. He told me to be careful not to bring the puppets too close to each other in the center of the screen because it looked like they were kissing. Instead, I should use the oil lamp as a marker for center and have the puppets on either side of center. Finally, he bid me goodnight and we agreed to meet the next day for another rehearsal at night. It would be without the musicians, but Pak Tunjung wanted me to practice again with the oil lamp.

The next day I took a painting class that lasted most of the day, and was quite tired before getting to Pak Tunjung's for rehearsal. That rehearsal did not go well, because I did not have much energy. Near the end, Pak Tunjung interrupted me and complained that I was doing it all wrong. He then demonstrated for me what he wanted and added some dialogue. I felt frustrated because he was describing things that were completely new, and Pak Tunjung was very upset and not very patient. He told me that

the opening was not very good because it lacked energy, and he scolded me because I was not holding Dalem the correct way when he was dancing. He told me that if I did the performance like that he would feel very *malu* (“shy and embarrassed”), and that Pak Sedana and the committee would not be happy that they invited me to perform. It felt extremely harsh. Before I left, he said we should meet early the next day to rehearse. I went home feeling very sad, and wondered if there was any way out of this commitment.

The next few rehearsals were not easy. Pak Tunjung told me he was worried about my performance and was not able to eat. I was frustrated because he kept changing the ending and I still was missing a couple of the puppets for an early scene. The puppets were still at the painters, and I was worried whether they would be done in time for the performance. Pak Tunjung told me not to worry, that he would lend me his puppets if mine were not finished. That made me more relaxed, but I still needed to rehearse the scenes with those puppets, and I did not have puppets to practice with. Additionally, every time he changed the scene, I had more *Kawi* to memorize and it was difficult for me to remember the strange words. Pak Tunjung was adamant that I could not use a script, so I carried my note cards with me everywhere to try and memorize the script. As the week progressed, slowly the details for the performance emerged, and I felt more confident about my performance. Midway through the final week I also needed to complete my ritual preparations and go to the remaining holy springs.

The Performance

Today was the big day: I was performing at the Ubud Festival. The final rehearsal at the hotel went really well, and all of the guests and professors from the

university were very happy with my effort. Everyone expressed surprise that a woman from America could really be a Balinese *dalang*. The performance at the hotel gave me confidence that I would be able to make Pak Tunjung and everyone else proud for supporting me. After a difficult week, I was very happy that I had finally pleased my teacher.



Figure 29. Backstage during my performance at the hotel. Photo by Tina M. Cox.

Kadek and I still needed to go to two holy springs before my performance at the Ubud Festival that evening. I had already gone to seven, but we waited until right before the performance to finish the ceremonies. Guru Made said that my final two holy springs

should represent the two families that had helped me. In the morning, we went to the spring that was right by Pak Tunjung's house, because he was my teacher. In the evening we went to the spring at the temple in Monkey Forest, because that was the village where I lived with Kadek. On our way to the first spring we stopped at Pak Tunjung's house because Pak Aksara, from the Ubud Festival Committee, was there and I was able to confirm transportation for 6:00 P.M. in the evening. Together we discussed the logistics of the offerings for the evening and I made sure that Pak Tunjung had the money he needed to buy the oil for the lamp. After a little while we got up to leave.

The temple we went to was very close to Pak Tunjung's house. When we arrived we got the offerings out of the plastic bag; Kadek did not think I could carry them on the back of the bike without the bag, so she went to find the priest. We found him, but as he started to set up, Kadek realized she needed/wanted one more basket of offerings, so she called home to have someone bring it. The priest had to set up the little bowls, rice, and incense. Finally the other offerings arrived and we were all set. The spring was located down some steep stairs adjacent to the temple. At the spring we set up the offerings on an altar and then we then kneeled for a long time while the priest chanted by the offerings and sprinkled everything with water. The priest then came over and sprinkled us with holy water, led us in prayer, and then we followed him back up the stairs to the temple. In the other temple we kneeled again, facing the altar, and the priest chanted again. After a second prayer we thanked the priest and headed home.

