Towards the Embodiment of the Mask
Balinese Topeng in Contemporary Practice

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Carmencita Palermo

Date: 22-10-2007

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ABSTRACT

Towards the Embodiment of the Mask. Balinese Topeng in Contemporary Practice.

This thesis explores the process of mask characterisation in Bali as expressed in performances and in the views of individuals. The polyphony of voices of performers, officials, cultural analysts and village audiences gives multifarious expression to a sense of cultural identity. This identity is in continuous flux, as topeng masked dance drama reflects the way in which Bali itself is changing in the contemporary world. Starting with an analysis of the performative principles of masked dance-drama practice, with each chapter I analyse a broader context of the relationship between these basic performative principles and daily life.

The performers' voices interweave with written discourse on Balinese culture, depicted as in increasing need of protection. Balinese culture (and dance as one of its manifestations) has had to be protected by separating what is truly linked to Balinese tradition (mainly based on religion) from what is not. The separation, at discourse level, has created two domains; one sacred, fixed and exclusively Balinese, and one profane, flexible and able to be "contaminated" through interaction with the outside world.
Balinese topeng moves between these domains. In its increased role within ceremonies it reinforces essential Balinese identity, also the subject of intense media discourse in the post-Bali bombing period. At the same time, as part of the entertainment domain, topeng becomes a medium for reinterpreting traditional concepts and affording performers new freedoms. Recently comedy and laughter, predominating in performances for entertainment and also intruding into the ceremonial domain, have been interpreted by some as empty escapism. Is this indeed how the laughter should be interpreted, or do its capacities to heal trauma and provide release from the pressures of chauvinist cultural discourse connect at a deeper level with contemporary Balinese social reality?

Another contemporary development, posing questions for the future of topeng form, is the involvement of women. Women now participate in topeng both for entertainment and ceremonies, but so far have not taken on the most sacred mask. Will they do so in future? Can the basic principles of Balinese performance and cultural identity be extended to allow women to help create harmony with nature through unity with the mask?
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Even though this research officially started in 2002 at the School of Asian Studies of the University of Tasmania, Australia, draws on data I have been collecting since I first went to Bali in 1993. In fact I can not separate my experience of being a PhD candidate at an Australian university from being a student at an Italian university (Performing Arts at the University of Bologna), a Balinese one (as dance student at the STSI/ISI Denpasar), a Maltese one and a Dutch one (Leiden, CNWS) or an employee at the Italian Culture Institute, Jakarta and a lecturer at various Jakarta universities. I would like to thank all those who supervised and supported me during those years and made me desire and believe in the feasibility of writing a PhD in a foreign language.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning by doing: personal experience between theory and practice

...the best source of knowledge [...] has to be personal experience, through the actual process of learning and interacting. (Herbst 1997: 147).

My personal experience started as I watched topeng, masked dance drama, following my first mentor, I Made Sija from Bona, performing from village to village. That was in the year 1993 when, as a student of performing arts at the University of Bologna, I was in Bali for the first time, researching the kecak.¹ With almost no knowledge of Balinese or Indonesian languages, and therefore not much understanding of what topeng was about, I could not stop watching Sija. At the age of about 55, through changes of masks, Sija was able to become a prime minister, then an old man, then a servant, then a king, then a sort of comic character who never stopped talking, making those present laugh or listen attentively. He could also become an attractive woman who entertains men with her dance, and finally a powerful being (the Sidhakarya) able to seriously scare children. I was attracted but didn't understand it. Fascination! My fascination with a phenomenon able to transform painted wood into something believable, alive: a character. I soon felt that I was witnessing that unity between body and mind so much searched for by theatre practitioners and theoreticians like Stanislavsky,

¹Kecak or cak is a form of dance-drama developed in the 1930s by combining the sound of the chorus of the trance dance Sanghyang with the Ramayana story. The chorus, derived from the chorus of the trance dance Sang Hyang is made up mainly of male performers (there are only a few examples of all-women kecak). It provides accompaniment like a gamelan orchestra, but can also personify characters such as the monkey army or a forest of trees. Although originally created for foreign audiences by I Wayan Limbak and Walter Spies, I have seen kecak performed at ceremonies, and it has inspired very interesting contemporary works. (See Bandem and deBoer 1995 [1981], Dibia and Ballinguer 2004 for basic information, and a specific study by Dibia 1996).
Delsarte, Copeau, Decroux, Artaud, Craig, Mejerhold, Grotowski, Brook and Barba.

Was I undergoing a visionary experience in the manner of Artaud? Was I projecting my own concerns, the things I was looking for, onto what I was seeing? Was my observation based on a pre-conceived idea of the ideal performer to be found in a remote, exotic, pristine tradition? Certainly my attention was quite selective. I could see, as a performing arts student, what I was used to recognising: the "presence" of the performer, and on that occasion, a masked performer. Although I was longing to learn how it is done, for a long time I simply watched. Watching mask making and watching people learning dance, especially children; watching performances nearly every day. It took five months to find the courage to openly ask to learn to make a mask, and to learn the mask-dance choreography. Then I was able to experience bodily, and not just understand intellectually, what one of my lecturers at the University of Bologna, Franco Ruffini repeatedly talked about: the search for the body-mind unity that theatre people of the 20th century also explored through their idea of "Oriental Theatre". A necessary unity which enables the performer to freely improvise with "precision" within the given score/partitura (both verbal and physical), performing in a naturally alive, believable way, not just giving a technical performance (Ruffini 1996: 59-87 also quoted in De Marinis 2000: 150)

As De Marinis (2000) observes, the search for body-mind unity on stage was a reaction against an over emphasis on the body, which itself had arisen as a revolt against the preceding exclusive focus on text and dialogue. At the end of the 19th century first the world of dance and then the world of theatre re-discovered the body. Often it was a response to the western-based body/mind dualism as well as a challenge to the predominance of the word and realism on stage. But those who wanted to re-create the theatre in the 20th century were not satisfied by empty, technical perfection of the body's actions. Rather they were looking for the truthful presence of body-mind. The solution was sought in the distant past of the ancient Greek theatre, in the Commedia dell'Arte, in the "Far East", and in the
puppets and masks understood as the performer's pedagogical instruments (Craig 1908, Copeau 1974[1937] in De Marinis 2000: 173).

And there I was, like my predecessors of a hundred years ago, in the "Far East" still looking for the presence of the performer through the mask. "Personal experience, learning and interacting: this is the way to learn", I Wayan Dibia told me in March 1993, when I first met him just few days after landing in unknown Bali. "Do you want research kecak? You have to learn it. The best person is I Made Sija in Bona". So I went to live in the small village of Bona. The concept of learning by doing was stimulating but frightening. Researching in these terms implies total engagement, total in the sense of body-mind. My learning process at the university had been predominantly theoretical. It took a while before I could follow the advice of all those Balinese performers who encouraged me to learn the practice of the form I was investigating. My fascination was more for masks than for kecak. After presenting my thesis on kecak in Italy in 1994, I went back to Bali with the Indonesian Scholarship Darmasiswa for almost two and a half years. At that time, informed especially by the theories of Eugenio Barba, I was following the path of those I had been studying in search of the presence of the performer.

During my study in Bologna I had been particularly exposed to the work of Eugenio Barba, founder of the School of Theatre Anthropology (Barba and Savarese 1991, Barba 1995). Barba's work, in search of the secret art of the performer through dance theatre-traditions, including that of the Balinese, surely shaped my way to look at the work of the performer in Bali. In this introduction I explore how Barba's theory can be related to the Balinese performer. I will also propose other approaches such as bioenergetics to find a key to the possible interpretation of Balinese principles in non-Balinese terms. Then I will show how the concept of pre-expressivity proposed by Barba needs to be supplemented with an examination of the cultural context. My analysis focuses on

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2Eugenio Barba, director of the Odin Theatre (Holstebro) and founder of the ISTA, International School of Theatre Anthropology.
the body-mind\(^3\) of the performer as he acquires knowledge enabling him to "bring the mask to life". At the same time this knowledge is fully embodied and involves several domains of the human being: "personal, social, ritual, aesthetic, political, cosmological" (Zarrilli 2001: 35).

My background in performing arts leads me to this theoretical approach, in contrast to the majority of studies of Balinese dance and drama that are based on anthropology and social-political perspectives. I intend to draw on scholarly studies of Bali, based on performing arts theories as well as social science and anthropology, while listening intently to the voices of those investigated. These voices will enable us to gain insight into the relationship between the work of the performer and the meaning of the culture that the performer belongs to, as well as his/her interactions with voices from public discourse, which is very much part of the process of cultural construction.

In this introduction I attempt to come to an understanding of the principles of topeng as a form by using western theories informed by interaction with non-western ideas and practice. Nevertheless I point out that we have to go beyond theoretical frameworks and through the voice of the performers grasp the specific complexity. The line of narration of this thesis follows the development of my personal understanding acquired through my practice of the topeng and my daily life interactions with local performers. The resulting narrative depicts my understanding of the people’s narrative.

Previous studies of mask, performance and specifically Balinese performing arts have shaped my approach in this thesis. There is a constant interaction between my practical learning with my Balinese teachers and theoretical studies. Often personal experience illuminates theory, while theories speed the practical learning process by combining the experience of the body with the experience of the mind. This introduction draws on such experience in formulating my own

\(^3\)Here I refer to the organic psycho-physiological procedures of the performer on stage as expressed in the Stanislavsky "system". See Ruffini in Barba and Savarese (1991: 150-153).
theory of Balinese performance, particularly masked dance, which will be applied in the rest of the thesis.⁴

**Learning through moving**

Barba (1995) focuses on the physiological behaviour of the performer. According to him, the body can have three kinds of activity: daily techniques through which there is communication of cultural content, acrobatic techniques that transform the body, and finally extra-daily techniques that, instead of transforming the body, "in-form" the body, making it alive and present. The state of the body "in-formed" is called the "pre-expressive" level and it is to that level that the spectator responds with appreciation. (Barba and Savarese 1991). Barba and a group of researchers in the field of theatre have investigated the principles that determine pre-expressivity transculturally. By exploring the work of performers from Europe and Asia they have identified those pre-expressive principles that give shape to the physical and mental presence of the human being in a performative context (De Marinis 2000: 156).

Barba's postulation is based on the fact that the performer needs special skills to attract the audience. Those skills are based on actions, called extra-daily techniques, that do not belong to daily life. Through the focus on the actor's body the investigator observes the whole of the performer's body-mind (Barba 1993: 182)⁵ in search for principles that are beyond interpretation or expression, that enable the performer to embody the character's presence on stage. In their study of the tradition of theatre using a codified technique, Theatre Anthropology researchers realised that performers "mould their body according to specific tensions and forms" and that it is these that affect the audience (Barba and

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⁴I have already employed part of the theoretical background discussed in the rest of the chapter in my PhD proposal formulated during the Advanced Master's Programme at the University of Leiden.

Savarese 1991: 186). These tensions and forms, that involve the performer’s organism (mind-body) totally, belong to the pre-expressive level.  

These tensions and forms are technical: they are the result of recurrent principles found across performance traditions. Those principles can be observed in the weight of the performer, in the balance, in the use of the spinal cord, in the eyes. It results in an extra-daily energy that makes the body “decided”, “alive”, “believable” in such a way that the presence of the performer attracts the audience even before transmitting meaning, before being expressive (Barba 1993: 23). It is not a psychological exercise. Rather, it is physical, but it includes the mind. My understanding of these concepts expanded to a new level of awareness when I started dance training in Bali. During training there isn’t much explanation of the characters of the danced roles. You learn how to give a shape to the body, in-form the body, according to the different characters: neck, shoulders, torso, arms, fingers, legs and feet totally change form. The new form is so different that it takes a certain effort to be stable. This effort, involved in these micro-movements of counter-balance, creates one of the basic pre-expressive levels that attract the audience’s attention. The difference between characters is shown by different rhythm and breath as well by different steps and different movements of every single part of the body, fingers and toes included. Furthermore the teacher does not say much about the psychological features of the character except in general terms, such as that the character is strong or refined, old or young.

Once you get used to the form the teacher may add further details in characterisation, such as breath control, to distribute energy according to the character and to truly give life to the mask. A performer becomes the refined king

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6 The pre-expressive level can be defined as the level at which the performer constructs and directs his/her presence on the stage, independent of and before his/her final goals and expressive results. “Presence in this definition is free of any metaphorical connotation. It is literal. The performer’s presence, her way of being on stage, organically, is obviously a physical and mental presence. Pre-expressivity, while being physical, is also manifested in a mental dimension” (Ruffini in Barba and Savarese 1991: 64).

7 Separation between pre-expressive and expressive is a laboratory-like contexts exercise. At a practical level, in the course of a performance there isn’t such a separation.
or the strong prime minister by means of an effortless ability to quickly in-form the body according to the mask by using proper breath (consider that the performer can change masks up to 12 times during a performance). Also in the case of spoken comic mask characters, the performers explain their process of characterisation starting from the physical shape suitable to the mask, the walk, the rhythm of movements and, above all, the right voice for the mask.

Kinaesthetic imitation and body manipulation are key features of the training process. Usually the pupil imitates steps and/or the entire choreography while the teacher dances (or sings). When the pupil has memorized the choreography the teacher will physically (with his own hands or entire body) manipulate the pupil’s body in order to activate it in the right points. According to the father of bioenergetics, Alexander Lowen, manipulation of the patient is one of the instruments for a psychophysical rehabilitation. The basic concept that the bioenergetics proposes is that every human being is his/her body, he/she manifests him/herself and interrelates with the world thanks to the body. Mind and spirit are aspects of any living body. Manipulation aids the restoration of the natural body-mind unity and aids the healing process. Furthermore, recent Theatre Anthropology studies demonstrate that the direct transmission (from body to body, from teacher to pupil) of technical or pre-expressive principles affects the brain in the relationship between the performer and character. The concept of pre-expressivity illuminates the practical principles employed by Balinese topeng performers as they work towards embodiment of the mask.

My attraction to Sija’s performances of topeng depended on that sort of general principle of attraction created by his ability to be one with the mask, a principle that can be found in his pre-expressivity. Being attracted without understanding is a phenomenon that can be explained through Theatre Anthropology. Nevertheless, when the level of involvement changes and the investigation actively involves the investigator’s body-mind in the learning process, conditions

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8 As De Marinis (2000: 192) states, the concept of body-mind in theatre comes from those “maestri” of psychophysical techniques of the twentieth century such Lowen, Gurdjieff or Feldenkrais.
change. Once language skills allow, it is possible to realise that ways of knowing of Balinese performers do not consist only of practical teaching based on kinaesthetic imitation and body manipulation, as mentioned above. They also include verbal transmission.

**Dialogical learning and East-West terminology**

The learning process from teacher to pupil is dialogical. The specific training for topeng performers is only a small part of the learning process: it is the base. Rehearsals are not common practice. The performer learns above all by performing. He may receive feedback while performing and/or at the end of the performance from both his teacher who invited him to perform, from elder colleagues and from friendly members of the audience. Part of the learning process is learning the chronicles, which are the stories told during the performances, and the religious-philosophical concepts that have to be transmitted during the performance. Those who engage in performing topeng consult different performers considered knowledgeable to improve or verify what they have learned by themselves or from someone else. People visit well known performers to ask for a particular song (that is usually tape recorded) or discuss a particular concept. Theatre Anthropology does not deal with this aspect of the transmission of knowledge, which builds up performers' ability to create presence at both pre-expressive and expressive levels. It is the performers' voices which reveal this aspect of the mask wearer's creative process. Access to the discourses about their practice is also access to their representation of their culture.

I am aware that as a white western woman I could never have the same relationship with my teachers that a Balinese performer has: at best I'll always be just like a curious child in their eyes. Nevertheless, like some other researchers, because of the extended periods of time I spent in Bali, I had the opportunity of frequenting their houses and performing with them. I was able to witness their interaction with their Balinese pupils and colleagues and slowly gain access to
dialogue with them. In both practical and discursive transmission of knowledge regarding work with the mask there is a recurrent expression: menunggal or mesikang with the mask, "being one" with the mask. The body has to become the mask to give life to the mask.

This concrete way of speaking about the mask is reminiscent of the description of the mask in the work of Etienne Decroux or Dario Fo. Are the similarities in the way of speaking about the mask the result of interaction between eastern and western ideas, or are they indicative of universal principles?

Etienne Decroux (1963), the maestro of mime and pupil of Copeau, searches for the body-mask, a "counterfeit body" (disguised, forged, modified), whose gestures are based on extra daily life principles. The body has to become the mask. Decroux used masks, but his discourse on their utilisation is more pedagogical, aiming to search for the presence of the performer with or without the mask. Dario Fo (1997 [1987]: 41-42), writer, actor and director, says that the body is the frame of the mask, enabling it to transform its fixity. The rhythm and dimensions of the mask wearer's gestures modify the value and the meaning of the mask. Fo also speaks about the difficulty of wearing a mask and speaking with a mask on, and the necessity of practising to reach "an almost natural rotundity".

Clearly there are parallels between the discourse of western theatre practitioners involved with masks and Balinese topeng performers. For example the breath and life of the character is an important aspect of the common pre-expressive principles investigated by Barba. Breath is also at the centre of Balinese performers' discourse on characterisation. While Balinese generally insist more strongly than western performers that this unity between the performer and the mask depends on the breath, the coincidence of the language in talking about the life of the characters is extraordinary. In the case of Barba's theorisation, it is clear that the language has been influenced by the Balinese performers he has
been working with during the ISTA sessions. The interaction is reciprocal: Balinese acquire western terminology and concepts as much as western theatre theoreticians acquire Balinese terminology and concepts. But we can't exclude the possibility that the common discourses of western and non-western mask wearers are grounded in similar perceptions across cultures. Given these complexities I have focussed on the representations of their work to me by Balinese performers.

My intention is to find a solution to what some consider problematic in Theatre Anthropology's approach. Barba's Theatre Anthropology has been accused of universalizing principles that might work for dance and mime but not always for theatre. Furthermore this type of research is criticized for using performers from diverse cultures without considering that culture itself influences the performer's physicality and the audience's perception.

This criticism may originate from the fact that during the School of Theatre Anthropology sessions all the experiments with the performers from different cultural backgrounds are conducted as if in a laboratory. On the model of an aseptic laboratory the subjects, the performers, contribute to the experiments only the elements requested in order to conduct the experiments. Their own culture (and their personal voice) is explicitly not part of the project even if it is not totally excluded. As Barba emphasises, his aim is "investigating that process by means of which mental energy (invisible) becomes somatic energy (visible)" (Barba 1988). He does not research a particular Asian theatre, rather he collaborates with "certain professionals from different traditions searching certain common principles of theatrical behaviour" (ibid: 13-14). Barba does not negate the importance of social, cultural or historical context, but he does believe that it is possible to understand aspects of theatrical practice outside of cultural contexts. He also defends the autonomy of Theatre Anthropology:

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9 The investigation of this aspect goes beyond the aim of this thesis. Here I limit my observations to interaction between the western and non-western theatre at theoretical/discourse level.
[...] the term "anthropology" is not used in sense of cultural anthropology but in the common sense of "the study of man in a theatrical situation." [...] Theatre Anthropology has nothing to do either with the application of paradigms from cultural anthropology to theatre, nor with the study of performative phenomena from those cultures which are normally the object of study by cultural anthropologist and ethnologists. The problem of reconciling Theatre Anthropology "with the existing discipline of academic anthropology" is certainly not a scientific problem. It is, if you like, a problem for universities organizing their courses (Barba 1988: 14).