I rested most of the day and then in the early evening together with Ibu, Nyoman, and Kadek I headed to the temple in Monkey Forest. We walked through the forest to a

small temple in the back where we set our offerings down. A priest from the temple met us there and led us down the steps to the spring that was located in a small shrine next to the river that winds its way through the forest. Kadek kneeled next to the priest while he said his incantations and I stood next to him with the flowers we would need to pray. There were a couple of tourists who followed us and they were taking pictures. The guide that was with them explained that the ceremony was for blessing a *dalang* before giving a *wayang kulit* performance. It made my stomach flip to realize I was the *dalang* he was talking about. While the priest chanted I used the time to focus my mind. It felt pretty amazing that they were all doing this for me, and I could feel all of the energy and love being sent my way. Afterwards the priest splashed Kadek and me with water, a lot of water, and poured it over our heads. I was quite wet when he was done.

Finally we all kneeled together and prayed before going up the stairs to return to the first temple. I was the only one who had to be really careful on the stairs, because they had all gone up and down them many times before. Back at the other temple, we kneeled again as the priest went through another set of incantations. It was almost dark and all I could see were the little red beams of the incense glowing, making the experience really magical.

Back at my room I got changed into a special sarong I had purchased for the performance and a shirt that Pak Tunjung had designed with a *kayonan* on the back and Ohio University and my name on the front. Pak Tunjung thought it would be great if we all wore the same shirts for the performance, and because the performance was not in a temple, I did not need to wear a *kabaya*.

The performance was on a big stage that the Ubud Festival had constructed on the soccer field in the heart of Ubud. I rode with Nyoman to the performance place, and Kadek came a little later with the offerings. I was worried we would be late, but there was a child *dalang* who was going to perform before me and he hadn't even started yet. Pak Tunjung explained that he hadn't brought any offerings or oil because his family thought the Ubud Festival was going to provide them. He was wrong, and they had to wait to begin while his family gathered the things he needed. I just sat in the backstage area and waited, while someone brought me a box of food and a drink. I ate some rice, veggies, and part of a corn fritter, but I was very nervous.

I did not really pay attention to the performance that was happening before mine, because I focused on when it would be my turn. While I was sitting there, one of Pak Tunjung's musicians came over. He would be playing for me when I performed and was quite young, only twenty-five. He worked at a hotel in Kuta, but was passionate about music and *wayang kulit*. He commented that he really enjoyed my performance at the hotel and looked forward to playing for me tonight, because he thought it was really fantastic that a foreigner was learning and performing *wayang kulit*. He was proud to be part of my performance, and that made me feel determined to do a good job.

Finally the other performance finished and we could take our places. It was getting late, but there were still quite a few people milling about the soccer field. Later Kadek told me that there were a couple hundred people watching my performance. Occasionally, I could hear them laugh, but during the performance my connection was with the puppets and not with the audience. The performance went really well because I

remembered all of the *kawi* and was able to execute the difficult moves. It lasted almost two hours, but I was not aware of the time. The next day the entire experience felt like a dream.

Reactions

A couple of days later I went over to Pak Tunjung's for my first lesson after the performance. When I got there, he was sitting with someone and they were both in *pakian adat*, so I knew something was up. Pak Tunjung gestured for me come over and he talked a little bit about my performance. He said that Ibu Arini, a professor at ISI, called him everyday because she wanted to write an article about my performance for the *Bali Post* and a few other publications. She told Pak Tunjung that she was impressed that a foreign woman could perform traditional *wayang kulit* so well. She credited Pak Tunjung as my teacher and added that many of the students at ISI could not perform *wayang kulit* as well as I could.

Pak Tunjung said when he was in the market that a lot of Balinese congratulated him on the performance because they were impressed that an American woman did *wayang kulit* so well. People told Pak Tunjung that my shadows looked so nice, just like a Balinese would do. Pak Tunjung said that he thought the performance at the Ubud Festival on Monday was much better than the first one at the hotel. He explained that my voice was well-balanced with the music and that there was nothing *salah*, or "wrong," about my performance. Pak Tunjung thought my performance demonstrated the strength of traditional Balinese *wayang kulit* done in the traditional way because it was successful with both Balinese and foreign audiences, and therefore did not need to be changed. He

hoped I would remember that experience in Bali when I performed *wayang kulit* back in the United States.

After our conversation, Pak Tujung had to go Denpasar, so I stayed and practiced by myself for a little while. He had just given me my new Dalem and Sangut puppets and I thought they were great. Before he left, Pak Tunjung promised that during our next lesson we would start to learn a new story; this one would be the episode that happens after *Arjuna Tapa*, and tells about Arjuna's adventures in the heavens. The story features several female characters and I was eager to learn to use those puppets.