This defense of the status of Theatre Anthropology is expressed in a letter published in 1988 in the theatre journal *The Drama Review* (Barba 1988) in response to criticisms by Philip Zarrilli. Zarilli's views, which were not completely negative regarding Barba's investigation, plus the comments of others, may have stimulated the research of Barba and his collaborators. For in the following years, Barba's collaborators attempted to find solutions to these criticisms, by distinguishing basic principles from their utilization, or process from result (De Marinis 1999: 115). De Marinis, who also contributed to formulating these theorizations, believes that research on pre-expressivity or expressivity cannot avoid taking into consideration the performance as whole, and in a special way the audience. Does the audience's reception exclusively depend on general principles? Or does it also depend on culture, history and individual experience? De Marinis affirms that he believes that audience perception, and then its appreciation, are always culturally, as well as cognitively, determined. As a consequence one cannot avoid attending to the different manifestations as well as the common principle (De Marinis 1999: 116).

All the criticisms of Barba's approach cannot negate the importance of his work in establishing an autonomous domain of performance studies, beyond the dramatic focus on text, and the sociological and anthropological analysis of relations between performance and society. Barba's investigation provides an instrument to look at the performative aspects of an event (or better, of the performer) in its autonomy as a performance. Nevertheless, especially in investigating a performative practice within a specific tradition, it would be extremely limited to consider it only in light of Barba's trans-cultural (or universal) principles as if in a laboratory. As Zarrilli (2001) also suggests, it is necessary to consider performers' voices, their discourses about their practice. Through their voices we
discover that basic performative principles and processes depend on aesthetic values that are also religious and philosophical, thus uncovering the bond between the concept of characterisation and local knowledge. The fact that the central role of breath in the process of becoming the mask is intimately linked to the broader context of daily life and cosmology is an example of an insight revealed through the performers' voices to be explored below. Nevertheless, performers' voices cannot be considered as absolute truth; they need to be contextualised. Previous studies of topeng practice provide some of this context.

**Previous works on Balinese topeng**

In spite of the relatively large number of works on Balinese topeng both in Indonesian and foreign languages, very few have paid attention to the relationship between the mask and its wearer. Most of the works in Indonesian language (from 1976) describe the types of topeng, give an historical perspective of the form, try to establish rules within the performance, and emphasise the importance of topeng for Balinese culture and religion. These works are often based on I Made Bandem & I Nyoman Rembang (1976), *Perkembangan Topeng Bali sebagai Seni Pertunjukan* (Development of Balinese Topeng as Performing Art) which describes the types of topeng, their functions, and the elements of the performance such as stories, costume and music.¹⁰

Studies of Balinese topeng in English mostly focus on the masked dance-drama as manifestation of Balinese culture, or analyse the structure of the form as a performance in a religious context. Particularly relevant examples of this genre are the first specific and in depth studies on topeng in English by Elisabeth Young (1980) and Deborah Dunn (1983). Young, through an explicitly anthropological approach, aims to analyse changes in the society through drama. Her invaluable work of transcription and translation of live performances relates the improvised text of performances to the current changes in society. Her analysis examines all types of topeng (*pajegan, panca, prembon*) highlighting the flexibility of the form.⁰

¹⁰ More information on works in Indonesian on Balinese topeng is given in Chapter II of this thesis.
between its sacred and entertainment function. Dunn, applying theatre theory, focuses on topeng pajegan only. In the context of the sacred aspects of the dance-drama. Dunn explores the performative origin of the sacred performance, its structure, mask making, performers' training, and detailed description of the choreographies of the danced roles. Both works are based on extensive field work, video recording of performances and feedback to these recordings.

I Nyoman Catra's Master's thesis, "Topeng: Mask Dance-Drama as a Reflection of Balinese Culture" (1996), as indicated by the title, aims to explore philosophical-religious principles that are at the base of Balinese culture. Catra, as an expert topeng performer, makes a significant contribution to the textual analysis of the performances in the depth of his interpretation of the dialogues. The focus of his PhD thesis (2005) on the role of penasar through Balinese dance-drama provides an even deeper interpretation of the performances' dialogue and gives more voice to his interlocutors/interviewees. This is a work that can be carried out only by someone like Catra, who is an expert performer and insider able to look at his own practice from the outside.

There are several theses and publications in Indonesian that will be discussed in the second chapter. The most recent work is I Ketut Kodi's MA thesis "Topeng Bondres Dalam Perubahan Masyarakat Bali: Suatu Kajian Budaya" (2006) (Topeng Bondres and the Changes in Balinese Society: a Cultural Investigation). Although his stated focus is change in the society, he also allocates considerable space to the matter of characterisation. Kodi not only provides examples of dialogues between various masked characters but also refers to specific features of individual masks. Furthermore, by giving examples of performances and performers from several areas of the island, Kodi presents evidence of important variations in the forms he investigates.
Focusing on the performer's consciousness

John Emigh and Margaret Coldiron's studies are interested specifically in the mask and its wearer. Emigh's (1996) *Masked Performance. The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre*, is a collection of articles published since the late 1970s which investigate the state of the mask wearer in ritual-theatre contexts in Papua New Guinea, India and Bali. Emigh asks the age-old questions about the performers' general consciousness. Is the actor in total control when he seems most emotionally involved, as Denis Diderot asserts, in reference to David Garrick in 1773 in "The Paradox of Acting"? Or, as Garrick insists, is the actor "beyond himself" in such a way that he doesn't purposely direct his own action, but rather is controlled, to his own surprise, by the emotion of the characters during the actions that have been rehearsed? The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1993: 179-206 in Emigh 1996: 26) describes this moment's "flow episodes" as an aware response to the action, with a loss of awareness of the self.

The dynamic between awareness of the action and loss of awareness has been observed by Winnicott in reference to children at play (Winnicott 1989 [1971]: 1-25, 107-110 in Emigh 1996: 1-3). Winnicott introduces the notion of "transitional events" and notes that play is characterised by a framing of the player as "me/not me" (Winnicott 1989 [1971]: 130-131 in Emigh 1996: 22). Schechner takes up this concept and singles out a quality shared by effective performances; "not me/not-not me"; the performer is not the character but he is also not not the character, he is between the denial of being the character and the denial of not being the character (Schenchner 1985: 109-115 in Emigh 1996: 24-25). This places the performer and the performance in a liminal state of playing between identities. Emigh indicates the importance of this concept to mask characterisation while the concept of loss of awareness of the performer is taken up and further developed by Margaret Coldiron.

Drama, explores the relationship between the mask and its wearer, comparing Japanese Noh with Balinese topeng and calonarang. Based on the concept of the quality of the performance “not me/not-not me” Coldiron argues that the mask wearer in these forms of dance-drama is in an altered state of consciousness, in a state of dissociation from him/herself, in a kind of trance. This state of trance of the mask wearer is illustrated by Coldiron through various examples, and linked with the neurophysiology of trance as discussed by Laughlin, McManus, D’Aquili and others. Coldiron employs the word “trance” in her description of the mask wearer’s experience, even though she is aware (as she explicitly admits) that Balinese performers never use this term in describing their experience. Coldiron gives space to performers’ voices, but in her final conclusions she chooses not to take into full consideration the content of their statements. The terminology used by performers, as mentioned by John Emigh in his preface to Codiron’s work, is in fact closer to d’Aquili and Newberg’s (2001) research on the brain activities during Tibetan meditation and Franciscan prayer techniques. The terms in which they describe that meditation experience are very similar to certain descriptions by Balinese performers of the experience of wearing masks: a sense of the oneness with the world.

Another way, I believe related, to define the state of the mask-wearer in Balinese topeng, other than trance or altered state of consciousness, is an expression used by Ruffini, “extreme level of consciousness”. Here is absence in the performer of automatism and the action is “voluntary” (Ruffini 1996: 178). This definition, referring to the body-mind unity of the performer on stage, is reminiscent of Alexander Lowen’s concept of “expansion of consciousness” (Lowen 1975: 305), a high state of awareness of the body-mind in unity with the rest of nature. In a certain way this definition seems very similar to the above mentioned oneness with the world. Nevertheless if we take into account performers’ descriptions of the experience of being one with the mask it can be argued that such experience is not individual and mystical only, rather it is an

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11Calonarang is a dance drama based on a legend about a widow witch whose powerful magic threatened social order in the 11th century kingdom of Kediri. In the dance drama, Rangda, the widow fights the Barong, the protector of the community. Archetypes of opposite forces in tension, Barong and Rangda don’t kill each other, but maintain the balance between the forces.
especially aware consciousness which includes everything and everyone present and non-present.

Unity and balance as philosophical-religious concepts are recurrent topics of a topeng performer not only on the occasion of religious ceremonies, but also during civil events. The unity is the result of the encounter of opposite energies, of opposite principles (they call it *rwa-bhineda*). It is the origin of life in both daily life and in the performative context. Breath, the source of life, is often described as the instrument for achieving this unity. This unity is a religious principle, linked to the tantric\(^{12}\) tradition, but it is a practical one too.

Lowen (1975) is helpful for an understanding of this discourse. He emphasises that balance is not a static phenomenon: it is the result of a shift between polarities; walking, for example, is the result of shifting weight from one side to the other in an effortless manner. It is breath which provides rhythm to the walk and thus creates the flow or harmony.

This balance in movement is achieved by a shift in charge, an alternation of excitation from one pole to the other, from left foot to right and back again, from breathing in to breathing out, from extension to contraction, from the consciousness of the day to the unconsciousness of sleep. This rhythmic activity of the body is the *unity* underlying all the dualities we are conscious of (Lowen 1975: 332).

A combined body-mind consciousness, an expanded consciousness, is able to perceive the unity in duality, while the mechanistic mind can see only dualities and a mystical mind sees only the “underlining unity” (Lowen 1975: 332). Such body-mind awareness has been interpreted by researchers such as Danielou (1980) in terms of brain functions. But rather than focusing on the right or left hemisphere predominance of the brain of the performer, I would focus on the speed of the shift from the left to the right hemisphere and back. This shift creates balance, unity, flow. It has been demonstrated that this shift in performers

\(^{12}\)Tantrism is a tradition based on the experience of the body. The aim of those who practice tantrism is to “unite the individual self (Atma) with the absolute Infinite (Brahman) in the cosmic-conscious state known as Samadhi.” (Mookerjee 1971: 16). They also aim to reintegrate the male-female principles: Siva and Sakti.
is quicker than in non-performers. I could argue that the performer is a performer because he is able (by training and/or predisposition) to make imperceptible to the audience the effort necessary to create balance through the shift between polarities: the quicker the shift, the more invisible it becomes. It is imperceptible, but it creates the energy that attracts the audience. In terms of Theatre Anthropology we can talk of “luxury balance” an alteration of balance that creates tension and attractions: it is the micro shift between opposite qualities of energy (male/female, strong/refined) that creates presence in apparent absence of movement (Barba and Savarese 1991: 34-35).

These principles exist in all Balinese types of dance and dance-drama, but they are more recognisable in the case of topeng where they are amplified. In fact a mask constitutes an additional impediment because it creates a physical challenge. Wearing a mask limits the vision, changes the sense of balance, and makes breathing difficult, creating that extremely artificial condition that Theatre Anthropology calls the “extra daily condition”. To overcome this extreme extra daily condition in combination with the condition of an in-formed body required by Balinese dance technique, requires an even more expanded consciousness than an unmasked performer’s. Here I am using western theories influenced by the observation of non-western theatre traditions in order to describe my understanding of Balinese mask characterisation. I realise that at this point my perception of Balinese masked-performers experience may appear similar to Coldiron’s approach in its generality. In later chapters, however, it provides the basis for further refinement and application of my ideas. Although my approach differs with regard to the detail of the mask performer’s experience, the stimuli provided by Coldiron and by Emigh, who wrote the preface to her book, are undeniable. Yet I would like to go further.

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\(^{13}\) Daniélou (1980: 64-65) reports that in the artist the communication between the two sides of the brain is particularly developed. According to Daniélou this characteristic is present in those who are bisexual and therefore embody the male-female unity, that is why the artist is often bisexual (Daniélou 1980: 64-65).

\(^{14}\) John Emigh also supervised Deborah Dunn’s dissertation.
Both Emigh's and Coldiron's works are important for my investigation because they clearly question the mechanisms of mask characterisation for the mask wearer. Nevertheless they do not focus exclusively on Balinese topeng performers. Although both consider the role of culture important in relation to performance, they do not explore this relationship concretely. However, Emigh, in particular, provides a very useful theoretical framework that facilitates the general understanding of the relationship between topeng performance and daily life. He provides me with a useful path to take in this study where I intend to look at both the relationship of mask to wearer, and the connection between the performers' discourse and practice and the domain of Balinese daily life.

**Balinese topeng: is it a performance?**

Up to now I have been using the word “performance” to address Balinese topeng, but I have not defined the subject of my research. The first question is then: what is Balinese topeng?\(^\text{15}\)

In the wide panorama of Balinese performing arts, topeng is one of the dance-dramas performed during certain rituals, official governmental events, for general entertainment and for tourists. Topeng is mainly a male masked-dance drama. With the word topeng, Balinese nowadays refer to four types of performance: *topeng pajegan*, a solo performance (*pajeg* indicates the fact that a performer carries the task all by himself) probably originating in the seventeenth century (Noosten 1941), *topeng panca*, a type developed from topeng pajegan in the early twentieth century performed by more performers (*panca* means five), *topeng prembon*, which resulted from a combination of topeng panca and *arja* (dance-drama with female characters) and was started in the 1940s; *topeng bondres* or *bebondresan*, started in the 1980s, where comic characters predominate. Topeng pajegan is also called *topeng wali* or *topeng Sidhakarya* because of its function within ritual ceremonies, using the mask of the *Sidhakarya* (literally “the one who completes the task”, i.e. the ritual) to complete the

\(^{15}\)With the word topeng we refer to both mask (topeng) and the type of dance (topeng), while in Balinese mask is tapel.
ceremony. Topeng pajegan is traditionally performed by a single dancer who characterizes several masks and concludes with the sacred mask of the Sidhakarya. Nowadays those terms have acquired a different usage: topeng pajegan indicates that only one dancer performs, while topeng Sidhakarya indicates that more than one performer is involved. In Topeng panca the story prevails and it is often performed as a non-ritual part of the ceremony. The last two types (prembon and bondres) are performed as a non-ritual part of ceremonies, at official governmental events, or for tourists.

In the structure of all types of topeng it is possible to distinguish two parts. During the first part court characters with whole masks, such as the prime minister (topeng keras or patih), the old man (topeng tua), the prince (topeng dalem) express themselves exclusively through the dance. During the second part, half-masked characters, mainly comic characters (bondres), present stories, mostly taken from the chronicles of Balinese history. The story, though, is soon forgotten to give space to jokes and comments related to contemporary daily life.16

I have used the term "masked dance drama" unquestioningly. It is an event in which one or more "performers" wear masks, dance and tell a story with a dramatic plot. Music, singing dialogues and jokes are involved. Topeng, depending on its type, can be performed in the innermost part of a temple, in a house or on a stage built for the occasion of a political election or to promote a specific message. The audience can be a crowd of hundreds of people or only the members of the gamelan orchestra accompanying the performers. The latter situation occurs with topeng pajegan or topeng Sidhakarya which, in its sacred status, is seen to be watched by audiences consisting mainly of ancestors and divinities. However, topeng Sidhakarya can also be followed by a laughing crowd. Usually there are no tickets to watch a topeng, and a patron, who can be an individual holding a ceremony in his household, a representative of a village temple or a politician, pays the performer/s. In light of these aspects, is it possible to define topeng as a form of theatre? In most cases topeng is staged as part of a

16 I describe the structure of the performance in more detail in the chapter V.
ceremony and it takes place at the same time as prayers, offerings and other religious activities. The performer is considered a sort of priest who undergoes initiation processes. Even in the case of topeng not linked to ceremonies, offerings are involved. The stories told connect contemporary Balinese to their ancestors. Does this make topeng a form of ritual?

To understand these performance-rituals I need to employ the aid of other theoretical models that have investigated the interaction between society and theatre. For this purpose I will consider the work of Turner and Schechner, who have made a link between theatre and anthropology, as well as Emigh who proposes a practical application to Balinese topeng of Schechner’s model.

From Turner and Schechner: the Efficacy-Entertainment Braid

Victor Turner, in distinction to other social scientists, not only uses theatre terminology as metaphors for describing social phenomena, but also finds a reciprocal relationship between what he calls “social dramas” (units of social processes) and “aesthetic drama” (drama on stage). The origin of these theories is the fruit of the collaboration between Turner the anthropologist, and Richard Schechner, the theatre director and theoretician.

Schechner (1988:187-206) demonstrates how social drama and aesthetic drama are in a dynamic and reciprocal relation: the theatre performer uses material from social life to produce aesthetic drama, while the social activist and even the militant terrorist uses techniques derived from theatre to change or preserve society. Theatre changes the state of mind of its audience by entertaining them or really changing their opinion. The role of the topeng performer as a communication medium is explicit: he is paid by a patron to inform the audience about the ceremony, about the clan holding it or about the specific event or occasion to which the performer is invited. Nevertheless the performer has a relative autonomy from his patrons in organising the content of the messages.
These are in fact results of his personal knowledge and exposure to the public discourse on the common topics of the performances. The domains of public discourse are the media: newspapers, magazines, academic publications, seminars and television. Is topeng then a form of aesthetic drama? If so we shouldn’t have any problem defining it as theatre. Nevertheless the ritual elements are so important that, especially in topeng pajegan, the definition of theatre still seems to be inadequate.

Schechner (1988: 106-152) proposes a model that suggests that it is not the polarity between theatre and ritual that we have to consider. But the polarity between efficacy and entertainment. According to this model it is possible to identify the braid that connects the function of ritual and efficacy with the function of theatre and entertainment. He observes that theatre is not purely “entertainment” nor ritual purely “efficacious”. He lists eight qualities of “efficacy” and “entertainment”, covering such areas as function, performer-audience relationships, and the like, and says that some qualities of the one can be seen in the other, while the balance changes with the historical period and culture.17

I have observed a remarkable co-presence of qualities of efficacy and entertainment in topeng, even though their degrees change according to type. Furthermore, like Coldiron (2004: 33), I have noticed that the degree of efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFICACY</th>
<th>ENTERTAINMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritual</td>
<td>Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to an absent Other</td>
<td>Only for those here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic time</td>
<td>Emphasis now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer possessed, in trance</td>
<td>Performer knows what s/he’s doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience participates</td>
<td>Audience watches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience believes</td>
<td>Audience appreciates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism encouraged</td>
<td>Criticism flourishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective creativity</td>
<td>Individual creativity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Topeng aims to contribute to the ceremony as well as entertaining the present audience. The audience can be an absent Other, but mostly it is present. There is reference to the past as well to the present. Performers are not in trance, but they are in some cases considered a tool of the ancestor and they are always aware of what they are doing. The audience can interact with the performers, but mostly watches. The audience both believes and appreciates. Criticism of the quality of the performers is common. Creativity is the result both of a long tradition and individual skills.
and entertainment varies according to the perspectives that are taken, including those of audience members, performers or external observers. By separating ritual/efficacy from theatre/entertainment Schechner's model actually demonstrates that the two domains cannot be separated. One is part of the other, and the polarity braid he talks about results in unity. His braid does not provide a definition, but it stimulates the search for varying interpretations of the multiple domains of an event. My aim is to consider the fluid interaction of topeng's multiple domains. In order to do so I will draw on Emigh’s model of the domains of Balinese topeng inspired by Schechner’s concept of the domains of cultural performance.  

From Schechner to Emigh: the relationship between performance and daily life  

Schechner (1988: 68-105) creates a model of "concentric spheres". "Drama" is the core in the centre, the written text, the domain of the author. Around it, developing in concentric circles, are three more domains. The first of them is the "script", "the interior map of a particular production" (Schechner 1988: 85) and the domain of the guru or master. The next is the "theatre", the set of the performers in any kind of performance, the domain of the performers. The final circle is the "performance", that is the whole event including anyone present; it is the domain of the audience. Outside these spheres of activity there is daily life. Thus Schechner separates cultural performance and daily life.  

Emigh (1996[1989]) redefines these domains to make them applicable to topeng: The "drama" is not a text, but the story "embedded" in one of the flexible texts; "script refers to the patterning of words and actions that will be used to convey and give specific form to the story in the context of a hypothetical performance" (Emigh 1996[1989]:175-176). The "theatre" is a concretisation of the "script", the

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18 Although Schechner's "Braid" doesn't really help in finding a definition for topeng I still consider it relevant because its efficacy-entertainment polarity recalls the sacred-profane polarity adopted by Balinese intelligentsia as we will explore in the second chapter of this thesis.
performative actions including music, rituals, and other elements whose link with "drama" varies in intensity. This is the sphere where a "script" becomes concretely alive in the physicality of the actor-dancer, in his muscle, bones and voice. Performance is the space of the occasion of the topeng, be it ritual, entertainment, or both, where there may be as audience, humans, ancestors and gods. Finally Emigh expands his model by including within the domains a sphere of everyday life that has an interactive interplay with the others. Emigh then adds a further circle to the domains of topeng: the Balinese macro-cosmos, the sphere of the "cosmos".

The passage from drama to script as described by Emigh is very useful for an understanding of improvisation, an important part of the topeng performer's creativity. For example, the story from the Babad chronicles (or Malat/Panji cycles) is not a fixed text. Emigh describes his mentor I Nyoman Kakul reading his notes, but the story is part of the memory. Reviewing notes or remembering a story for an expert performer is a way of deciding what to say, what part of the story to use, what masks to wear, what jokes to make during the performance. But nothing is fixed until the moment of the performance. The performer adapts the story to the situation, not the foreseeable aspects of the ceremony, but new information that he receives from the ceremony's hosts while he is welcomed with food and drinks, and, just as importantly, from the audience's response. The script, what the performer decides to do, is absolutely flexible and based on the performer's ability to improvise.

The creation of the script does not stop even during the passage from script to theatre, when the script becomes concrete in the performer's body, voice, costume, masks and in the music. He has to quickly understand the preferences of his audience who usually have little interest in the story itself but rather in his jokes or/and his dancing ability. As Emigh emphasises, the script can have little to do with the drama when the performer decides to address elements of the

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19 Improvisation has to be considered not as the absolute freedom to do and say anything, but rather the ability to combine and adapt to the context elements such as movements, songs, jokes etc. already part of the performer's repertoire.
domain of the performance (the larger event in which topeng is included such as the gamelan group, the priests or the audience if the event is a ceremony). 20

A better understanding of the dynamics between script and theatre can come from the observation of the domain of the daily life within the performance. This manifests itself in all the activities of ordinary people who are not actually involved in the ceremony or in activities related to the performance (e.g., who are praying, gambling, flirting, selling, eating etc). Furthermore the daily life domain comes into the theatre and then to the performance domains through jokes and remarks. These can refer to the performers' private lives, the audience, or the current discourse on religion, culture, tourism and so on. The process of creating the script itself does not have a specific delimitation in space or time. A performer continuously absorbs material from his exposure to all the other domains of topeng, including daily life, for this hypothetical script. Examples of this dynamic will be described in the body of this study and especially in the third chapter.

These models help me to identify an appropriate approach for the investigation of my first question about how to define topeng. Nevertheless this question would not be satisfactorily answered if I limited my instrument to the models that I have described here. The model which I propose has to be seen as flexible, not as applicable in a fixed way to a phenomenon. Instead, my model is an instrument for considering variation: variation in the perception of the audiences; variation in the work of the performers in their creative process aiming to serve different audiences; variation in the performers' interpretations or their own work. Thus the models that I described above have to be considered simply as a path toward the articulation of a complex reality, a sort of implicit subtext of my narrative of my mentors' narratives.

20 The nature of the event also determines the choice of the story or, more accurately, a particular section of a story. Although the relation of story to event is of great importance, I will not explore this in this study. This subject is the main topic of the current research of another scholar, Robin Tatu.
The use of performers' voices

Performers' voices need to be considered as representations of themselves, their identity as Balinese mask performers. The result of my conversations with Balinese mask performers over the years is the starting point of my attempt to unfold the performers' perspective on the relationship of the mask to their process of characterisation. The performers' voice, as the starting point of research, is quite rare, but there are some very insightful studies which start in this way. Ethnomusicology seems to inspire this sort of investigation, resulting in inspiring works like *Voices in Bali: Energy and Perceptions in Vocal Music and Dance Theater* by Edward Herbst (1997) and *Balinese Discourses on Music and Modernization. Village Voices and Urban Views* by Brita Heimarck (2003). While Herbst focuses on the learning process of arja and topeng in villages and local performance theory, Heimarck compares village and college (institution) practice as an example of modernization in *gender wayang* (music for shadow puppet) and *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theatre). Both works consider extremely relevant the dialogic approach between themselves as western scholars and the Balinese performers whose often divergent opinions offer multiple viewpoints. Heimarck bases her approach on Foucault's (1972) discourse theories and Bhaktin's (1984) concept of polyphonic discourse which convey the complexity of music and modernisation more than a linear approach. In a similar way in this study I attempt to demonstrate the presence of a polyphonic discourse in local theory on the life of the mask which, however, has a common element: the unity between body and mask.

In fact, as I already discussed above, the voices of the performers have a key role in my investigation and I often consider the audience's perception from the performers' perspective. I look at the audience through the performer's eyes, what he/she does in considering the audience. This does not exclude the voices of audience members themselves, and those of cultural commentators in oral and written discourse that interacts with performers' work.
Collecting voices

Informal conversations and tape or video recorded interviews have been the main method to collect the voices reported in this thesis. Because I was interested in the discourse of performers and civil servants I asked the same questions to most of my interviewees in order to single out definitions of the same concepts and key words in their verbalisations. When possible I also asked the same questions to the same people at a distance in time to find out whether there was a different reaction to or interpretation of the same concepts. I find this methodology very useful on the occasion of short interviews, about half an hour to forty minutes. In addition I often engaged in long interviews, or better conversations of two to three hours. During the research for this PhD thesis the video-camera has played a fundamental role. Inspired by the ethnographic film Jero Tapakan, a Balinese Healer by Timothy Ash and Linda O'Connor, when possible I showed performers recordings of their own performances and/ or those of others and collected their feedback. I also used the video-camera regularly for interviews. This has been possible because most of those I interviewed are people who I have known for years. I have been learning with them and watching their rehearsals tirelessly. I have been performing with them or watching and video-recording their performances continuously. A little portion of the material collected is provided with this thesis.

Structure

My overall project is to explore the process of mask characterisation in Bali as expressed by various individual performers. The polyphony of voices gives expression in various ways to a sense of identity in a world of continuous change. Topeng, which continuously changes, is an expression of these changes of Bali in the contemporary world.

The focus of the first chapter of this thesis will be my personal learning experience and performers' voices describing the principles that enable them to
make the mask alive. I start with an analysis of the performative aspects of Balinese topeng practice — pre-expressive principles from the performers' point of view — setting up the core of my argument that will evolve throughout the following chapters. Each chapter will analyse a broader context of the relation between basic performative principles and daily life.

Within the many interpretations is the recurrent concept of unity: unity of body and mask, unity of action, thought and sound/speech. Unity within the body-mind of the individual and unity of the individual with the manifestations of nature are recurrent concepts in the conversations with performers. Those are principles necessary to bring the mask to life as well as to live life in balance, and performances in ritual and non-ritual contexts contribute to keeping the balance. But these principles, that appear to be intimately lived by the individual within a local community, are actually shaped, at least at the discourse level, by a wider reality.

Chapter Two is the first step into the broader context of topeng performers' conceptualisations and discussion of performative principles and practice. I explore public discourse on art and culture, demonstrating its dynamic relationship with topeng performance in terms of both content and function. Debates surrounding the function of topeng apply to all performance in Bali. Although it began in the Dutch colonial period, I concentrate here on a key moment of social change, the early 1970s. During this time of tourist boom the Balinese intelligentsia both felt the need to protect themselves from outsiders, while at the same time trying to attract them for economic reasons. This tension resulted in a new conceptualisation of dance. Dance could no longer be regarded simply as a part of ritual with functions grounded in its aesthetic/religious qualities; it was to be defined as having sacred or profane functions, according to the genre and context of dance. The resulting dance categorization based on a dichotomy in the function of dance was new to Hindu Bali people: its aim was to separate, not to unite. Voices discussing this categorization as it applies to topeng are manifold. There are differences of opinion, probably because of the relative artificiality of the categorisation, which was dictated by the rapid changes
in Bali, caused by increasing contact with non-Balinese. A clear separation between sacred and profane dances, between ritual and entertainment, is not a reliable mirror of practice. Rather, it can be considered an imposition upon practice. In this chapter, I demonstrate that the disagreements caused by this debate, and the categorisation of dance that was created from it, have been alive in recent years, but changes in attitude towards it have occurred in the past two to three years.

Chapter Three discusses the most recent development of the discourse on culture outlined above. Ajeg Bali (preserve, protect and erect Bali) has become the most pervasive political slogan of the moment, aimed at preserving Bali's supposed unity and harmony. This new discourse differs from the one developed in the 1970s. It does not only aim to protect dance and art as manifestations of culture, but to protect Balinese culture as a whole — referred to as Bali Hindu, Bali infused by Hindu religious principles — from any outside influence. This is an old theme that has acquired more vigour and xenophobic connotations in the post Bomb-Bali context. The discourse of unity seems to turn Balinese culture inwards. According to the indigenous principle of the unity of opposites, insiders should coexist with outsiders; the one cannot exist without the other. But the new discourse separates: the Bali Hindu insiders must stand erect against the outsiders, the non-Bali Hindu, even those living within the boundaries of the island. I explore how this new conservative discourse is being integrated into contemporary dance-drama practice. Although its political and economic implications pervade the media and people's daily life, it does not have the same impact on everyone. The way performances and performers react to it also vary — from resistance to indifference, or to total involvement in the campaign.

Chapter Four explores another relatively new domain, concurrent with the influence of Ajeg Bali, but beyond 'traditional' performance. Some topeng performers are trying to re-define basic Balinese philosophical cultural concepts in their own ways. The resulting performances are defined as modern or contemporary. In the Balinese context, contemporary performance cannot be delineated by western theory, though the terminology used in indigenous
seminars comes from western theory. I present the voices of a number of performers searching for a definition, however complex, of the contemporary in Bali. My discussion then focuses on the use of the mask in contemporary works. While the masks are invested with great power in the search for a re-definition of spiritual, they seem unable to evoke enthusiastic audience response. Are audiences missing the pre-expressive principles they are used to? Do they prefer performances with no reference to the discourse on culture and Balinese-ness?

Chapter Five explores a masked genre with greater entertainment power. Bondres, an offshoot of topeng, is variously considered to be contemporary, popular or traditional. I discuss the audience's current hunger for laughter and how bondres performers adapt their work to different audiences. Laughter can be viewed as both a healing instrument for a traumatised island, and as a distraction from the continuous indoctrination by the media about Balinese culture. Some bondres performative elements have been integrated into topeng in temple ceremonies. Consequently, masks are changed less and often substituted altogether with make-up. Are masked characters becoming stock characters? Are the pre-expressive principles that enliven the mask at risk of being forgotten by the new generation of performers?

Chapter Six introduces the emerging role of women in topeng. Women have historically been denied participative access to mask dance-drama, performing topeng, and using masks, but this has changed in recent years. Their position is still precarious however. On the one hand, there is official encouragement: the phenomenon originates in government-sponsored festivals, and female foreigners performing topeng have also had an influence. On the other, there are cultural obstacles, reiterated by both male and female performers. Is a woman able to achieve unity with the mask? Is she able to contribute to the harmony of nature? Or does she represent a threat to this deeply desired harmony? This last chapter explores the questions situated in the gendered, culturally-specific body, and analyses the many possible responses to these, as offered by the performers themselves.
A note on the video accompanying the thesis

In order to give a proper space to the performers' voices and to the voices of cultural commentators relevant to this study, I have provided a DVD containing edited interviews and performances for four chapters I have already described the role of the video camera as a central tool for data collection, not only in recording performances but also more recently in video recording interviews and feedback from previously video-recorded performances.

This video material is provided to supplement the written word and to overcome some of its inherent limitations. The interviewee's physical attitude, tone of voice, way of interacting with the interviewers are as important as, perhaps even more relevant than what actually has been said. However the videoed interviews do not include all the interviews referred to in the written portion and often contains material not analysed in the written text. Even though the written text and the visual material are integrated, they can also be treated separately: it is possible to read the text without watching the videos and similarly, it is possible to enjoy the videos without reading the text. While I personally recorded most of the material used in this work, I have used excerpts from interviews conducted by Pamela Allen in the video linked to the third chapter. Those interviews were conducted in order to collect material for a joint presentation and paper on ajeg Bali. The video related to the fourth chapter has been made available through the help of Gus Dana and Ni Made Lingriati, who conducted the video interviews for me. Because I could not visit Bali at the time, the only solution was to make a list of questions and of people to be interviewed and ask Gus Dana and Ni Made Lingriati to conduct the interviews. As dancers themselves, involved in the contemporary performance scene and well-acquainted with all the performers I wanted to interview, they found the task feasible. The rest of the material has been recorded and edited by myself, excluding, where indicated, very brief scenes from TV programs and commercial VCDs.

The chapters that include video material are chapter III, IV&V (joint video), and VI.
VIDEO I: Ajeg is...

The video related to chapter III starts with some definitions of *ajeg Bali*, then focuses on the performances included in what I can define as the official launch of the *ajeg Bali* project by *Bali Post* on 16 August 2003 (performance by the *bondres* group Gita Ulungan) and performances on the occasion of Independence Day on 17 August 2003 (performances by I Ketut Kodi and IG Ngurah Sweca and the by the group Balian Sakti).

VIDEO II: Balinese mask-performance between adaptation of a traditional form and a tradition-inspired contemporary form.

The video related to chapters IV and V explores the perspectives of those involved in contemporary works and their struggle for an audience because of the competition with light entertainment. Starting from the search for a definition of *kontemporer* the video moves to a discussion of bondres because one aspect that everyone laments is that people prefer light entertainment more than contemporary works. It includes images of I Ketut Kodi performing topeng pajegan, the group Dwi Mekar performing topeng Sidhakarya in Singaraja and the group Salju performing topeng Sidhakarya in Denpasar. Are also included some images of lawak performance from commercial video produced by Bali Record (as indicated).

VIDEO III: Women in Balinese performing arts crossing male boundaries

The video related to chapter VI presents the voices of female performers involved in topeng masked performances. Listening to their reflections between excerpts of rehearsals and performances, it is possible to feel the difficulties of women in entering a domain usually dominated by men. The images start with a ceremony in Keramas where I Made Jimat performs topeng Sidhakarya. The voices of women interviewed are alternated with the images of practice and performances by Topeng Sakti first then the all-women topeng group coordinated by Ni Wayan Latri.
While the interviews are translated in the subtitled text, the excerpts of performances are translated in the body of the thesis when relevant to the topic discussed.

From a technical point of view there are some aspects that I would like to underline. The videos of performers' feedback most of the time include both the performer and the screen projecting the performance, the object of the conversation. The quality of the frame of all interviews is often less than perfect due to my choice to sit far from the video-camera and closer to the interviewee to create a more relaxed natural atmosphere. For the same reason (but also for economic reasons) I haven't used an extra microphone or digital audio recorder to record the voice. All the sounds actually present in the venue of the interviews are clearly audible in my video-recording, and in Bali the soundscape is very rich.

I am not deceived into thinking that giving the reader the opportunity to listen physically to the voices discussed in the thesis provides a more "truthful" understanding of their point of view. As the editor of those voices, it is still my narrative of their narratives.
CHAPTER I

The body takes form in Balinese masked dance drama topeng

In this chapter I retrace in detail for readers that personal journey foreshadowed in the introduction. In this journey my mentors in Bali are the main guides, building up an overall concept that will become clearer over the course of the chapter in the same way as it is becoming clearer to me throughout the years.

As I have extensively described in the introduction, the driving force of my investigation is fascination. Fascination with a phenomenon able to transform painted wood into something believable, alive: a character.

How does it happen? How is it possible that a wooden someone else's face can come to life? I have been searching for an answer, asking especially performers and mask makers. A difficult task. Because, over time, I realised that their talking about their work is another performance, and like any good performer, they adapt themselves to their audience: in this case a western woman. Do they say what they do because they think it is what I want to hear? When I talk with those performers from whom I learn, with whom I perform, the conversation acquires a different nuance, it becomes part of the learning process, which is dialogical. The subject of my interchanges with them, with performers that I had already known and new ones, has been how to characterise the mask. In theorizing, they are

\[1\] As mentioned in the introduction, Herbst (1997) has influenced me in this choice: he gives an account of the transmission of knowledge about a practice as it is acquired by a pupil relating with his/her mentors during the learning process. Herbst does not uncover and display a pre-digested knowledge; rather he communicates his own journey giving credit to its protagonists; his mentors.
analytical and usually willing to explain aspects of their own practice. Nevertheless, their opinions are not homogeneous: there is not a single theory, the theory of mask characterisation in Bali. Rather there are voices, expressing their views. Even when they draw on the same concept, they use different terminology. There are some common aspects in their discourses though. Something that they all seem to agree with is: everyone can learn how to dance, ngigel, but this is not enough; it is superficial, it’s just dance movements. What is important instead is mesolah, “to characterise”.

I noticed that during some interviews the conversation was incomplete if accompanying gestures were not present. Whether unconsciously or intentionally, gestures seemed to be unavoidable in clarifying certain concepts. Gestures indicating parts of the body or demonstrating movements overcame the limitations of verbalisation in conveying specific meaning regarding process within the body of the performer. Such gestures involved touching by my interlocutors of their own navel or chest, gestures used while explaining how to bring the mask to life. These gestures were also accompanied by different words in the Indonesian language but often mixed with Balinese.

A central concept that often arose during the conversation is the necessity of “a movement from inside”, or “an inner force”; that can give life to the mask. Mask makers, performers and also the pedanda (high priest) Buddha from Batuan (Ida Pedanda Budha Batuan-Ida Bagus Alit2), speak about it extensively. Some of them connect the concept more to spiritual aspects of the dance, others to physical aspects. I am not sure if the stress on one or the other aspect depended more on their own personal views or on their will to satisfy my curiosity, or on what they thought was my main interest, or to protect me from a knowledge that they think I should not have access to.

2I was introduced to Ida Pedanda Budha Batuan by I Ketut Kantor in January 2000. His views reported in this chapter refer to the conversation we had on that occasion.
The spiritual dimension of characterisation of the mask has inspired oral and written discourses on the subject, involving both Balinese and Western practitioners and scholars. Inner charisma (taksu), purification ceremonies for the performer, (mewintan), and awakening ceremonies for the mask (pasupati) are often described as fundamental elements, contributing to the capacity of the performer to become the character. It is not rare to hear performers affirm that they never learned to dance; instead in order to perform, they consider it necessary to make proper offerings.

By contrast there are performers (such as I Made Sija) who affirm that there is no relationship between entering into the mask and initiation ceremonies, because the aim of the mask is the character. Similarly some performers and the pedanda also suggest that if the performer is already yakin, convinced, aware, grounded, she/he does not need ceremonies or offerings. Some performers admit that the right ceremonies do not guarantee the success of a performance. Conviction, concentration and visualisation of the mask-character through meditation are indispensable ingredients for a good performance according to the pedanda Buddha. The mask wearer has to be able to visualise the features of those characters who are well-known figures in the stories represented during topeng performances and convince the audience that what they see is the character and not a specific performer anymore, according to I Gusti Ngurah Windia: he is “one with the mask”.

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3 As defined by Catra (1996: 51) taksu has several interpretations including “divine inspiration” especially referring to the fact that taksu is also one of the upper elements, having a shrine in the family temples to which the performers usually make offerings before performing. As Kantor emphasises taksu refers not only to the performer but also anyone good at his/her job is said to have taksu: everything turns in his/her favour and people defer to him/her.