Another Performance

At my next lesson, Pak Konrad, the one who carved the beautiful designs into my puppet box, was there, because he wanted to know if I would be willing to give a performance in his village. He lived in a small village, and they could not afford to pay for a *dalang* to give a performance at their *odalan*. He thought of me, and wondered if I would be willing to do it. I would have to pay for the musicians, assistants, and transportation out of my own money, but it would be a good opportunity for me to give back to some of the people who had helped me. It would be a chance for me to *ngayah* for the gods and to give thanks for all I had learned as a *dalang*. I was honored to be asked, and happily agreed to do the performance.

The performance was going to be the next day, so Pak Tunjung wanted to go there and get things ready for it. He wanted to see where they would set up the screen and make sure it was a safe space for my performance. Pak Tunjung explained that it is important to have the screen facing to the east or north, because the *dalang* must face and

acknowledge the sun. This is not a Hindu belief, because it is important to acknowledge that the sun gives everyone on earth life and energy. If the screen is facing the wrong direction it could be very bad for the *dalang* and the audience: people could become sick and die.

The next day I met Pak Tunjung at his house at around 7:00 P.M. This performance was in a temple so I wore *pakian adat*. We sat and talked for a few minutes before getting on his bike to go to the temple. His assistants and musicians were already there getting set up. At the temple, I had to wait quite a while for my performance, because the priest needed to complete certain ceremonies before there could be a *wayang kulit*. We sat and sipped tea and ate some food; a couple of my friends came to watch me perform and they sat with me while we waited. We were the only foreigners: the rest of this audience was Balinese.

Finally it was time to perform and we went into the inner part of the temple. The performance went well and I mixed English, Indonesian, and even some Balinese in the clown scenes so the entire audience could understand and enjoy the performance. Pak Konrad thanked me the next day, because without a *wayang kulit* performance the ceremony at the temple would not be effective.

A couple days later I was able to talk with Pak Tunjung some more about my performance in the temple. He explained that the performance was special because that was full “magic” and I was a woman *dalang*. He said that he had never seen a woman *dalang* perform a complete story like that.⁵² Pak Tunjung explained that before a

⁵² My research shows that other women *dalangs* have given full night performances in temples, but it is not common, and perhaps I am the first foreign woman to give such a performance.

performance in a temple it was very important to pray and meditate, because *wayang kulit* has very powerful “magic” and makes the *dalang* vulnerable to people who do “black magic.” He told me that when he went to the performance space before my performance, there was an old man with white hair and beard watching him very closely. Pak Tunjung was worried this person had bad “magic,” and Pak Tunjung promised that we would protect me. Before the performance, Pak Tunjung spent time in the temple praying and meditating for the gods to protect me and to give my performance good power. At his house, before we went together to the temple, he blessed me with holy water and put a flower in my hair. Pak Tunjung said that the flower was to protect me (I did not know this at the time), because it would help provide a shield around my body to guard me from “bad magic.” When I performed, he told me that he meditated because he felt that there was “bad magic” in the space and he kept it away. He said that my performance was very powerful because I was able to do the entire story, and that I made the audience very happy. After my performance several people wanted to take some of the oil from my lamp because it would give them additional blessings.

Pak Tunjung explained that during the performance the *dalang* is like god, even is god, because in the story the *dalang* can decide who lives and dies. The *dalang* gives life to the puppets and the story; the world on the screen would not exist unless the *dalang* called it into being. If the *dalang* wants to kill Arjuna, he can kill him. The audience may ask, “why has Arjuna died?” However, it can happen if the *dalang* just wants it to, just as the *dalang* can also bring Arjuna back to life or reincarnate him. The performance is for the gods and the *dalang* is a god: it is a weird sort of equality.

Pak Tunjung told me about another friend who had studied *wayang kulit* and was invited to give a performance in his village, but he did not tell Pak Tunjung. Before the performance he did not pray, and he was only able to perform for fifteen minutes before he felt a sharp pain in the middle of his body. The man was no longer able to lift his arm or move the puppets. The next day he visited Pak Tunjung, but he could barely walk, his arm was white, cold to the touch, and he could not move it. Pak Tunjung said the arm was like it was dead. While the man waited, Pak Tunjung went into his temple to pray to the puppet gods and to make holy water to sprinkle on the man. Slowly, the man got better, but returned to see Pak Tunjung for several weeks before he fully recovered. Pak Tunjung explained that the man fell ill because he did not pray before the performance and was vulnerable to “black magic.”