4 The stories represented during topeng are drawn from written literature: Babad, Usana Bali, Usana Jawa. They portray the Majapahit period and the origins of the Balinese dynasties.

5 I Gusti Ngurah Windia, puppeteer and topeng performer from Carangsari.
Learning mask-dance: personal experience

Before exploring the performers' voices I shall introduce some pre-expressive aspects of mask characterisation through my personal learning of topeng dance. While my learning process started with I Made Sija by watching him performing and teaching and later on with Ida Bagus Alit (under whom I learned mask making) my regular training started with teachers from STSI\(^6\) (especially with I Nyoman Cerita, I Ketut Suteja, and I Gusti Ngurah Sweka) and with I Ketut Kantor from Batuan.

Learning with I Ketut Kantor\(^7\) how to use the mask implied first of all memorizing all the choreography of the introductory masks of topeng, by imitating his movements and repeating them without asking for many explanations. Over and over for nearly two years, I repeated the choreographies taught by Kantor. His attitude was almost bored.

Further learning: the source of movement

But that was just the starting point, as I realized on successive trips to Bali. Corrections increased and the focus on the pelvis area as source of movement became greater. The main correction was the reduction of the movements both for strong (keras) and refined (halus) characters: or better stated: I had to learn how to keep the energy inside; I had to learn when to keep it inside and when to let it out. Sija used to correct me telling that I had to hold "it". That "it" that I have called "energy" cannot really be explained; while I was practicing Kantor started to correct me by touching little points on my back and around my navel,

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\(^6\) ASTI, Akademi Seni Tari Indonesia, the Academy of Indonesian Dance was founded in 1967 and recognised state wide in 1969. In 1988 it was upgraded to STSI Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia-College of Indonesian Arts, and in 2003 to ISI Institut Seni Indonesia-Institute of Indonesian Arts (upgrading depended on the availability of post-graduate programs. See Hough 2000).

\(^7\) I Ketut Kantor, topeng and gambuh performer from Batuan.
manipulating my arms, adjusting my spine, making me feel his breathing with my hands. Yes, the "it" was something in between breath and energy.

Since the first time I went to Bali, dancers have tried to explain the use of this "it" in dancing; but trying to find "it" in my body made me perceive it differently. I can isolate that "movement from inside", to quote I Wayan Tangguh, described by I Dewa Ketut Wicaksana and I Gusti Ngurah Windia as a point from which "the breath emerges". It is also described as the source of the sound, both for the dancer-actor and the priest who worships. The pedanda Buddha from Batuan calls the point pusat nabhi, the centre of the body, the point, which lies (if we consider the body as microcosm) at an equal distance between the earth and the air. This is the point of origin of the opposing tensions between down and up, which hold the body in balance. Pusat nabhi is not the area of movement, but the point from which the energy flows and is distributed. Windia speaks in terms of the necessity of having light feet, with raised toes, and a muscular stomach, through which the breath passes, to give life to the mask.

While Dewa Wicaksana was speaking about the necessary combination of inner force and skill to bring the mask to life, he was continuously touching his navel area: he explained that the life of the body comes from there, where "there" is prana. He started to demonstrate that compressing the stomach by using the breath resulted in a total change of the position of the body, so that every part of it rises up; thus the stomach is the origin of the dance movements. He went on to show how holding the breath is important: he started to sing a piece of topeng keras music (prime minister mask) while moving, to demonstrate the importance of the control of the breath and ngunda bayu (distribution of the breath) and its connection with the music. He also says that the control of the breath in the training of the dancer comes after the learning of the technique. In fact only after I

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8 I Wayan Tangguh mask maker from Singapadu. Informal conversations over the years especially 1999-2000.
11 Informal conversation in January 2000 with I Dewa Ketut Wicaksana.
mastered the choreographies I did start to perceive the necessity of giving life to the movement through the use of the breath. A body is not “in-formed” only by its shape but also, if not mainly, by the breath. It is the breath that provides energy, rhythm to the body.

Sija always insisted on this aspect and he often explained the use of the breath demonstrating it by singing and moving. Sija considers the breath as the source of the movements: "we look for the movement through controlling the breath"; he used to say. He was also much more specific: he stated that every time he is in agem (any basic standing position) the breath must be held (dikunci: locked); while it must be partially released during the tangkis (sequence of transition from one agem to another). He used to stress that if the dancer breathes regularly during the movement, there is no dance; in that case the dance becomes unsteady. I can add other examples of movements in which the dancer must hold the breath: for example during the movement when looking at an object or person, soon after which there is a slow partial release.

One of the most difficult moments in the use of the mask is when the use of the breath must make the mask alive while it is still. This is a stillness which is not death, but pure life: energy flowing within the body and breathed into the mask. There, in that silence, I can see what Sija describes as "the movements that push the face of the mask" that make us believe (yakin) that we see a character and make us forget that there is a performer behind it. The self of the performer is unified with the self of the character. The performer, through the breath (bayu) which goes through the entire body, is able to give spirit (menjiwai) to the mask, to make it alive. The performer appears at one with the mask. His body-mind is "in-formed", and in Decroux’s words, the “body is the mask”. It is a physical

12 Kita mencari gerakan melalui menatur nafas. I Made Sija often repeated this concept during our conversations in order to make me understanding that the breath is the source of the movement.
13 Gerakan yang mendorong wajah tapel. I Made Sija often used this expression to make me understand the connection between body movements, especially the pelvic area and the mask, through the use of the breath.
transformation which makes the body's gestures and attitudes artificial, different from the ones of daily life, the body is "in-formed" to embody the mask.

**Theatre terminology between East and West: an example**

In the above paragraph I have shifted from informants' discourse to my own wording drawing on concepts from western theatre. Am I imposing these western concepts on my masters' words or am I conveying their conceptualisation as it happened? I am actually drawing on a commonality of terms that already exists because this same terminology originated in the conscious encounter between western and non-western performance cultures. As indicated in the introduction, Theatre Anthropology is a clear example of this encounter. Theatre Anthropology indicates "energy" as one of the fundamental elements of the pre-expressive level; it is the element allowing the performer's "presence". Barba (1993: 33) refers to Asian traditions to better explain the word "energy"; the Balinese term bayu is one of those words. Bayu is translated in *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* as "wind, breath, spiritus"; "a wind which animates the performer's actions" (Barba and Savarese 1991: 77 and 83). Barba explains its workings through the Balinese dance body position which is the result of soft (manis) and strong (keras) tensions. This is an important attempt to describe a basic aspect of the presence of the performers. Although his explanation of the work of the breath from a Balinese point of view may seem somewhat "shallow", Balinese performers also employ different explanations of the same phenomenon according to their own level of knowledge and that of their listeners. In addition, like Barba who adopts Balinese terminology to explain cross cultural performative principles, Balinese in contact with western performers and scholars may adopt a western mode of verbalizing their own experience of characterization.

Rather than reflect on these issues, I would prefer simply to listen to performers' voices. Below will follow a description of how some performers describe their process of mask characterisation. I am going to show, through their voices, the
range of different verbalisations, looking at differences from more practical to more spiritual approaches. I want to go beyond shared universals into the varying details of contextualised local practice, exploring what performers themselves understood about what they were doing.

**Interviewing performers: verbalisation of characterisation process**

The assertion that some performers have an exclusively practical and others a spiritual approach in talking about mask characterisation is misleading. Nevertheless I noticed that some speak only in cosmological terms, others speak in practical terms; some others speak mixing the domains spontaneously while others do so if asked; some mix these domains without precise definitions while others make a clear distinction between perspectives relating to the visible world (*sekala*) and definitions regarding the invisible world (*niskala*). Furthermore the same person if interviewed on one day can be keen to explain practical aspects of masks characterisation, while on another occasion he provides details of spiritual aspects.

Most of the excerpts of interviews discussed below are responses to my question of what is important in a topeng performance or what it takes to make a mask alive. The importance of “oneness” between the performer and the mask seems to be a recurrent answer. Some performers are able to provide all the technical details about how to reach this oneness: they explain how to change the shape of the body and the quality of the voice according to the shape of the mask. A few gifted performers can trace the creative process enabling them to make the mask alive. But this practical aspect of mask characterisation, which is common to other traditions, is often reinforced by a different dimension grounded in Balinese thought. This distinctive dimension extends oneness to other elements of the performance or to the ceremony or to daily life. But this concept is not always explicit and its expression varies. This results in an apparent confusion of terms
and concepts, where at first it seems that everyone is saying different things, or alternatively is expressing the same concept with different terminology.

It is difficult to decide where to start. Should I start from the oldest performer I interviewed who lives isolated from the city’s lifestyle and has never travelled abroad to perform? Or should I start from the internationally recognised academic and performer? The latter provides such a coherent explanation of mask characterisation process that it is tempting to rely on his words alone for enlightenment. But I would prefer instead to introduce the “chaos” of voices with the hope of capturing the same sort of experience that I have personally undergone. Listening to voices in the context of my own practice has created some sort of clarity, and rare moments of “enlightenment” out of a puzzling confusion of terms and opinions.

**Introducing the terms**

“Oneness” is the translation of the Indonesian term *menyatu* and of the Balinese terms *menunggal* and *mesikian*. We talk of oneness between the mask and its wearer but also of oneness of the performer with the music, the story, the audience, the ceremony and the self. Some performers do not use the term *mesikian*, rather they use concrete Indonesian/Balinese terms like *cocok* “suitable”- or the Balinese term *pangus*, Indonesian *pas*- exact, fitting. Others, instead of literally translating into Balinese the word *menyatu*, explain the concept through what I regard as a cultural translation, employing the term *nganten*, literally “getting married”. This union is symbolic, but also signalled concretely by ceremonies that initiate the performer, that celebrate the union with his masks, or his task as mask performer. The purification or awakening ceremony for the mask, *pasupati*, and the purification or initiation ceremony for the performer, *mewintan*, are often mentioned by my interviewees.
Looking further, for those who speak about "wedding", "being one" is the result of the union of two opposite elements: female and male, pradana and purusha according to the tantric tradition. This union happens within the self through the strength of thought, referred to either as keneh, kayun or idep. Some performers reveal the mechanism of the unity between bayu (action), sabda (words) and idep (thought/feeling) which constitutes the basis for gaining taksu. The discourse goes beyond the concept of being one with the mask. It goes into daily life and religious life domains, where some underline the importance of offerings, while others disagree with the high status of offering and mantra and trust the personal strength of the human being.

The following discussions of excerpts from my interviews gradually reveal the sense of the terms I have introduced above, moving towards a deeper understanding of the use of breath in mask characterisation. I start from the practical point of view, then connect this to a broader concept of oneness.

**Marrying the mask: I Ketut Kodi – practical steps**

The performer I have been talking with most intensively and frequently in recent years is I Ketut Kodi. His point of view is relevant not only because he is a very active practitioner and scholar, living between institution and village, but also because he is a mask maker. I often discuss with him matters regarding mask characterisation, and sometimes when the discussion looks particularly interesting I ask him if I can audio/video record it. Then we forget the camera and keep chatting, resulting in hours of material about all sorts of things. During a planned interview, Kodi seemed to provide a summary of our previous conversations. It happened on the 2 November 2004, sitting where he usually carves his masks in company of his father and brother. On this occasion Kodi was quite clear in explaining the most important element of a topeng performance: to give life to the mask in a way that "the body wants to be the body
of the mask”¹⁵ all parts of the body, voice included. It is impossible to force the mask, he continues: rather the mask forces the body, the mask dictates the single parts of the body to move and to sound in a certain manner in order to be one with the mask, to be part of the mask”¹⁶

Then Kodi says:

... because of the fact that in Balinese performance there must be a marriage (harus kawin) between the topeng performer and the mask itself, in fact there is a wedding ceremony (upacara perkawinan) between the mask and the dancer. The meaning of this fact is that there is a union between the mask and the performer.¹⁷

At this point Kodi goes on to explain further that the marriage unifying the mask and its wearer is like the marriage between husband and wife, the ceremony itself is similar to a wedding ceremony as well the sort of relationship in which the two become one and he repeats the concept: the aim is to make the body, his body, to become its body, the mask’s body.

After this brief explanation of the ceremonial “wedding”, with the mask allowing him to be one with the mask, he continues explaining this process from a practical point of view. If he cannot find the proper gestures and voice he imitates daily life. He tries to find a person whose face is similar to the mask’s face and he observes how he moves, how he talks. In a similar way if he meets a person with interesting features he studies his/her face, movements and voice to make a new mask, a new bondres (comic character).

¹⁵...kita menghidupkan topeng ini supaya badan ini mau menjadi badannya topeng. Interview with I Ketut Kodi, 02-11-2004.
¹⁶...bukan topeng yang kita olah tapi din kita, kita olah untuk mengikuti kemauan topeng ini, dalam sebuah pertunjukan topeng ini yang penting, kita jangan memperkosa topeng tapi senimananya yang mesti diperkosa oleh topeng, tolong saya kasih tangan begini, tolong saya kasih omongan begini, tolong saya kasih badan begini, gerak seperti ini, kita mengikutikehendak topeng ini. Interview with I Ketut Kodi, 02-11-2004.
¹⁷...makanya dalam pertunjukan Bali itu antara penari topeng dan topeng sendiri itu harus kawin makanya ada upacara perkawinan antara topeng dan penarinya yang artinya supaya antara topeng dan penari itu menyatu dia... Interview with I Ketut Kodi, 02-11-2004.
...sometimes he (the performer) creates that gesture by himself or he gets it from imitation of everyday life. I look at this mask and I feel that in this village there is someone, whose face is similar to the face of this mask, then I take his movements and voice and I transfer those into the mask's movements. That happens by taking movements that already exist... 18

The imitation of daily life movements, he explains further, does not occur automatically: the daily life movements and features of a real person have to be amplified or reduced three times in order to be used during a performance. The performance context requires alteration of daily life gestures and not their accurate imitation.

While Kodi explains all these aspects of the life of the mask he moves, touches his own body, wears the masks giving demonstrations. He then starts to use a mirror to play with his new faces. He explains that the mirror is one of the instruments to study the character of a mask. The face's anatomy is very important. A line on the chin can determine the neck position, long or short, backwards or forwards and as a consequence the chest position, the back and the way in which the character walks. While he looks at the mirror he also concentrates on modifying the position of his own mouth and lips to follow the shape of the mask's lips.

...if you wear a mask, sometimes it is very difficult to be ready for it, to create a correspondence/connection between the mouth of the person with the mouth of the mask, you have to practice to reach it. 19

The half mask provides the upper lips and he has to adjust his lower lips to the mask while hiding behind the mask his own upper lips. In this way his mouth is

18... kadang-kadang dia ciptakan sendiri gerakan itu atau dia mendapatkan, meniru dari kehidupan sehari-hari, saya lihat topeng ini di desa ini rasanya ada orang mendekati wajah topeng ini, geraknya seperti ini saya lihat, suaranya seperti ini, dia ambil itu, gerakan itu dia transfer ke dalam gerakan topeng, itu terjadi dengan mengambil yang sudah ada ... Interview with I Ketut Kodi, 02-11-2004.

19....kalau pakai topeng, kadang-kadang mempersiapkan ini sulit sekali, untuk menggabungkan antara mulut manusia dan mulut topeng itu harus belajar. Interview with I Ketut Kodi, 02-11-2004.
forced into an unusual position which determines a specific emission of sound. This sound is the one suitable for the character. Kodi enthusiastically explains all the possibilities that the body and the voice have to become the mask. He also adds that a skull would help him in finding the facial form suitable for the mask. The performer has not only to adapt the shape of his face to the shape of the mask, but also the rest of the body has to be “in-formed”: every single part of the body has to acquire a non-daily life shape suitable to the life of the mask. This form is not connected to emotions, but to the shape of the mask inspired sometimes by a particular feature of persons seen on the street. Kodi explained also how a small detail of the face can influence not only the neck, the shoulders all the rest of the body, but also the voice; it is the result of practically wearing the mask and trying all the different shapes and voices. The voice in particular depends on the shape of the mask’s lips and nose. In the effort to adapt his own lips to the mask the voice emission will change.

Kodi’s capacity for explaining details of the process of mask characterisation is extraordinary. I believe my fascination in following his explanations and practical examples encouraged him to go deeper in details. Practical details are often explained with a more philosophical justification, just to reinforce his own words, for he quickly goes back to follow a more practical track about how to become married, or one with the mask. In fact the concept of “being married” with the masks has returned many times during conversations with Kodi. During an interview conducted on 25-08-03, we discussed extensively the concept of being one with the mask. When he speaks specifically about the concept of being married with the mask, he uses the Balinese term nganten.

Menyatu in Bali is a daily life concept named nganten, which means kawin, marriage. That’s why in Balinese dance people say nganten, that’s why there is the mesakapan between the topeng performer and his masks in order to become one. If he performs the mask of the old man (topeng tua), he will be old, the body has to look old... the becoming one, is nganten, in Indonesian menyatu. Mewintan is self cleaning-purification.

Coldiron (2004: 197-201) has already noted the importance of “being married” with the mask in Balinese mask characterization. In order to amplify the meaning of this concept, here I provide a wider range of points of view and specific Indonesian and Balinese terms used by the performers.
In the case of nganten becoming one is taken from daily life, nganten means the male becomes one with the female.\(^\text{21}\)

The concept of the ceremonial marriage between performer and mask referred to here by Kodi is the subject of extensive discussion by two other topeng performers; I Gusti Ngurah Lanang Sideman and Ida Bagus Alit.

I Gusti Ngurah Lanang Sideman and Ida Bagus Alit: ceremonial aspects of marriage

I Gusti Ngurah Lanang Sideman from the village of Sideman in the district of Karangsem is a performer whose age is very unclear. He once described himself as 90 years old, but he could be about 70. He is now a recognised “living cultural treasure”. Sideman is a village where most of people do not have a land line phone in their houses: visiting him is always uncertain and it can involve staying at his house overnight after following him performing, having long conversations, walks in that beautiful area and “forced” dance and singing practice for me.

When I asked Gusti Lanang what was important to make the mask alive, at first he replied that the process of \textit{pasupati} is necessary for the mask and \textit{mewintan} for the performer: the unity of these two purified elements creates perfection. I also asked him to explain in simple terms \textit{pasupati} and \textit{mewintan}: the \textit{pasupati} ceremony is a purification ceremony for the mask in order to clean the wood from contact with the feet (the mask is carved by holding the wood with feet) while the

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\(^{21}\)Menyatu di Bali yang konsep ini diambil dari konsep hidupnya namanya "Nganten", kawin, makanya menyatu dalam tari Bali itu nganten dia di bilang. Makanya ada upacara mesakapan antara penari topeng dengan tapelnya supaya bisa menyatu antara penari dengan topengnya menyatu. Kalau dia menarikan topeng tua, mukanya tua, bodanya supaya kelihatan tua, makanya perlu ada upacara "mesakapan", upacara mesakapan itu untuk upacara "nganten", upacaranya namanya mesakapan, menyatunya adalah nganten. Dalam istilah Indonesiannya itu menyatu. Mewinten itu adalah membersihkan diri. Kalau nganten itu menyatu dia kan ngambil dari kehidupan, nganten berarti yang laki menyatu dengan perempuan... Interview with I Ketut Kodi, 25-08-03.
mewintan ceremony aims to clean the body and the actions.\textsuperscript{22} Gusti Lanang added that the result of this is oneness and perfection; and what the audience see is this perfection.\textsuperscript{23}

It seems then that the unity, or the marriage between the performer and mask is possible if both of them undergo a purification ceremony. Nevertheless we need further aid. Possibly the concept of marriage and its relation to purification ceremonies can be better clarified through the words of Ida Bagus Alit.

From the time I first I met Ida Bagus Alit in 1993, he kept repeating to me that the main thing for a topeng performer is being able to be one with the mask, with the music and with story. As a mask maker IB Alit has always had a precise opinion about oneness with the mask; in order to be one with the mask the performer has to make his own masks:

\ldots that's why the topeng wearer has to make his own masks, that's what I mean with being one (menyatu) with the mask. Because in this way while making the mask from the beginning it is characterised, it is studied, it is moved with the feeling not with the dance. Oh\ldots if the mouth is like that the movement is like this. If we have a bondres with the mouth like this maybe its sound will be like this; if the cheeks are a bit fat maybe the speech will be slow [\ldots] If you can make a mask you can reach oneness from the beginning. It comes from us who make it\ldots furthermore there is an added value if there are offerings when the mask is made. It creates a contact with Ida Sang Hyang Siswa Karma and we ask for blessing from Sang Hyang Pasupati in order to be able to use it for dancing.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22}...kalau mewintan minta sama pendeta supaya membersikan badan kita, pelaksana kita. \ldots Interview with I Gusti Ngurah Lanang Sideman, 12-11-2004.
\textsuperscript{24}...Makanya penopeng itu harus bisa membikin topeng itu yang dimaksudkan dengan menyatu dengan topeng karena kita dari awal membikin sudah dijiwai sudah dipelajari sudah digeraki dengan perasaan bukan gerak dengan tari Oh\ldots kalau gini mulutnya mungkin geraknya begini. Kalau kita bondres oh kalau gini mulutnya\ldots mungkin suaranya begini; kalau pipinya agak gemuk sedikit mungkin suaranya akan lamban. \ldots kalau bisa membuat topeng bisa menyatu dari awal. Dari kita membikin\ldots apa lagi ada sesajennya pada waktu bikin ada kontak dengan Ida Sang Hyang Siswa Karma minta Ado graho Sang Hyang Pasupati, kita kontak minta dengan dia supaya bisa dipakai menari. Interview with Ida Bagus Alit, 06-03-2003.
It is noticeable that the practical aspect of being one with the mask, a body informed through the deep understanding of the mask's character, also seems to require a further, spiritual connection with the deity Sang Hyang Pasupati. IB Alit also adds that the Balinese term for menyatu is mesekiang, and continues with a concrete example of being one in which the result of being one is contentment.

If there has already been the wedding ceremony with the mask it can't be loaned to other people. Can you imagine to lend your husband or wife to other people? It is not permitted, it is not allowed that someone comes in between the happiness of two together who are already husband and wife..., when they are only engaged you can lend the person. That's why pak Alit owns lots of topeng I'm not married with yet. The ones pak Alit is married with are special and they cannot be loaned. That is oneness in marriage. If there is oneness you have results. What results? If the performer is one with the music there is contentedness, if you have result, like a child, it is a success isn't? Looking for descendants. What a performer looks for is contentment, gaining contentment, that's the result.

Oneness is the result of moving, from medue, being two, to kesekian, being one. Comparing the mask to an "un-lendable" wife whom one guards jealously is a very strong and clear image to understand the feeling of a good number of performers. But not all have this attitude. I Made Sija stands out as one performer whose lack of concern for physical possession of masks reflects a different perspective.

I Made Sija: masks are just tools, thought is the thing

I Made Sija has always tried to teach me that masks, like knowledge, have to be available to anyone who looks for them: he does not really own his masks. His

basket of masks has been always available to anyone who needs a mask for a performance, which often results in not having them returned. This would not be a great problem for Sija, he simply would make another mask.

The position of the place where the masks are stored says a lot about the relation that the performer has with his masks. Anyone entering Sija’s compound can see immediately under the main pavilion the katung, the basket with the masks as well the box with the wayang kulit, the shadow puppets and the gender wayang, the instruments for wayang kulit performance. Most of the other performers I know keep the masks indoors, locked in a special place within the house; IB Alit, for example, keeps the masks in a special corner of his mask showroom, while Kodi keeps them on the top of a carport in the central room of the house.

I Ketut Kantor has designated a special place to the masks, all the headdresses and keris within the family temple. The masks are not kept in a basket but in a wooden box which is always carried by his assistant on the top of his head. All performers care for the way in which masks are carried and displayed, but Kantor has a care for details that I rarely observed in other performers. Sija lets anyone handle his masks and if I have to wear one of them during a performance he does not necessarily use mantra, holy water and incense either for his own or my masks. He rather shows with amplified gestures that he takes sweat from his face with his fingers to moisten the mask that he is about to wear. Then he looks at it, and he moves it. These slow and intense gestures seem to be exclusively for me, to teach me how to connect with the mask, because when I do not pay attention or during the rush of a topeng pajegan performance he does not do any those gestures, he just quickly puts on the mask and performs. By contrast, Kantor recites all the prescribed mantra with the proper offerings before opening the basket, when he takes out the masks, throughout the performance, and at the end when he closes the box of masks.

There is a striking difference in the way in which Sija and Kantor speak about masks. While Sija says that he does not want to awake things (the masks) that
need to be continuously nurtured (with offerings), Kantor insists on the necessity of rituals for the masks. Sija often told me that the main thing is to be convinced and make people convinced; this regards both the process of characterisation of the mask and the role of topeng as part of ceremony. Another performer, I Gusti Ngurah Sweka, in an interview, described Made Sija’s attitude towards offerings in this way:

_Pak Sija, even on the occasion of performances, seldom uses mantra: “I don’t use mantra” he says. Because in principle in general in Bali the most important thing is “manah”, the thought, that’s the most important even if you don’t use mantra but the thought is straight, that’s more important than reciting mantra. There is a saying in literature “Kwer tekang japa mantra yan kewawo tekat nirah nirajas tan ada gunane masih”; whatever the ability of someone in reciting (knowing) the mantra if his thought is dominated by bad intentions it does not have any meaning._

Thought is the main thing; it can overcome the absence of proper mantra as well as determine the efficacy of the mantra themselves. _Manah_ is the Balinese word for thought but also desire, will. There are other words with a similar connotation that performers use; these are _kayun, keneh, idep_. Kantor also speaks about the importance of thought in the process of mask characterisation. He uses the term _kayun_. In spite of having a very different approach, both Sija and Kantor underline the role of thought. Thought, desire, being convinced - such concepts occur in the discourse of several performers. Exploring the context of the terms related to thought as explained by Ketut Kantor may add further insights to the concept of oneness.

26..._Pak Sija pun dalam pentas jarang menggunakan mantra-mantra, “tiang naan ten ngangon mantra” begitu yang dia bilang karena pada intinya memang secara umum di Bali yang paling utama itu adalah “manah”, pemikiran itu yang paling penting walaupun anda tidak memantra tapi kalau pemikiran tulus itu yang lebih utama dari memantra. Ada istilahnya sastra mengatakan “Kwer tekang japa mantra yan kewawo tekat nirah nirajas tan ada gunane masih” Bagaimanapun orang pintarnya memantra tapi pikirannya dikuasai oleh rajas dan tamas itu tidak ada artinya juga. Interview with I Gusti Ngurah Sweka, 27-08-2003. Rajas literarily means activity and tama inertia, two of the qualities of Kali the third is Sattva, essence. (See Moorkerjee 1971: 16-17). Here I translate the concept considering the negative connotation coming out of the imbalance of those qualities._
I Ketut Kantor and I Gusti Ngurah Windia: thought and oneness

Over the years I have noticed that Kantor, during discussions with students researching masks and in TV interviews, explains the process of mask characterisation by highlighting the difference between secara sekala, the visible point of view, and secara niskala, the invisible point of view. He teaches his students what s/he has to do according to the sekala domain to make the mask alive: before wearing a mask s/he has to look at the mask and determine its character. Then with our thought, he says, we have to enter the mask and imagine the sort of movements we do in order to make the mask follow the same movements. From the niskala point of view, the mask wearer has to ask that the wood, kayu, comes to life. Then Kantor makes a connection between the word kayu, wood, and kayun, which he translates with keneh, in order to be one.\(^{27}\) The will makes oneness happen. He further specifies that oneness is reached by worshipping “the god” Sang Hyang Pasupati.

Gusti Lanang Sideman also used the same concept connecting the word kayu, wood, with kayun, thought. They used the same wording, underlining that the word kayu comes from kayun. Etymological elucidations are often imprecise, but it is interesting to observe that two performers connect concepts in the same way. Nevertheless this is not enough to understand the logic of the etymological connection. Ngurah Windia also speaks about thought to better explain oneness.

I Gusti Ngurah Windia is part of a group of older and more respected performers in Bali along with Sija, Kantor and Kodi. He is very active in Bali as well as overseas. I seldom announce my visits, but he always welcomes me to long conversations in the same way as he welcomes all those who look for him for a consultation, or to learn. He is very used to being interviewed, especially by North American researchers, who often involve him in Balinese performances projects in the USA. His interviews often appear in the local and national newspapers, and

\(^{27}\)Bali TV program, Imagi Bali. Kantor’s words: Untuk menhidupkan topeng yang terbuat dari kayu, kayu itu asalnya dari kayun yang berarti (kene-) keinginan. Sekarang kayu itu menjadi benda mati, bagaimana caranya untuk menghidupkan, kemudian menyatukan kayu pada manusia (penari topeng).
he is often quoted by non-Indonesian scholars. When I talk with him he mostly
avoids Balinese terms and he never seems uncertain in expressing his thought or
to have difficulties in using words to express process regarding mask
characterisation. When I asked what was the most important thing for a topeng
performer he replied that I had to look at his behaviour (sikap), whether his
behaviour is in accordance (cocok) with the mask character, whether it is true
that the mask is moving and talking:

'It has to be both, when the oneness is reached we also see one: (he puts his hands
together, then he takes away one hand and he adds), if it is open (not one- he refers to
his open hands) we look and see him (the performer and not the character)...

... that's not one, we look at their shapes... is it suitable? We compare the movements;
are they suitable? The same thing happens with the talking. Who talks, is it true that it is
the mask talking? If it is already true that he is the mask talking it is already suitable
(cocok). ... oneness is the suitability of the right figure and talk. In order to make the
audience able to be with us.\(^2^8\)

Windia underlines the oneness with the audience as well the oneness with the
mask. When I asked how to reach this oneness he replied that it is difficult and
there is not a recipe; secara nyat in tangible terms, (Kantor would had said
"secara sekala", from a visible point of view), Windia explains that practice is the
key, but it doesn't really ensure oneness, menyatu. A special awareness, which is
tidak nyata, intangible (or niskala invisible point of view), is needed to reach
oneness. Atma, the breath, the soul, could help and the performer has to look for
it, he said without explaining further. When Windia spoke about this aspect of
oneness, he described himself as a man in search of answers, but after
discussing several topics including the cycle of life and death he provided a more
specific answer: oneness (menyatu) is the result of turning/rotating (memutar). I
asked then what has to be rotated to reach oneness with the mask. He replied:

\(^{28}\) Harus keduanya itu, karena sudah menyatu kitapun automatik melihat satu, (he puts his hands
together, then he separates one hand and he adds), kalau terbuka lain kita pandang kita melihat
dia (the performer and not the character)...

... tidak nyatu, kita pandang tunjun mereka, figur mereka... cocok? kita perbandingkan gerak,
cocok dipakai gerak yang itu? Sama dengan bicara. Siapa yang berbicara itu apa betul tapel itu
yang berbicara? Kalau sudah betul tapel yang bicara sudah cocok dia itu.... nyatu kecocokan
berfigur yang baik, bebicara. Supaya penonton bisa dengan kita. Interview with I Gusti Ngurah
Windia: The thought
C: How can the thought be turned?
Windia: You have to think like digging ... we have to think towards oneness: how the movement can become one ...

Then I asked:

C: What moves the movement?
Windia: The desire
C: What regulates the movements?
Windia: My desire; it is always the thought

Desire and thought is the answer. Windia here uses the Indonesian word keinginan, which is the translation of the Balinese term kayun. He also uses the Indonesian term pikiran that may be translated in Balinese with kayun as well as with idep. Beside the semantic aspect of this discourse it is interesting to notice that Windia adds a new element to the concept of oneness which is putar, to turn, to rotate. Although this is an interesting discovery it does not make things much clearer. How does it happen? Thought as means of oneness is a very intriguing concept, but why then does Kantor insist so much on the mantra and offerings? Isn't the thought enough? Some explanations suggest that mantra cause thought to circulate, but it also seems that thought moves the mantra. Nevertheless thought is not by itself; it is one of the elements. Is the thought then the moving element creating unity or is it one of the elements that in conjunction with others create unity?

29 Windia: pikiran
C: pikiran itu bagaimana diputar?
Windia: harus berpikir menggali...kita harus memikirkan untuk menyatu: bagaimana gerak supaya bisa nyatu ...
Then I asked:
C: apa yang menggerakkan gerakan?
Windia: keinginan nan.
C: apa yang menatur gerak?
Windia: keinginan saya...selalu pikiran
Ida Wayan Jelantik Oka: the life of the movement – taksu

On this point I would like to cite views of Ida Wayan Jelantik Oka, which direct our attention to the concept of taksu. Jelantik Oka (mid 50) is from Karangasem regency; he lives in a small village not far from Bebandem. The streets of the village are still without asphalt and his white house seems to emerge from the forest. Telephone is not an option there and the only sound that mixes with his strong and slow voice is the persistent sound of crickets. I have seen Jelantik Oka performing a few times throughout the years, but I managed to visit him only once. That time, on the 13th November 2004 during an audio interview, he explained that unity (penyatuan) between a certain character, a strong one (jiwa keras), for example with a strong body and strong music, results in oneness (menyatu) which is taksu. He also added an example to clarify this concept:

Dance movement is the human body, while taksu is the spirit.\(^{30}\)

In other words, according to Jelantik Oka, taksu is the life of the movement and it reveals itself when we can see unity between the character of the mask, the body of the performer and the music. A proof of this state for him is that when he performs characters like the topeng dalem, the king, he feels as if he is the king and the audience sees the king and forgets that he is the one performing. Here there is a difference from Windia’s description of characterisation. Windia always underlines his high state of alertness. He does not become the character, his focus is on creating in the audience the sensation that it is the character performing, not he. Beside this important aspect, I would like to add other details of my conversation with Jelantik Oka in regard to taksu. About half an hour of conversation after the previous statement, while talking about the function of topeng within the religious ceremony, Jelantik Oka talked about the relation between mantra and taksu:

Mantra are the fire, taksu is the oil. Fire without oil is actually dead. Now we need fire, if we have oil it’s clear the flame will be good and successful. That’s taksu.\(^{31}\)

If taksu is a practical manifestation of oneness or oneness itself, mantra are means of oneness, but mantra, the fire, without the fuel taksu, doesn’t have a long life.

Going deeper – other voices speaking of taksu

I Nyoman Durpa, a very well known performer who lives in Singaraja, may add to our understanding of the role of offerings in relation to taksu. Durpa considers taksu present within the person and offerings are necessary to recognise and pay respect to this presence.

What I really believe is that the definition of taksu is not found in the literature, rather taksu is a conviction that we gain through experience, which cannot be given to other people, that we gain by ourself. I believe that taksu is inside us. If Cita asks someone else for taksu, he may not understand. But if before departing (home) I don’t pay respect to taksu, I feel already wrong, not right, I have to ask permission first with incense and my thought, with that I will receive the approval (blessing).\(^{32}\)

A total different approach comes from Suanda, a topeng performer, but also one of the most well known lawak (make-up comedy) performers (and musician). About taksu he says:


Taksu does not need offerings, Charlie Chaplin has never made an offering but he had taksu didn't he? But Charlie Chaplin jokes in the past were simple, but exact (pas), just right ... it's hard to find that exact rightness.\textsuperscript{33}

Clearly according to Suanda the presence of taksu cannot be ensured by either offerings or mantra. Furthermore he universalises the concept of taksu while most of the Balinese describe taksu as an exclusively Balinese feature. Nevertheless like other Balinese performers he emphasises that the presence of taksu is found in simple gestures which result in being pangus which means exact, just enough, suitable, matching. Movements, voice can be aesthetically pleasant/good, but this is not enough, they have to match with the character, with the mask. He also gave an example of a Balinese performer who employs very monotonous movements, but he is pangus, while more sophisticated performers look good, but they don't have taksu because they are not pangus, their gestures are not one with the character.

Taksu then is sign of a good characterisation but it is not interpreted by everyone in the same way. While the concept of unity linked to taksu is recurrent, a strong and explicit religious connotation of taksu is not always present. However, the nature of the performers' responses may also depend on their relation with me. On the few occasions that I interviewed performers without having met them previously, they had the tendency to explain aspects of characterisation in more mysterious ways. In fact, as in the case of Ida Bagus Wayan Basma\textsuperscript{34} from Karangasem regency, metaphysical concepts linked to taksu were seen to produce an almost magical means of transformation. First he described taksu as a strength contributing to the success of the ceremony.

\textsuperscript{33}Taksu tidak perlu banten; Charlie Chaplin tidak pernah bikin banten tapi dia taksu kan? Tapi lawakan Charlie Chaplin masa dulu sederhana tapi pangus...sulit cari pangus. ... Interview with I Ketut Suanda/Chedil, 07-05-2005.

\textsuperscript{34}Ida Bagus Basma was introduced to me by Robin Tatu.
Taksu comes down to give us strength. If there is not taksu there is no light (shine), taksu ensures the success of the yadnya-ceremony.35

Furthermore he explained, similarly to other interviewees, that a performer in order to receive taksu has to be bersih, clean which implies that sabda, bayu, and idep have to be one (harus jadi satu) and only those who have undergone the mewintan ceremony, which means self cleaning-purification (membersikan diri), can achieve this state. When his students perform with him they have to have taksu; before performing he asks them whether taksu has already entered, otherwise he waits until it comes. About his personal experience of being entered by taksu he explained that when taksu enters he feels different, he can do movements that he never practiced and when that happens he becomes the character. This may seem to imply that he refers to a sort of trance, but when he previously spoke about trance, he said that the presence of a trance in a topeng, especially by the performer, is a sign of failure of topeng pajegan. Still the image of taksu as a presence enabling the performer to do extraordinary things never learned before is very strong in his definition of taksu.

During this interview I asked for practical examples of the presence of taksu and in general on the process of characterisation. I almost offended him since all his explanations had an exclusively spiritual focus: he did not want to speak in practical terms. It is true that performers in Karangasem are well known for their strict opinions regarding topeng. For example they believe that only high caste people36 should perform, excluding commoners or jaba, who normally perform in the other regencies. Furthermore in Karangasem they are very proud of being the custodians of the sacred and historical Balinese texts, lontar, usually owned by Brahamana families. The sense of owning secret knowledge, knowledge that other people (especially people like me) can't grasp, arises during conversations.

36Brahamana and Wesia. In Bali they use the term Warna, which means colour rather than caste.
Gaining “secret knowledge”

The sense of owning a special knowledge is in fact present in most performers. The will to share this knowledge depends on the relation with those who ask for it or on the actual depth of the knowledge itself. Once Kantor explained the process of pasupati to a non-Indonesian dance student. He said that the pendeta (high priest) has to inscribe the sacred letter aksara on the mask to make it alive. Three aksara sounding “Ang”, “Ung”, “Mang” are inscribed on the eyes of the mask. On that occasion he said he didn’t know the meaning of the sacred letters. But in my conversations with Kantor he often mentioned the aksara regarding several aspects of mask characterisation. Starting with sentences like “I tell you a little secret”, knowing that I was going to employ “the secret” for my research, he started to go in depth into certain topics. Similarly the contribution of Ida Bagus Alit goes in depth into more metaphysical explanations illuminating some obscure concepts introduced by Kantor.

These topics, that previously I always considered “secrets”, have in the last five years been openly discussed by my mentors. I wonder if they started to talk about it because they perceived my curiosity and possibly my ability to follow, or because the same topics have been discussed in numerous popular instructional manuals and newspaper articles. Before trying to answer this question I would like to continue this journey through the performers’ words, focusing on I Ketut Kantor and IB Alit.

Kantor talking about unity mentioned that the aim is tunggalan bayuntah (make the breath or energy ONE). 