Pak Tunjung said that if I kept studying puppets, I as long as I remembered to honor the puppet gods, I would remain safe. He demonstrated with his fingers: I was his left finger and he showed another finger coming at me. He said if I was not protected that the other finger (the bad person or “black magic”) would strike me and kill me, but he assured me that because I work and study hard it would not be like that. The “black magic” would just go around me and not touch me. This time he showed the other finger coming at me, made it go around. He said it was not my job to fight back or to destroy the “black magic,” but just to stay safe.

A few days later I was walking home along the street by the soccer field when a Balinese man stopped me and asked, “Hey, weren’t you the *dalang* I saw perform in the village the other night? I saw you.” I acknowledged that I was and he told me how much

he enjoyed the performance. He then wondered if I got paid, and I said no, that I did it for *ngayah*. He wondered if I had my own puppets and when I said yes, he expressed hope that maybe the next time his temple had a celebration I could come and perform, because then I would be more famous. I smiled and told him I would like that.

Going Home—The Ritual Body

On my last day in Bali, Pak Tunjung and his family held a special party for me; the men in the house and several of the musicians came over to make *lawar*. *Lawar* is a special kind of finely diced meat, spices, vegetables, and sometimes blood that is reserved for a special occasion. It is a meal of honor and friendship that takes a very long time to make; it is also expensive because of the amount of meat and spices used. *Lawar* is delicious, but sometimes risky to eat. (Bad *lawar* will make your stomach very sick.) The actual eating does not take long – it is a fleeting moment – but the memory of the meal and the time spent in the preparation is what matters most. I think eating *lawar* is like doing research: the words on this page are read in a short moment, but represent many hours of work and the assistance and energy of many people.

At home, I am left with notebooks and computer files filled with data, tapes of interviews and videos of performances, and my puppets, box, and oil lamp. These things represent an important part of my research, but in order to really understand the structures of tradition, the presence of ritual, it is vital to consider my body.

I have attempted to locate myself as a physical presence within the ritual of *wayang kulit*, and in order to do this, I need to articulate the relationship between the body and ritual. Various anthropologists and scholars from other disciplines have written

about the relationship between society and the body: that the ways we move, act, and relate to each other in society are culturally learned behaviors. Bell explains that ritual is a key site where a body is cultured: “Indeed, any discussion of the social body presupposes some theory of how the human psychophysical entity is socialized and therein empowered as a cultural actor. Often a special appeal is made to ritual to ‘model’ this whole process of socialization as the transformation of nature into culture” (96). The body is changed through ritual, but I also feel that the body can change ritual and therefore intervene into the structures of society. Ritual creates a moment of potential. Bell invokes Bourdieu in order to create a relationship between the body, society, and the cosmos through ritual:

Bourdieu’s analysis of these dynamics has been, perhaps, the most dramatic. He argues that every social group “entrusts to bodily automatism’s” those principles that are most basic to the organization and maintenance of that group. [. . .] Bourdieu explores the mediation of the body via a “dialectic of objectification and embodiment” that makes it *the locus* for the coordination of all levels of bodily, social, and cosmological experience. This coordination is effected only in and through schemes that pass “from practice to practice” without becoming explicit either in personal consciousness or in social discourse. (97)

It is that moment of passing “from practice to practice” that I have shared in this section by recounting my experience learning *wayang kulit* and going through the ritual initiations to become a *dalang*.

Ritual provides a type of knowledge, which Bell describes happens in a certain moment as “ritual mastery.” This concept casts “ritual” as a scheme for knowing and being in the world. Bell explains:

Ritual mastery, like the culturally defined mastery of theoretical practice, reveals a specific object-unity characteristic of ritualization as a particular mode of practice. Specifically, its relationship of seeing to not-seeing is the production of agents embodying a sense of ritual constituted by and expressed in particular schemes of ritualization. These schemes act as instruments for knowing and appropriating the world. (114-115)

Ritual mastery is the method by which the structures, and the structuring structures, of tradition may be revealed. Crucial to my study is the question of if these structures might not only be revealed through ritual, but also that, can the structures themselves be changed? Is *wayang kulit* a possible site of agency for women to change the traditional structures of gender hierarchy within Balinese society?