Without my asking for further explanation, Kantor continued:

37 July 5 2003. Kantor was interviewed by his student and I assisted the conversation.
38 Interview with I Ketut Kantor, 28-02-2003.
Now there is a little secret here; it is called sabda, bayu, idep. Sabda is sound, bayu is energy, idep is thought. Now just take Sabda, the sound of your heart that desires to dance, the strength that wants to come forward in dance, it's the will to dance, it's your thought to dance. If it becomes one I say tunggalan which means make the thought becoming one, which is bayu, sabda, idep, that means 'spirit'.

I think that Kantor's efforts to to make things clear to me are not always sufficient to clarify concepts to those who are not used to listening to him. I can grasp the meaning but if I look at the words that he uses I wonder if other people can actually follow what he says. He kept explaining that this unity can manifest itself through tremor, vibrations, or sudden sweating.

Sometimes there is a voice in your ear (ehhhhhhh), but there is no need to fear, that has to be there, if you can receive it with fear ...awareness, and ask for ...what's its name... invite taksu... ah arrives... after that ask the Father and the Mother who are called Sang Hyang Widhi. Akasa- the Sky and Pertiwi-the Mother Earth. So we have to ask help from the two of them. (then he repeats the concept). First you have to make one the heart, the energy (the strength in your heart), second you invite the taksu, and third Akasa and Ibu Pertiwi.

Still I didn't understand the relation between taksu and bayu, sabda idep. He first said that everyone has got taksu. This is something that Kantor has repeatedly told me.

Everyone has got taksu, he explained. Taksu is something that makes people trust someone, that makes a teacher understood and makes the audience so happy (senang) about a performer that they cry, for example. Then he started to

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40 Kadang-kadang ada di dalam telinga suara..uheee itu bukannya takut itu tak itu harus ada kalau menerima itu ...takut...sadar...mohon..sampaI situ baru...apa namanya menundang taksu...ah sudah ada sudah kasih tahu...sesudah itu baru mohon kepada bapak dan Ibu Yang di sebut Sang Hyang Widhy itu adalah Akasa dan Pertiwi. Itu dua [yang] harus [dij]minta bantuan. Pertama [me]nunggalkan hatinya tenaganya, kedua, menundang taksu, ketiga [meminta bantuan] Akasa dan Ibu Pertiwi. Interview with I Ketut Kantor, 28-02-2003.
explain bayu, sabda idep in other terms: *kayika* (what you do-action, laksana [bayu]), *manacika* (feeling, manah, [idep]), *wacika* (words [sabda]).

According to Kantor the intention and action have to be truthfull to the feeling to receive taksu. He also gave an example: if someone performs only thinking about money, taksu will leave. Kantor went on explaining the practical details of inviting taksu and further signs of its presence. He recited the mantra that he usually employs in the three phases of unity of bayu sabda and idep. He compared the mantra he uses with the ones employed by his father, I Nyoman Kakul, other performers and those found in books. He also specified that a complex mantra can be simplified: the simplest form of mantra is the use of incense, *secara bodoh* (in simple-stupid way), he said. He suggested that I could use it for my performances. He also explained the mantra used before opening the basket: an invitation to Sanghyang Taksu to Akasa and Ibu Pertiwi are included after which the basket is knocked three times and then opened. Knocking the basket three times is executed also at the end of the performance after putting all the masks and headresses back into it. I have seen and video recorded it so many times. Why three times? Without any hesitation Kantor explained:

*Three times to reach unity, to become the AUM of Ongkara.*

Three times in order to reach the unity, three as the three sounds of the Ongkara, the three sacred aksara. He started to explain the role of aksara, the sacred letters, as the tool to reach unity: one secret after another. His passion on this

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41 *Tiga kali untuk tunggalkan kalau jadi AUM ongkara* Interview with I Ketut Kantor, 28-02-2003. He also continued to explain with details the process of becoming one mentioning the full proper mantra.
topic is quite evident from the fact that the rotation of nawasanga, the nine cardinal points correspondent to the swastika, is one of the favourite topics of his paintings. Each cardinal direction of the nawasanga corresponds to a divinity, a letter, a sound, a colour. Kantor also explained that all dance movements are based on the nawasanga, but this aspect was considered a secret, he added. He also said that aspects in daily life are based on the principle of nawasanga; for example the white *udang*, the headdress worn by men in the temple also symbolises the nawasanga. When it is open as a square it is possible to inscribe the swastika; folded in triangle it represents the three aksara of the Ongkara. The udang serves to keep the thought linked to the highest manifestation (God).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Weapon</th>
<th>Temple</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>east</td>
<td>Iswara</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>bajra (thunderbolt)</td>
<td>Pura Lempuyang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>southeast</td>
<td>Mahesora</td>
<td>pink</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>dupa (incense-burner)</td>
<td>Pura Goa Lawah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>south</td>
<td>Brahma</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>danda (club)</td>
<td>Pura Andakasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>southwest</td>
<td>Rudra</td>
<td>orange</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>moksala (mace)</td>
<td>Pura Uluwatu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>west</td>
<td>Mahadewa</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>nagapasa (serpent-noose)</td>
<td>Pura Batu Karu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>northwest</td>
<td>Sangkara</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>angkus (elephant-hook)</td>
<td>Pura Puncak Manggu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>north</td>
<td>Wisnu</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>cakra (discus)</td>
<td>Pura Batur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>northeast</td>
<td>Sambu</td>
<td>blue/grey</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>trisula (trident)</td>
<td>Pura Pasar Agung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>centre</td>
<td>Siwa</td>
<td>multi-coloured</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>padma (lotus)</td>
<td>Pura Besakih</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nawasanga weapons and correspondence to deities, colours, numbers and temples. This illustration is commonly sold as a poster. Downloaded from a website promoting spiritual holiday in Bali. [http://www.narasoma.com/bali/](http://www.narasoma.com/bali/)

Slowly passing from one secret to another the conversation moved focus from performance to daily life, cosmology in general and comparison of books on the topic by both Balinese and foreigners. More direct explanation about the relation between taksu, bayu, sabda, idep and Ongkara came from IB Alit who mentioned
the dasaksara instead of mentioning the nawasanga. The dasaksara system includes ten cardinal points in the swastika, as compared to nine in the nawasanga. On the surface there seem to be no major differences between the two systems, but some Balinese say that I should not mix-up the two. Nevertheless when I asked IB Alit about the relation between bayu, sabda and idep and taksu he replied introducing the dasaksara where Kantor would employ the nawasanga:

If humans don't have bayu, sabda and idep how can they be humans? If they are not humans they are dead, they don't have taksu. If they are dead they don't have bayu, sabda, idep. What is called bayu, sabda, idep move everything; sabda talking, bayu energy, idep thought, that's why before we talk, before we move we have to be there (it happens with) what is called dasaksara when they are entered and become three; bayu, sabda and idep (then they are) unified into Sang Hyang Widhi (with whom) the thought enters the brain after which we talk.\(^\text{42}\)

IB Alit seems to consider bayu sabda idep and taksu vital elements of human beings, that make everything move. Like Kantor, he does not consider these exclusively related to the work of the performer, and like Kantor his words are not totally clear. IB Alit seems saying that bayu, sabda, idep come from the dasaksara. The dasaksara enter, become three, bayu, sabda and idep, then these three become one, unified in Sang Hyang Widhi, the highest manifestation, then the thought enters the brain enabling speech. While saying all this he was touching different parts of the body. Those gesture were an integral part of the discourse, and without them we may lose the sense of it. Forseeing future difficulties I asked IB Alit why he was touching his belly while saying “entering the dasaksara”. He explained that the dasaksara enter with the breath through the mouth to the belly area through yoga technique in absolute concentration. When

\(^{42}\)... Kalau manusia tak punya bayu sabda idep bagaimana kita jadi manusia?... kalau tak [jadi] orang manusia orang mati tidak ada taksu. Kalu orang mati dia tidak punya bayu sabda idep. Yang disebut bayu sabda idep itu yang menggerakan semua: sabda bicara..bayu tenaga... idep berpikir... makanya sebelum kita bicara sebelum kita bergerak harus ke sini... makanya yang disebut dasaksara dimasukan menjadi tiga jadi bayu sabda idep ..tunggal..sang Hyang Widhi pikiran masuk ke otak baru kita bicara. Interview with Ida Bagus Alit, 06-03-2003.
the dasaksara are entered it is possible to talk (or move) and then free them by exhaling.

It is through the breath, then, that the dasaksara enter the body and with the breath they come inside and go out perhaps, according to my perception, in a circle. The process of entering the dasaksara requires full concentration and the proper attitude. The discussion moved on to who actually employed dasaksara in performing. He underlined the necessity for full commitment in performing otherwise the need for dasaksara is not recognised and their entry not achieved. In the same way without full personal effort and dedication to learning for a considerable period of time there is no hope of receiving taksu.

We have to have zeal... maybe in a year if we already have zeal maybe Sang Hyang Taksu will come. If there is no zeal it's better not to dance. If you dance just for dancing there is no way that Sang Hyang Taksu will come. Sang Hyang Taksu is the seriousness, you have to have a serious and sure intent and for sure I'll be able to.43

According to IB Alit then taksu does not come without the personal effort of learning. Training is combined with the use of mantra by means of the breath.

In summary, it seems that there are those who say that taksu is a magical power that makes it possible to do things never done before. Others are keener to describe it as the ideal unity between the performer and character which has spiritual and practical characteristics. There are still terms such as bayu, sabda and idep, Akasa and Pertiwi, Father and Mother, Sang Hyang Widhi and Ongkara (the three aksara) that may need a more systematic interpretation.

43 Semangat lah kita... mudah mudahan sampai satu tahun kalau sudah semangat kalau ada niat mungkin Sang Hyang Taksu akan ada. Kalau tidak anda semangat lebih bagus jangan menari. Kalau kamu sekedar menari Sang Hyang Taksu tidak mungkin datang Sang Hyang Taksu adalah keseriusan harus punya niat yang serious yang pasti... pasti saya akan bisa. Interview with Ida Bagus Alit, 06-03-2003.
Clarifying the secrets: I Made Bandem

Made Bandem, one of the most active and influential Balinese academics and also a well known dancer and musician added some aspects regarding mask characterisation. Who knows how many people all over the word have interviewed him, and have asked the same questions as mine! He has also written books and articles on the same topic. The first sentence answering my question on the most important thing in making the mask alive reminds me of other interviews as well as his articles; he speaks in terms of transformation (mentransformasikan) and give spirit, give life, then characterise (menjiwai).

Bandem: The capacity of transforming, the capacity of characterising the mask—that has to marry with us first, sleep with it, it has to be used continuously, has to undergo a ceremony as part of macro and micro living dimensions, that's important because I did it. As a topeng Pajegan performer, I made a wintan ceremony at the Pura Desa before the population of Singapadu for all my masks including also the non special ones. The time I performed topeng pajegan with my father, he made a wedding ceremony between me and those masks; the aim of that wedding was to make me become one with the mask during the performance. In this way I acquired the capability to characterise (give spirit), to transform those masks within myself between that macro and microcosmological dimensions.

C: How does that process happen?

Bandem: this process happens through that wintan ceremony, through learning literatures, kekawin, dharma, mantra all those kind of things. Only through all that the marriage is possible, if not it is impossible.

C: In the body?

Bandem: Yes we learn about the life of bayu. Bayu is the base Panca Maha Buta, all the five elements of the Panca Maha Buta strength; sky, fire, water, air, earth, they all have strength. We are thought by our grandfathers to gain that strength, if we can bring into the body that strength to wake up and unite it to ourself. Here (in the body) there is the same strength, there is water-blood, bones, there is everything there, here is a microcosm, aren’t we able to unify that strength with the one that is here, at least to say that there is power. If unified it becomes really one, we are dead, that Bayu comes from there.44

44Bandem: Kemampuan mentransformasikan, kemampuan menjiwai topeng. Topeng itu harus kawin dengan kita dulu, tidur dengan dia, dipakai terus-terusan, diupacarai sebagai bagian dari kehidupan makro dan mikro, itu penting, karena saya lakukan itu. Jadi sebagai penari
Bandem's words make clearer that in the process of characterisation aiming at unity, it is necessary to be aware of the correspondence between the body and nature; the body is considered the microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm, the universe. The same elements comprising the Earth are present in the human body; these are the Panca Maha Buta: sky, fire, water, air and earth. This awareness and the capacity to unify those five elements allow us to gain a special strength or energy, bayu.

In spite of his clarity I felt that Bandem did not really explain to me an important element: the connection of the five elements, the Panca Maha Buta, to the kanda empat, the four siblings that accompany and protect every human being from birth to after death. These are placenta, amniotic fluid, blood, and vernix caseosa. The kanda empat acquire different names according to the stage of the life of the person who is the fifth brother/sister. It results in a scheme in which the person is at the centre as Akasa, the sky, and the other four siblings are at the four cardinal points corresponding to the Apah-water (Anggapati), Bayu-energy/air (Banaspati Raja), Teja-fire (Mrajapati), Pertiwi-earth (Banaspati). The identities of the kanda empat is quite complex, but the key concept seems to be the unity between the individual with his/her siblings at microcosmic level as well as at macrocosmic level. During informal conversations I asked mainly Ida Bagus

topeng pajegan, topeng biasapun saya dulu diwinten di Pura Desa, dihadapan public di Singapadu, dibuatkan upacara pewintenan. Pada waktu itu saya pertama kali menari topeng dengan bapak saya, dia buat upacara perkawinan antara saya dengan topeng-topeng itu, jadi perkawinan itu maksudnya supaya saya jadi satu dengan topeng itu pada waktu mementaskannya. Sehingga dengan demikian saya ada kemampuan untuk menjiwainya, menetransformasikan topeng itu ke dalam diri saya antara makro dan mikrokosmos itu.
C: Dan lewat apa proses itu?
Bandem: Lewat pewintenan upacara itu, lalu lewat pendidikan, literatur-literatur, kekawin, Dharmana, mantra-mantranya, pengasreng-pengasrengnya itu. Lewat itu saja perkawinannya, kalau tidak, tidak bisa juga.
C: Di dalam tubuh?

45For details on kanda empat see Eiseman (1989: 100-107), for a deeper understanding see Hooykaas (1973) and for a specific application to performance see Catra (2005: 93-95).
Alit if there is any relation between the concept of kanda empat and taksu. I never received an explicit explanation, but in short the answer was "yes".

This aspect arises through all the other interviews; the other performers have already been heard explaining the concept of taksu as result of the connection between bayu, sabda, idep and akasa and pertiwi, the father and the mother, becoming one in Sang Hyang Widhi, the highest manifestation. Akasa and Pertiwi are two of the five elements of Panca Maha Buta and kanda empat that together with the highest manifestation are three and become one, from five to three to one. Sabda, bayu, idep are three and the sacred aksara of the Ongkara are three as well: the aim is to become one.

The ultimate opposition between the female and male element called also ruwabineda, aims to unity by expressing the coincidence of opposite elements. This is a very basic aspect of the Tantric yoga tradition which is very widespread in Bali, but seldom explicitly discussed by labelling it. The role of letters, sounds, directions, breath, (but also more the role of the tantric yantra (form, function, power) are observable in the relationship between performer and ritual event. More specifically the relationship between performer and music will allow us to grasp the role of metaphysical principles in performative contexts. We will look again at the role of the topeng performer during a topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya for example.

Secret knowledge embodied: performers' practice

The words of Windia, one of the most respected performers, introduce the way this happens in practice. The main thing during a performance is the audience's rasa or feeling. The performer has always to be aware of what he is doing. He must to be in an awakened state, and able to interact with and react to everything around him including the other performers (if present) with whom he weaves improvised dialogues. He has to pay attention to the space and the audience.
Owing to the routine, (the habit or kebiasaan) and concentration, everything he has learned is expressed effortlessly (keluar sendiri, Ind. lit. "comes out by itself" - Windia). While the performer performs automatically to entertain the audience and makes his characters believable, he simultaneously pays attention to the priest who coordinates the ceremony.

Each person involved in a ceremony carries out his/her own task. They appear to be disconnected, but in fact they are all working as part of a whole to achieve the completion of the ceremony. Colours, actions, sounds (and smell) invade the senses. All these sensory inputs have the aim of keeping the balance between the elements of nature, to invite ancestors and divinities to their temporary shrines in the temple, and to keep away the other entities. The topeng performer, just like the other performers involved in the ceremony, must also contribute to the work (karya) and he does so through embodying the sound. This implies being one (menyatu) with the music, or being music. This involves more than mastering the music, in order to be able to operate like the director of an orchestra, by constantly communicating with the main drummer and the rest of the gamelan. Tenzer (1991) also speaks about the inseparability of music and dance; both are materialization of the same beauty which is offered to the gods.

Music and dance together are mutually reflective duet-two realizations of the same abstract beauty, each clothed in the attributes of its form (Tenzer 1991: 12-13).

There is something more though.

How does one grasp the meaning of "being one" (menyatu) with the music? "Experience" is my mentors' answer: kebiasaan: I had to get used to it, just like I had to get used to wearing the mask by performing during ceremonies even before mastering the dance: learning by doing. Trying to learn the music was not enough. "In order to understand the relation with the music, you have to dance with a gamelan as often as possible" my teachers used to tell me. Dancing during the ceremony with a live gamelan with which there is no previous rehearsal gives great opportunities. First, to feel the relationship between the body-mind of the
performer and the sound of the gamelan. This includes the comprehension of the cyclic nature of the music, rather than the melody with which the performer has to interact, and being alert to the gong, which punctuates each cycle. The sound of the gong, which resonates throughout the body, is the returning reference point for the performer, as well as for the instruments of the gamelan.

The performer will give a certain signal to the drummer in specific points of a musical phrase. There are different signals given from the dancer to the drummer for both the danced parts and the spoken parts of a topeng performance: vibrations of the fingers, sudden and subtle movement of the whole body, long and slow breathing or a simple clap of hands can tell drummer to stop or start a piece, to go faster or slower, to have a longer or shorter accent or a sudden crescendo. Usually the movement is also concluded with a final gong which in the danced part often corresponds to breathing out. But all these signals can be given only in certain parts of the musical phrase. In the cycle for the music of topeng keras (8 beats – cycle) we count:

8 (gong) - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 (gong) - 5 (pur) - 6 - 7 (pur) - 8 (gong)

"gong" is the big gong, while "pur" is a smaller gong.

One way to call for an angsel, a musical accent speeding up the rhythm, is to give a signal on the 6th beat. The drummer will start the angsel in the following cycle, for 4 beats or one or more cycles according to the performer's signals and movements. The monotonous melody made of eight (or sixteen according to the area of the players) beats acquires dynamics which are totally embodied by the performer; it is the performer creating it. But the performer is in connection not only with the sound of the gamelan with which he directly interacts. During a ceremony the performer is also part of an enormous mix of sounds coming from several gamelan, from a wayang kulit, from the chanting, the kawi reading, and the priest's mantra, all of which are part of ceremonies in Bali. As some Balinese explain, sound is the bridge between human beings and the upper world.

Aksara, the letters of Balinese language, likewise embody sound, in the union of elements which constitutes ritual ceremony. Letters are used in specific
ceremony like the pasupati ceremony as Kantor said. But they are also are used in the rites of passage. For example they are marked with a ring on the body of a person undergoing a tooth-filing ceremony or on a dead body before cremation.\textsuperscript{46} The Balinese system of musical notation uses Balinese letters.\textsuperscript{47} These letters are sounds, but sound is movement in the context of a performance. Dancers in Western traditions also emphasise that movement is sound in the context of all performances; this awareness is not related to Balinese performances only. Nevertheless in Bali this aspect acquires a deeper dimension.

My first confirmation of this perception came from the pedanda Buddha. He confirmed that movement-gesture is sound: audible and non-audible sound. A pedanda can choose different ways to worship (puja) by uttering mantras which are written aksara (letters): not using sound, or using a low sound, or a loud sound. When a pedanda does not use \textit{sabda} (sound) and uses \textit{idep} (thought) and \textit{bayu} (breath-energy), the body sounds. It is not a matter of sounding or being mute; rather being audible or inaudible. The sound is there, within the body.