Bell’s argument leads me to conclude that ritual can be understood as a site of agency within tradition, because ritual is tied to tradition and is the site that reifies or changes tradition. Bell explains: “Ritual *can* be a strategic way to ‘traditionalize,’ that is, to construct a type of tradition, but in doing so it can also challenge and renegotiate the very basis of tradition to the point of upending what has been seen as fixed previously or by other groups” (124). Woman *dalangs* and woman characters intervene through the ritual. Ritual, as my experience shows, can construct tradition even as tradition constructs and instructs ritual. It is not a fixed set of behaviors, but rather a constant

negotiation. My initiation and acceptance into this system demonstrates the potential for change. Balinese women do not need to cast away tradition in order to achieve gender equality; *wayang kulit* provides one such case that demonstrates how structures might change. *Wayang kulit* provides a powerful site for agency that can lead to resistance, and I look forward to continuing to study how Ibu Trijata's daughter and the next generation of female *dalangs* are able to seize this potential.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

Final Performances—Tradition in Ohio

Back at Ohio University, only a few months after returning from Bali, I was asked to perform a short *wayang kulit* for an evening of food and entertainment that the Indonesian students were hosting. I was excited to have the opportunity to perform, and another student, A.J. Predisik, agreed to help. He studied *wayang kulit* in Java for a summer, but proclaimed, “Now you are the *dalang*,” and told me that he would be my assistant.

We met a couple of times to work out the logistics and discuss story ideas. We wanted to do something that was both “traditional,” and appropriate to the international audience that we would be performing for on campus. The story, *Arjuan Tapa*, provided the framework, but instead of going up the mountain to gain wisdom we decided that Arjuna would travel to Ohio University. In the performance the clowns complained about the cold weather and Twalin worried that they will want to check his underwear as they go through airport security. A.J. suggested that they visit *Input*, the art installation on campus that was designed by Maya Lin. The artwork is located in a large field and consists of raised and lowered indentations with inscriptions about Athens and the university. The puppets walked across the field, and then fell in, because they did not notice the holes in the ground. *Input* provided a fun backdrop for the battle between Arjuna and the ogre Momosimoko. Arjuna won, graduated, and the puppets flew home to Bali.

The performance was well received and I could hear a lot of laughter from the other side of the screen. Later in the evening, as we sat and ate dinner with friends, they were surprised to learn that I was the one to move all of the puppets on the screen and had given them all voices. “We just assumed that A.J. was doing the deeper voices!” exclaimed my friend Max. “Wow, that was amazing,” our friend Monica added. A.J. told everyone how he held on to the puppet box for “dear life” as I played the percussion with my *cepala* and foot. In the days after the event I kept running into other students, both Indonesian and not, who had seen the performance and wanted to tell me how much they enjoyed it. I was tickled with their praise—even in the US, I was truly accepted as a *dalang*. I was pleased that my body could represent the tradition that I had studied and loved while in Bali.

Tradition and Agency

In this dissertation I assert two primary, and interdependent ideas: first that change is a compatible and an intrinsic quality of “tradition” that demonstrates tradition’s relevancy for contemporary Balinese society. Second, that within that change there is the potential for agency because of tradition’s special relationship to “habitus” or the structuring structures within Balinese society. “Tradition” implies angst about change, because perhaps traditions, like *wayang kulit* for example, will be lost. Durkheim wrote about this decline of tradition as modern cities replaced rural villages: “That it is in the great cities that the moderating influence of age is at its minimum. At the same time, one observes that nowhere have the traditions less sway over minds” (297). It is assumed that “tradition” cannot compete in a modern world; likewise, early literature on Balinese arts

is dominated by this concern. Beryl de Zoete writes in her introduction to the now classic book on Balinese dance and drama that she co-wrote with Walther Spies:

Bali is neither a last nor lost paradise, but the home of a peculiarly gifted people of mixed race, endowed with a great sense of humor and a great sense of style, where their own traditions are concerned; and with a suppleness of mind which has enabled them to take what they want of alien civilizations which have been reaching them for centuries and leave the rest. And in spite of a few exceptions mentioned above they seem to have left the rest very successfully. [. . .] Here is the unchanged traffic of Bali, between villages inaccessible from the road, but with a very complicated life of their own. (2-3).

In order to protect tradition de Zoete seals Bali off from the rest of the “modern” world, making the island both stubborn and inaccessible. Over and over, throughout the book, de Zoete and Spies write that the Balinese are simple and untouched by time, because to be “touched by time” means that they might lose their traditions; this conclusion denies the complexity of Balinese culture.