Cosmological principles explained

The \textit{lontar Prakempa}\textsuperscript{48} systematises all these vague intuitions. \textit{Prakempa} is a sort of manual regarding the use of gamelan, covering philosophical, aesthetic, and practical aspects of the use of musical instruments in Bali. It has been translated into Indonesian by I Made Bandem and published in 1986. According to this lontar, letters and their sounds created the universe, the earth and human beings. The gamelan reproduces the sounds coming from the Earth and they

\textsuperscript{46}See Zurbuchen (1987) and Hooykaas (1973) for details.
\textsuperscript{47}The Balinese Gamelan notation System uses 'penganggening aksara'...., Bandem (1983: 61) the sounds of those letters are a, i, u, e, o, and each district in Bali adds different consonants before and after the vowel. As a consequence the note will sound dang ding dung dung or dar dir dur der dor and so forth. The use of aksara in the notation system is also testified by Mc Phee (1976-1966) whose research dates back to the 1930s.
\textsuperscript{48}Translated from Old Javanese (Kawi) into Indonesian by I Made Bandem (1986).
resonate into the human body. Panca Geni, the five notes of Slendro set of tuning system, and Panca Tirta, the five notes of Pelog set of tuning system, come together in the head and are mixed. At first they produce pleasure; then when the sounds reach thought, awareness (Bandem 1986:31-75).

Bandem clarifies that Prakempa comprises the balance concept Tri Hita Karana: balance between human beings and God, as well as Nature and other human beings. There are ten dimensions of balance (from one to ten), and each dimension is linked to a letter, a sound, a divinity, a direction, or a colour.

All the elements are within and around the Earth.

Bandem refers to the schema which organises all principles in Balinese philosophy, which we can define as a sort of ‘rose of the winds’ or the swastika, representing the four cardinal directions, the four intermediate points and a central point (Zurbuchen 1987: 51), resulting in nine directions (nawasanga). These can add up to 11, including 8 external plus three in the centre (centre, nadir and zenith). The north is actually the mountain-direction, kaja, and south is the sea-direction. The elements related to all the dimensions/directions can be activated through sounding the corresponding aksara clockwise during the uttering of mantra. By doing so a circular movement is created, condensing into the final ONG, the Ongkara, “the ultimate reality all in one”. This is the unity resulting from the three powers; bayu, sabda, idep: action, speech, thought. These three powers are the three ways of knowing “in general sense they refer to action or results (bayu), the form in which these occur (sabda), and the motives and meanings (idep) that underlie them” (Zurbuchen 1987: 129).

49 West is kauh and east kangin. Kaja and kelod direction will change, according to the geographical position within Bali. e.g. for people living in the north of the island kaja will be south. As consequence it is more proper to translate kauh and kangin with sunset and sunrise orientations.
What seems important in the schema is the circular movement, which establishes the ultimate-balanced connection between the human and nature. As a consequence it is possible to assert that from a philosophical perspective, music works just like the mantras: notes and patterns of notes in circulation resonate in the human body-mind and connect it to the rest of the universe. The Prakempa solves the confusion of all the mix of views, but how reliable is this source which is used predominantly as a text book for ISI students? McGraw (2005) questions if the lontar Prakempa really existed, or is based on the personal writings of a well-respected, intelligent teacher (I Made Geria, d. 1986) whose notes were claimed to derive from an ancient lontar in order to invest them with greater authority or veracity (McGraw 2005: 72).

The explicit display of knowledge in the Prakempa seems to represent local Balinese knowledge based on religion/cosmology exposed at a national level, as part of the curriculum of ISI, a state intitution. Although the history and use of this document is somewhat questionable, it gives a clear idea of concepts which circulate in oral tradition. One might find problematic such an open display of previously restricted knowledge, but its authenticity as an expression of orally-transmitted knowledge is unquestioned. A more specific and explicit explanation concerning the relation between notation system, sounds of aksara, deities and body in circulation aiming to unity comes from Ida Wayan Oka Granoka (1998). This work, whose publication was supported by the Department of Culture in Bali, constitutes another display of knowledge based on religious/cosmological principles. It is a useful instrument with which to explore details unclear from the conversation with performers. An example is the possibility of making a distinction between the dasaksara system related to the aksara and the Nawa Sanga, related more to the deities. Separate systems, but part of one system aiming to unity. But how is the performer's body part of it?
Back to the performer’s body

The topeng performer participates in this dynamic. His body with his organs are exposed to the sound with which he interacts, but he also determines the intensity and rhythm of the music. With his torso or fingers the performer gives signals, like small vibrations, to the drummer to ask for an accent or slower musical moment. His body must effortlessly communicate with the gamelan, following the gong cycles, in a way that he himself becomes one of the instruments. His posture and movements are organised by the nawasanga. The body, microcosm of the universe, has three parts: the underworld (lower part), and heaven (upper) and in between, in the middle, the human world. Each part of the body is related to a direction of the nawasanga very much recognisable in the basic standing position of the dancer. Let us consider the kaja-kelod (mountain-sea) axis of the body which generates a necessary opposite tension. This tension, at the macrocosmic level creates the human world, while within the performer’s body there originates the performative body, alive, able to give life to masks and to be credible in front of the audience. The origin of this life is in the centre of the axis of the stomach, in the ulu ati, the centre of energy, where the energy is continuously produced and distributed.

Let us consider the basic male standing dance position (agem kanan) when the weight is on the right leg: the feet are open 90’ circa. The right foot is flat on the floor, the left pointing on the floor with raised toes. The whole body is oblique to the right. The right arm is raised higher than the left. This position is unbalanced and anyone can easily fall, if the stomach is not compressed. This makes the chest and shoulders rise up and stretch the spine, pushing downwards. Keeping the stomach compressed, the performer inhales, holds and exhales continuously. The muscles all become active, the circular activity of breathing gives form and life from the stomach to every single muscle: legs, arms, fingers, eyes and mask.

Dibia often uses this image during workshops to describe the function of the body in Balinese dance in general.

Literally “upper end of the liver” in Indonesian.

Swasti (1995) has inspired me for this example: she uses a standing female dance position to demonstrate how the ngunda bayu works.
It is an enormous task for the muscles, which are pushed by the breath in order to be balanced, in axis.

This activity is defined as *ngunda bayu*. The interpretation of this aesthetic concept is so various and unclear that Swasthi defines it as "a mystery". An example of a discrepancy noted during my interviews, is that while one master dancer defined *ngunda bayu* as the process of moving the *bayu*-energy from one part of the body to another; Kantor disagreed, considering this an absurd interpretation. If the energy is transferred it implies that a part of the body is left without energy and this never happens. Rather there is a different quality of energy which reflects the principles of the axis *kaja-kelod*. The main aim is balance, through opposition of forces: balance within the body and between the humans and the rest of the Universe.

Letters, sounds and movements are the connection between microcosm and macrocosm, inner and outer worlds, past and present. This aesthetic concept is intrinsically linked to the function of the performance, which is *yadnya*, offering/sacrifice, whose beauty and entertainment values are necessary conditions for the successful conclusion of the ceremonies.

Learning these aesthetic values is a combination of physical apprenticeship, watching others' performances, discussing with more experienced masters and priests, reading chronicles of Balinese and Javanese history and philosophical-religious texts. Discourse about performances is part of the learning process: it belongs to the practice of both performance and daily life, since both are, at least in theory, ordered by the same principles.

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53 *Ngunda: memindahkan sesuatu dengan cara sambung-menyambung oleh banyak orang; many people moving something continuously. Bayu: tenaga, energy Swasthi Wijaja 1995: 1). (Swasti The importance of the *ngunda bayu* concept at the discursive level was underlined in the 'Oration' on the occasion of STSI Dies Natalis in 1995 presented by Swasti Wijaja: 5).  
54 It is also necessary to be aware of the contemporary political and social issues, the sources of jokes and observing people's physical behaviour as inspiration for new characters.
CHAPTER II

De-sacralising and re-sacralising topeng: unfolding the discourse on sacred dance

In the previous chapter I analysed principles embodied in the work of the performer and described in the words of the performers themselves. Furthermore we saw that these principles, based on Balinese Hindu philosophy, are also documented in written texts by both Balinese and Westerners, constituting a written discourse. In this chapter I identify some key moments in Balinese cultural policy that have shaped the direction of this discourse. We will see how, in the broader context of the Indonesian nation, ritual and religious practice became central to the definition of Balinese culture (Boon 1990), and representation of "Balinese identity". A shift occurred from discourse integrated with practice to a discourse aiming to define a culture. Performing arts, as key sites of Balinese cultural expression, were deeply involved in this process.

In particular I will focus on what I, like other scholars such as Picard (1996a), consider a milestone in culture policy making regarding Balinese dance: the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari (Seminar on Sacred and Profane Arts in Dance). Aiming to protect performances linked to ceremonies from the exploitation of the tourism industry, this seminar enstablished two new terms in the discourse on Balinese culture: "sacred" and "profane". The two categories were used to distinguish those dances regarded as truly representing Balinese culture/religion, and as such untouchable, from those that could be developed or "contaminated". This chapter will make evident also the connection between the process of building of a Balinese religion accepted at the national level and the
decisions taken in this seminar. The contradiction between national cultural policy (imposing an "acceptable" religion for Bali) and local, regional practice can be seen as the cause of variations in the definition of sacred and profane that occurred at the seminar and that have been present in discussions on culture since then. I will look at the discourse generated by the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari, with particular reference to topeng, analysing differing conceptualisations and the reasoning on which they are based.

In fact the categorisation resulting from the Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari 1971 has not been blindly accepted. Intellectual discourse about Balinese dance and identity arising from the seminar has been sharply critiqued and resisted by performers, yet at the same time its terminology provides a key point of reference. There is a confusing diversity of voices and opinions, many of them resistant. Yet clearly the discourse influences conceptualization, and impacts concretely on the practice of topeng along with economic and social factors. In the present period of a heightened sense of challenge and threat to Balinese identity, this discourse takes on renewed importance. A major controversy in 2000 over a performance seen to violate sacred boundaries prompted a second seminar in 2002, which produced more flexible, inclusive findings than those of the earlier seminar, but also statements defending Balinese cultural exclusiveness. The contest continues.¹

From colonial encounter to self-definition

The shift from embodied, "natural" practice to constructed self-definition has its origin as Boon (1990), Picard (1996b) and Vickers (1989) point out, in the interaction between Balinese and their Dutch colonisers.

¹In this chapter I draw on research and interviews conducted in the year 2000 for a paper written during the Advanced Master's Programme at the University of Leiden.
Bali has interacted for at least ten centuries with other cultures, mainly Chinese, Indian and South-East Asian. But it is only in the last century and half that these dynamics have been documented. Over this period Bali came in contact with a "new modern world" first through Dutch colonisation, then through integration into the Indonesian nation state and the global tourism circuit. As it defined its own identity vis-à-vis these forces the embodied local practices and understandings described in the first chapter were inscribed into a formal discourse. Several studies have underlined the process of the creation of a new, reinvented Hindu religion and tradition. This started during the Dutch colonial period and had its peak after Bali became part of Indonesia.

In colonial times, during the 1920s, the Balinese intelligentsia drew on Hindu values in an effort to reform Balinese religion and redefine the concept of culture. This effort had its first concrete results when Bali, as part of the Republic of Indonesia, was required to have a universal religion. In 1953 Balinese religion was recognised by the Ministry of Religion as a branch of Hinduism, with the name Agama Hindu Bali. Later in 1965, it was renamed Agama Hindu (Ramstedt 2004). A more concrete formulation and application of traditional Hindu values took place between the 1970s and 1980s when Ida Bagus Mantra held the position of Governor of Bali. Ida Bagus Mantra's goal was to build a Balinese identity which would be a suitable part of the Republic of Indonesia. His politics made a great contribution in shaping the social and economic structure of the island as we can see in contemporary times. A study by the Udayana University research team stresses that the conceptualisation of those principles comes from Mantra himself (Rama et al. 1998:10). His work towards a reinvented Hinduism to save the uniqueness of the island has had an ongoing impact, generating an emphasis on the "sacredness" of Balinese culture, distinguishing it from other areas of Indonesia (Ramstedt 2004).
A culture in danger: discussion of “Balinese identity”

"Defining Balinese identity" is a huge task, implying complex issues covered by several scholars (Picard 1997, 1999; Vickers 1989). Picard's definition of Balinese identity indicates this complexity. According to Picard, Balinese identity "is the outcome of a process of semantic borrowing and conceptual recasting (which the Balinese) have had to make in response to the colonization, the Indonesianization and the touristification of their island" (Picard 1999: 17).

The field of performing arts in general and topeng dance drama in particular has been intimately involved in this process, especially because of the important role of art (especially dance) in the definition of Balinese culture. In the light of Picard's definition of Balinese identity, I will explore the changing perspectives about tari topeng, its meaning, role and definition, as constructed from time to time by audiences and performers.

Two levels of analysis of tari topeng are relevant: discourse level and practice level. The discourse level is dominated by an increasing number of intellectuals (both Balinese and others), civil servants, artists and also audiences in general. The fields of the discourse level are publications (newspapers, magazines, academic papers and theses, booklets), TV and radio programs, informal meetings, gatherings during ceremonies, interviews (by Western and Indonesian scholars of performers). The practice level is dominated by the performers (in collaboration with their sponsors and the priests). The field of the practice level is the body-mind of the performers, their rituals, the transmission of knowledge (to their pupils), performances and ceremonies, where the performers through dialogues reinforce the necessary role of topeng within ceremonies. What is transmitted from master to pupils is part of the practice, but if described (when and if it is possible to describe) it becomes part of the discourse. Discourse and practice are inevitably related even if, sometimes, by contradiction.
Language issues

Discourse and practice use language. What language? Even when choreography is taught, in addition to the use of the body, there is use of oral language. If it is true that Balinese identity (and its "cultural expression") "is the outcome of a process of semantic borrowing and conceptual recasting Balinese have had to make in response to the colonization, the Indonesianization and the touristification of their island" (Picard 1999: 17), we may find in the contemporary use of language a key to understanding topeng in its discourse and practice. Contemporary Balinese use Sanskrit, Kawi, Balinese, Indonesian and also English and Dutch (terminology) according to the context. More specifically Picard suggests that a certain epistemological imperialism impells Balinese intellectuals to use terminology from "stronger" languages, especially English, in discourse about themselves. "As a result what Balinese 'say' is in contrast with what they actually 'know' but cannot be expressed through western categories" (Picard 1996a: 116-117).

Picard points out that the linguistic interactions is not only a matter of westernization, but also one of Indonesianisation and Javanisation. Another aspect to be taken into consideration is the language used by the informant with researchers. As Hobart says "most scholarship on Bali depends on the remarkable ability of Balinese to convey their culture to researchers in Indonesian" (Hobart 1988: 22 unpubl., cf. Picard 1996a: 117). Balinese are used to conveying in Indonesian the official concept of Balineseness to the Balinese people. Balinese intelligentsia spread the legitimate discourse on Bali, as mediators between Jakarta and the Balinese village. Picard points out that the origin of this attitude is rooted in the colonial period when those Balinese were educated in Dutch schools because bilinguals could mediate between natives and colonizers. Such educated Balinese had to define aspects of the culture (wangsa, ngaben, adat) in non-Balinese languages: Malay and Dutch. Later and continuing to the present day they define aspects of culture in Indonesian and English (Picard 1996a: 117-119).
In fact it is clear that at least for the last thirty to forty years there has been a recurrent use of English words translating Indonesian-Balinese words or Indonesian words derived from English, to correctly explain concepts about art that could be unclear in Indonesian. This terminology is widely employed in the discourse on topeng specifically, and as part of overall discourse on dance. The origin of this terminology can be traced in a specific period of the history of Bali as part of the Republic of Indonesia and it is linked to the wider discourse on cultural politics in Indonesia.

The official discourse on cultural politics in Indonesia began with the constitution of 1945 (Yampolsky 1995). It was stated in the Constitution that "a new Indonesian culture shall be created". It was further stressed that the national culture would result from the "peaks" of all regional cultures in their diversity. Elements from foreign cultures should not be rejected, though, if they could also enrich the national Indonesian culture.²

One of the goals of the Orde Baru (New Order) government (established by President Suharto in 1966 following an alleged abortive coup in 1965) was to create a national culture, based on diverse regional traditions. At the same time the government had to overcome the economic crisis that arose during 1960s, and it did so by means of international tourism. Consequently, it was decided to use the colonial image of Bali as a "paradise", which would become the model for the development of tourism throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The dynamics of the use of a discourse employed by a previous power has been observed by Foucault:

There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourse within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy" (Foucault 1980 [1978]: 101-10).

The image of paradise based on Hindu culture and performances had been used by the Dutch to promote Bali as a tourist paradise. It aimed to make the external world forget the blood shed during the conquest of the island in 1906 and 1908. The same image was again employed to wash away the blood of the anticommunist killings of the 1960s, and to promote the archipelago as a united, independent and modern nation with Bali as its showcase.

In this context, the Balinese had to preserve and develop the "peaks" of their culture to contribute to the nation-building process; they also had to use their own culture to remain in the tourist market. At the same time the rise of tourism made the Balinese authorities feel the need to preserve Balinese culture from external influences. On the one hand "cultural tourism" encouraged the traditional performing arts in order to foster Balinese identity and contribute to Indonesian art. This position was expressly formulated at the Seminar Pariwisata Budaya (Cultural Tourism Seminar)³ of 1971. On the other hand, another seminar was held in the same year, the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari [sic] where the authorities attempted to create boundaries to protect the performing arts, in particular dance, from the negative influences of tourism. They wanted to establish which types of dances, including topeng, could be used in the tourist industry by distinguishing seni sakral (sacred art) from seni provan (profane art).

This investigation of the mobilisation of dance in general and topeng in particular to define Balineseness within modern Indonesia and the international world begins with the findings of this seminar. It then considers other voices modifying, querying and resisting the problematic distinction drawn at the seminar, distinguishing the sacred from the profane functions of dance.

³Cultural Tourism is extensively discussed by Picard (1996b). Here a note on the spelling of sacral and provan. I will be using c and v in these two terms when I refer to the title of the seminar because this was the original spelling of the proceedings of the seminar, in all other cases I will use the spelling sakral and profan which is the current Indonesian spelling.
Seni sakral dan profan, sacred and profane art. The official voice

During two days (24-25 March 1971) the participants at the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari discussed how to trace boundaries between sacred and profane and established classifications. There were five main contributors: an expert on religious issues (Ida Pedanda Putra Kamenuh), and on philosophy (I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa), a ritual specialist (I Gusti Agung Putra), a dance historian (I Gusti Nyoman Pandji) and an anthropologist (I Ketut Ginarsa). There were three other contributors by discussion (I Gusti Nyoman Kaler, R. Moerdowo, I Dewa Gede Putra). Their contributions were written up as papers and published as proceedings.¹

The Balinese authorities were worried about the extended use of certain ritual dances for tourist purposes. A central issue of the seminar was the emerging conflict between traditional practice and modernisation represented by the tourist world. On the one hand the use of cultural performances for tourist purposes followed the national cultural policy, but on the other hand it meant a risk of "contamination" by tourism and loss of the Balinese cultural identity. Thus the welcoming speeches of the seminar declared its aims: to oppose the excesses of the contemporary period as a consequence of the contact with the outside world (dunia luar) represented by tourism. Furthermore the seminar was considered an important tool to decide how to protect and perpetuate Balinese culture and art as part of the national culture. The seminar was meant to be an instrument to regulate "Cultural Tourism" (Pariwisata Budaya).