This angst that tradition is incompatible with modernity and might be lost, however, depends on an understanding of tradition that does not allow for change as an inherent part of tradition. It does not account for the many ways traditions will adjust in order to remain relevant and powerful in the present. In this dissertation I have argued for an understanding of tradition that accounts for its adaptability because as *wayang kulit* is learned and performed in each generation, the *dalangs* adapt the stories and objects of

wayang kulit to match the needs of its audience. I have discussed how this happens when Pak Tunjung selects a story or uses photocopies to borrow designs from other puppet carvers. Also, as women perform, they will intervene into the “tradition” of *wayang kulit* and over time the “tradition” of *wayang kulit* will evolve to better include women and their performances. Susilo, Bakan, and Kellar trace how the traditions of *gamelan* and *arja* respectfully are expanding and changing as women performers become commonplace. This type of change is an inherent feature of “tradition,” whether the artists are men or women, and does not suggest an erosion of tradition.

Tradition can change with the addition of women and still maintain its status as “tradition,” but does that mean women are able to achieve agency through *wayang kulit*? Scholar Sylvia Tiwon, writing about women authors in Java, argues that women are able to gain agency through “articulation;” that through writing, or I would add performing *wayang kulit*, the women are given power over their own representation. They are able to add their voices into the discourse about women in Indonesia, and their voices have efficacy because there is an audience for this work. Tiwon explains:

By articulation I mean the instance of giving voice, whether orally, in writing, or in print, to ideas and experiences, which, until they are voiced, especially in this age of competitive articulation, must remain private and thus, nonexistent as far as human society is concerned. Furthermore, articulation only makes sense when it is placed within the rhetorical context, when it assumes the existence of an audience, for articulation without an audience, though at times necessary, is, within the public

function, an absurdity, a negation of the human capacity and need to communicate. Articulation is also a function of the process involved in the formation and transmission of cognitive and experiential schemata.

Thus, it is not a static object, frozen within its own absoluteness. (48-49)

Through *wayang kulit*, women *dalangs* speak to and speak for the gods, giving that speech, or articulation, a revered status within Balinese society.⁵³ This dissertation is grounded in the potential for that voice—about establishing how women might change the structures of society through their involvement in the structures of tradition through the practice of *wayang kulit*. Later studies will build on my language skills in order to compare the words of their performances in order to understand how this articulation is being used.

The act of articulation in *wayang kulit* more powerful than in other arts or literature because of the place it holds in society through its status as tradition. Articulation through *wayang kulit* is more than just joining the conversation; through the process of *menyatu*, the woman *dalang* is able to intervene into tradition. The woman as a *dalang* is in direct opposition to *kodrat wanita*, or the intrinsic nature of woman as understood in Indonesia. The next generation of women *dalangs* will determine the type of voice women are able to realize through *wayang kulit* and how “tradition” will provide agency for women in Balinese society.

⁵³ *Wayang kulit* has a special relationship to the gods as the essential audience, whereas, the human audience is considered the inessential audience.

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APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

adat: Tradition or custom.

alus: Refined

bale: A covered platform or pavilion that is used as a meeting place in the home or village.

cepala: A small wood knocker that the *dalang* holds between his toes or in his hand in order to make percussive sounds during a *wayang kulit* performance.

dalang: The puppet master.

gender: Small xylophone-like instrument that often accompanies a *wayang kulit* performance.

guru: Teacher.

ibu: Literally means mother in Indonesian; the polite term of address for a woman in Indonesia, similar to Ms. or Mrs..

ISI: *Institut Seni Indonesia*, the performing Arts University in Denpasar, formally called ASTI (*Akademi Seni Tinggi Indonesia*).

kabaya: A lace or cotton blouse that is worn by women for *pakian adat*.

kasar: Unrefined.

kayonan: The tree of life puppet.

neskala: The invisible realm.

ngayah: To do something or perform something as an offering to the gods or in service to the community.

odalan: A temple celebration, often of the anniversary of a temple.

pak: Literally means father; the polite term of address for a man in Indonesia, similar to Mr..

pakian adat: Traditional clothes.

panasar: Clown characters in *wayang kulit*—the characters Twalin, Merdah, Sangut, and Dalem.

pura: Balinese Hindu temple.

raksasa: Ogres.

ringgit: Puppet.

sekala: the visible realm.

speda motor: Motorbike.

taksu: Spiritual power.

upacara: The generic term for a special celebration or ceremony in Bali.