The opening speech by I Nyoman Tusun clearly indicated what steps needed to be taken to achieve those tasks - to separate "seni sacral" (sacred art) from "seni proven", (profane art), and to discern which genre of sacred art could be treated

¹In the published document are included the introductory speech made by the head of the committee, I Nyoman Tusun and speeches by the official representatives of the regional authorities. The document also includes the plan of a two day-workshop a list of officially invited representatives from every district, representatives from universities and schools of art, of Lystibyia, Parisada Hindu Dharma, National Radio and so on, and the decisions taken at the seminar. Neither the public discussion nor the dynamics of the discussion of the commission are reported in the publication.
as profane (boleh di 'provan'kan) and which had to be maintained as sacred (harus tetap di 'sacral'kan). The main assumption is that all forms of dance are forms of "religious art" (seni keagamaan). However a subdivision can be made based on the functions of the art form as either entertainment or ritual. That is, either a) art that can be performed everywhere and can be commercialised (boleh di'busines'kan) or b) art that cannot be commercialised and can be watched only in its religious contexts.

This opening speech confirmed awareness that the dichotomy between sacred and profane dances is artificial: all the dances are religious. However, a distinction between seni sakral and seni provan had to be formulated out of practical necessity. Before making this boundary they had to define those foreign words sometimes written between quotation marks. In fact, as often underlined in publications of all sorts by Balinese and non Balinese, the word seni, "art", should have been considered foreign too; it is not a Balinese concept, rather it belongs to Indonesian discourses to indicate regional and national art. Balinese refer to their dances, music and visual art as part of yadnya, offering (Ramstedt 1992) or sacrifice (Catra 1996). Nevertheless in referring to dance the Balinese intelligentsia have maintained a twofold attitude: on the one hand there has been the effort to separate dance from its ritual context, on the other a continuous mention of the ritual origin of dance.

Picard points out (1996a) that this attitude of the Balinese intelligentsia has its origin in the 1920s and 1930s. Before the 20s there wasn't really any mention of Balinese dances, either in the texts published by those working for the Dutch colony or in the first tourist guides. In the late 20s dances and music were part of the tourist program: the new kebyar style permitted performances separated from the ritual context. The first systematic description of Balinese performances was done by the Cultural Congress on Bali in 1937 whose proceedings were written by Goris and Spies. They classified Balinese dances in "ceremonies which one can describe as sacred dance or theater (including some processions) and

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5Kebyar is a form of music created in the Buleleng regency.
Secular dances (or theater)" (1937: 205 cf. Picard 1996a: 132). Sacred dances included temple dances but also kecak barong and Calonarang. The secular theatre included forms of dance-drama, topeng pajegan included. This subdivision was adopted for de Zoete and Spies’s (1938) book, but the task was not so easy since they kept reminding the reader that all dances are linked to religious celebrations (Picard 1996a: 132). As Picard emphasises, this categorization, made by foreigners in the 30s, was fully adopted by Balinese in the 70s. The widespread scope of this adoption is indicated by the use of English even to the extent of clarifying through English the Balinese definitions of sacred and profane as determined in the seminar.

From this perspective it is possible to understand the need of the Seminar’s speakers (Sugriwa and Panji) to use English and/or Dutch labels such as sacral and profan to discuss foreign concepts or the need to refer to the writings of foreign scholars to make a dance categorisation (as done by Pandji who refers to Claire Holt). Kaler, however, refused to use foreign words to express the dichotomy. Instead he suggested the use of terminology coming from lontar7 to distinguish seni wali (wali, namely dances with religious qualities) from those with secular features, which deal with what belongs to the material world (hal-hal keduniawian). The latter could then be commercialised.

Putra suggests a similar categorisation drawn from mythology: he gives a functional explication of the dances, placing the performances as embodiments of character in the cosmological domain. Thus he indicates that all the dances are sacred, or wali, except the recent modern creations. He distinguishes two kinds of seni wali: dances that have the function of carrying out the ceremony and dances that accompany the ceremony. The other dances are categorised as not

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6 As already mentioned the chanting chorus musically supporting the dancers’ actions in kecak dance-drama is based on Sang Hyang trance dances. All forms of Sang Hyang are considered sacred, but the reason for including kecak in the sacred category needs to be investigated. It could be for promotional reasons: to sell kecak in the tourist market as an original sacred dance. Barong and Calonarang with the kris dance were and still are also important tourist attractions that over time became focus of the sacred-profane debate.

7 Palm leaf manuscripts inscribed with mythological stories and religious-philosophical texts.
wali: these are also not classical, proposing then a further dichotomy between classical and new forms.

Each participant proposed solutions that not all present could agree with. Some participants considered certain dances sacred, which other participants considered profane. Sugriwa suggested a classification based on the space where the dances are performed: seni sacral are performed inside the temple; seni provan are performed outside the temple, for entertainment purposes. Moerdowo proposed a distinction between classic dances which are religious and cultural, and modern dances which are popular. He remarks that this categorisation is not a rigid one; there are exceptions like the topeng which is defined as semiclassical.

Seminar conclusions and their implementations

The various contributions were systematised in a unique corpus of rules and the Balinese authorities launched a campaign to promulgate the decisions made in the seminar. The final classification raised in the seminar is as follows: SENI TARI WALI (sacred, religious dance), SENI TARI BEBALI (ceremonial dance), SENI TARI BALIH-BALIHAN (secular dance). There is also a list of the dances belonging to each category. Topeng, without specifying which type, like all forms

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8As already mentioned, the English translations of these terms are included in the original proceedings of the Seminar. Even after the foreign concepts of sacred and profane had been expressed in more familiar terms, these Balinese words still required re-translating into English in order to clarify their meaning. They were more originally Balinese, but unknown. According to Zoetmulder's Old Javanese-English dictionary, wali or bali means "tribute, offering and ritual requisites for ceremonial occasion". Furthermore bali also means to return. I remark that for Balinese to make offerings is also to share with the gods what they have received from them: to return. Balinese-Indonesian dictionaries translate wali with upacara di pura, "ceremony in temple" (kamus Bahasa Bali -Indonesia 1978 and Kamus Bahasa Bali Anandakusuma 1986) and/or kembali, "to return" (Bahasa Bali -Indonesia 1978 Kersten 1984). Not all Balinese dictionaries record the term wali or bali. The speakers at the Seminar referred to it as a term belonging to religious texts, thus close to their own tradition in contrast with the foreign terms. Bebali in the Kamus Bali-Indonesia 1978 is translated as sesajen or sajen, ritual, offerings. Balih-balihan deriving from balih in Indonesian lihat, menonton to watch, is translated in Kersten 1984. as tontonan, show, performance entertainment Thus wali is ceremony, bebali offerings, bali-balihan is performance entertainment.
of wayang, is considered bebali. The distinction between wali and bebali is explicitly based on the use of a story: wali dances don't have a story, while bebali dances do.

The creation of a third category, a category in between, recalls Balinese concepts of an ordered correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm. The middle world, the domain of humans, is the result of equal and opposite tensions between the upper world, the domain of divinities, and the lower world, the domain of lower entities. I have already shown in the previous chapter how this principle works in the performer's body, and its importance in creating the body-mind-mask unity. It can be found in all aspects of performance as well in daily life, and especially in the discourse on Balinese culture. It is striking that many participants in the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari suggest this third category.

The seminar also established that a specific section of the government department of religion, culture and education was needed to maintain and develop (memelihara and membina) each category of dance. Universities (including ASTI) had the task of carrying out research. The Proyek Penggalian, Pembinaan, Pengembangan Kebudayaan Daerah Bali had the task of publishing the research.

The Department of Culture and the Department of Religion were given the following tasks: to ensure that all the Seminar's conclusions were applied; to develop the "Art and Culture of the Island"; and to promote research and publications on dance in particular and Balinese "Art and Culture" in general (as explained in the last two pages of the seminar's proceedings). More specifically the wali dances were under the control of the Paridasa Hindu Dharma.  

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9Parisada Hindu Dharma, the Council of Hindu Religion later renamed the Council of Hindu Religion in Indonesia was officially established in 1958. Its main task was to have Balinese Hinduism recognized as one of the official national religions. In order to achieve this task the Council had to follow the national dictates, including having a sacred text and one god. While it
From this account it is clear that the 1971 *Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari* was meant to be an important watershed, giving direction for regional cultural policy within the framework of the national one. It was planned to create a classification in order to preserve the peaks of national culture. This was done through government departments of culture and religion. The role of the Parisada Hindu Dharma was vital in deciding what sort of dances were proper to represent the sacredness of Balinese Hindu religion, only recently accepted at national level. The main practical method used was to disseminate the decisions through publications in Indonesian.

In this context it is possible to understand the sudden proliferation of literature on Balinese culture and specifically on dance published by Balinese scholars after 1970. Foreign scholars likewise showed increased interest in Balinese performances. I will explore the discourse about dance in general, focusing specifically on topeng. Numerous seminars have been dedicated to Balinese topeng not only in Bali but also in Java, some of which resulted in formal publications.

In all those works a certain resistance to the 1971 Seminar's final decision is evident. In particular topeng, as genre, is not classified as bebali, rather there is an effort to identify and label types of topeng. More specifically some publications consider topeng pajegan as wali, underlining the sacredness of that type of topeng.

was difficult to establish one sacred text of Hinduism, the epics were offered as analogous. Importantly for performances, the philosophical strain within Hinduism that stresses that the "gods" are but aspects of a unitary divine was emphasized, and Sanghyang Widhi, a Balinese construct for the Godhead influenced by Christianity and Islam, was given new prominence. This rationalization of Balinese religious practice is still in progress. It has been recently reinforced with a new reminology defining Balinese culture based on religion and increasingly "aiming to unity" as a centre of this discourse.
Dissemination of the final decision of the Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari

The following account describes attempts to disseminate the Seminar's conclusions and its terminology. These are important in revealing the dynamics of the conceptualisation and practical application of an aspect of culture policy. Furthermore it is important to notice how individuals contribute to the discourse and how this has its impact on practice of performance. One of the instruments used by the Seminar to spread the classification and preserve the wali dances was booklets published by government institutions and projects, often for free. Also important are the dance competitions that encourage the use of the wali dances. Particular scholars have been very influential in popularising the classification. In particular one name frequently recurs in seminars and publications both in Indonesian and English: I Made Bandem.

Director of ISI in Yogyakarta until the year 2006, Bandem was director of STSI Denpasar for sixteen years (1981-1997). He was the first graduate of ASTI to undertake postgraduate studies in the USA (M.A. 1972, University of California, Los Angeles and Ph.D 1980, Wesleyan University) specialising in Ethnomusicology and Performing Arts. Politically active, he had an important role in the bureaucratic world, contributing to decisions about cultural policy regarding performing arts. He also became a candidate for governor of Bali in 1998. Bandem did not participate in the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari because he was studying in the USA, but his role in diffusing the Seminar's decisions far exceeds that of anyone else, especially in regard to topeng.

In spite of the fact that he took this role he didn't literally follow the seminar's final decisions. In an interview he explicitly explained his disagreement with the fact that the classification was officially made on the basis of the presence of a story in the dance. Following this principle topeng Sidhakarya could not be classified as bebali, he explained, because the story is not the main element; in fact the performer stops as soon as the pedanda finishes celebrating the ceremony.

10Interview with I Made Bandem, 16-08-2003.
Bandem added a better basis on which to categorise a dance. As suggested by Sugriwa and Kaler during the seminar, Bandem prefers a categorisation based on the place of the performance in relation to the temple. Furthermore it is necessary to take into consideration what people consider sacred; often sacredness is linked to special objects that have undergone purification ceremonies. Bandem also critiqued the way the message was transmitted to the public:

It has never been clear, there isn't anyone who can explain it to people according to the principles of desa-place, kala-time, patra-context,¹¹ no one can explain it in the sacred context, that's the problem why people have never understood it. In reality the main aim of that classification was to develop the culture, to protect the non-profane Balinese art.... That was to face the tourist boom in Bali in 1971.¹²

Bandem also disagrees with the wide-spread use of the words sacral and profane, which are foreign. He prefers and supports the use of the words wali, bebali, bali-balihan. The latter belong to the common usage and culture of the Balinese: they embody a flexible and balanced dichotomy comprehending a middle element that is always present in Balinese philosophy: “bayu-sabda-idep” is an example (see chapter I). On the contrary, still according to Bandem, the distinction between sacred and profane embodies the Western notion of an absolute dichotomy between two opposed parts:

As a consequence they employed a western concept which is very absolute-extreme, church, outside church, here sacred, over there profane. In Bali it is not like that, a place

¹¹'Desa, kala patra’ is a principle according to which everything can be considered not in a fixed way, but in relation to its place, time and context, which vary.
¹²‘tidak pernah jelas, tidak ada yang bisa menjelaskan pada orang dalam konteks desa, kala, patra, dalam konteks sakral tidak ada yang bisa menjelaskan, itu masalahnya sehingga orang tidak pernah mengerti. Tujuan utama dari pembuatan klasifikasi itu sesungguhnya adalah untuk strategi pengembangan kebudayaan, memproteksi seni Bali tidak profan. ... Itu untuk menghadapi boom pariwisata di Bali tahun 1971. Interview with I Made Bandem, 16-08-2003.
becomes sacred when offerings are made, the main thing is suci (clean, pure), it’s like that.\textsuperscript{13}

The duality aiming to unity intrinsic to Balinese philosophy then is sacrificed for the creation of an untouchable domain called “sacred” to protect all those elements within it from external influences. But people feel uncomfortable about boundaries, and discussions of this fact often arise in the process of the socialisation of the final decision of the seminar. Bandem, like some others, when writing about function of dances, starts with seemingly accepting the seminar’s final categorization, but goes on to propose exceptions. Topeng is bebali, he often writes, but it can be wali according to the place where it is performed. In his works he does not mention that the original dance classification is based on the presence of a story; he argues instead that the definition rests on the site of the performance, often citing Sugriwa’s opinion on this point. Interestingly enough, however, one of Bandem’s most well known publications, co-written with deBoer, \textit{From Kaja to Kelod} (Bandem and deBoer 1995 [1981]) is structured around the concepts of sacred/ profane, reinterpreted as a continuum rather than a dyad. Because of his participation in seminars on culture and the performing arts and his academic activity, Bandem’s interpretation has become so popular and his opinion so influential that often writers, both in Indonesia and overseas, quote his version of the categorisation. His work, especially on masks, attracted the interest of foreign scholars.

In the 1970s Indonesian borders were opened up not only for tourism but also for an influx of academics especially from the USA. As a result a striking difference is evident in the number of publications on topeng produced before and after 1971. Prior to that time no study had been written focusing specifically on topeng with the exception of the monograph by Noosten and Stutterheim in 1941 which focus on the history of what it is considered the first set of masks in Bali. Most of the other texts more or less extensively describe topeng (e.g. Friederich 1849

\textsuperscript{13}Jadi salah karena mereka menggunakan konsep barat yang sangat absolute, gereja, di luar gereja, di sini sacral, di sini profane. Di Bali tidak di situ juga dibuat banten jadi sacral di situ, yang penting suci, kan begitu. Interview with I Made Bandem, 16-08-2003.
Covarrubias 1937, de Zoete and Spies 1938, Moerdowo 1963). After 1971 both Balinese and Western scholars dedicated many theses, articles and seminars to topeng. These works added to all the proceedings of seminars and booklets constitute a relevant corpus of works specifically on topeng. By nurturing the discourse on sacred dance, especially as related to topeng, these publications, purposely or not, have influenced the practice of topeng. Protecting and developing wali dances was the main aim of the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari. Topeng, although not explicitly classified as wali at this time, took on a sacred role and it has been promoted thereafter through specific seminars and festivals.

**Topeng as focus, Bandem as major voice**

A specific concern attempt to preserve and develop topeng gave rise to numerous seminars, festivals and other activities, beginning with the Festival Topeng Se Bali (All Bali Topeng Festival) (1974) (Bandem 1976: 19). This was followed by the inclusion of topeng performances in the programme of the Bali Art Festival in 1975; and two seminars specifically devoted to topeng held in 1975, the proceedings of which were published by the government's Proyek Penggalian, Pembinaan, Pengembangan Seni Klasik/Tradisional dan Kesenian Baru "Project for the Research, Support, and Development of Classical/Traditional and Modern Art". According to Dunn (1983: 9) this project was established during the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari.

The proceedings of the *Loka Karya Topeng Bali* held on 10-12 February 1975, contains papers on topeng from diverse points of view. It represents an effort to establish rules regarding the practice of topeng and its function. It analyses topeng's didactic, historical, religious, and also theatrical roles. Some papers describe in detail structure, masks, costume; all the elements of a topeng performance. In analysing topeng, the sacred-profane dance categorisation is

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14 I am grateful to I Wayan Madra Aryasa for providing the proceedings of this seminar.
frequently mentioned, but its application does not always follow the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari's formulations. Ketut Rota in his paper "Topeng Sebagai Sarana Pendidikan" explains that topeng was not as widespread in the 1970s as in the 1940s because of the competition with films.

Nevertheless topeng as tari wali is a fundamental element in the context of religious ceremony and as such its survival is ensured by its link to ceremonial activity. R Moerdowo considers topeng as bebali because it presents a story, but he also speaks about wali connotations of the Sidhakarya mask. DW. NGK M Sayang in his paper "Tari Tradisional Topeng Pajegan" describes topeng pajegan as bebali with the same function as Wayang Lemah puppet performance in accompanying the ceremony – pengiring upacara. I Made Bandem, in his paper "Topeng Sebagai Salah Satu Bentuk Theatre" commenting on another paper with same title, specifies that topeng pajegan is performed at the same time as the ritual activites of the priest, pedanda, and sometimes together with the puppet performance wayang lemah. It is also performed in the same space where the ceremony is carried out. In this case Bandem is not very specific about the dance categorization, but as we will see, his position in this regard becomes particularly relevant in the following years when topeng pajegan is increasingly associated with the ceremony in a role as prominent as that of the pedanda.

This change can be observed already three years later on the occasion of the Festival Tari Topeng (Festival of Topeng Dance) in Yogyakarta 15-20 February, 1978. On that occasion I Made Kanta in his paper "Topeng Dalem Sidhakarya" explained that topeng Sidhakarya is wali because it is performed for ceremonies simultaneously with the pedanda and wayang lemah. Without the Sidhakarya the ceremony is not completed. The wali connotation is determined by the timing (together with the pedanda's ritual), the place (close to where the ceremony is carried out, usually in the jeroan, inner court of the temple- while bebali dances are performed in the jaba tengah, middle court of the temple or jaba sisi, external one), and the offerings (to pasupati, to Sidhakarya and to the ancestors). He also defined bebondresan as balih-balihan and topeng as kerakyatan
(popular). Furthermore he underlines that wali and bebali dances can be also klasik (classic). This way of using the dance classification is closer to Bandem's view and more specifically to one of his 1976 publications.

The Proyek Penggalian, Pembinaan, Pengembangan Seni Klasik/Tradisional dan Kesenian Baru published a booklet by Bandem and Rembang on topeng in 1976. The structure and elements of the dance drama are described in detail. Topeng, following the 1971 Seminar's classification, is defined as bebali for its function during the ceremonies. In certain cases, though, it has wali function depending on the temples and ceremonies used. This booklet, which is more a manual on how topeng should be and not so much a description of how it was in those years, has been quoted very often and is still influential. Furthermore, its structure and content have often been used as a basis for many ASTI (ISI) theses on topeng.

Other writings, other views

Someone who often proposes alternative interpretations to Bandem's approach is I Wayan Dibia. He is the second graduate of ASTI to undertake post-graduate studies in the USA, obtaining an M.A in 1984 and a Ph.D in (1992 from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), specialising in Performing Arts. He was the successor to Bandem as Director of STSI Denpasar from 1997 until 2003. In 1977/78 he wrote the booklet "Perkembangan Seni Tari di Bali", published by the Proyek Sasana Budaya Bali. In this early booklet Dibia describes three types of classifications of Balinese dances: the first based on character (male/female dances), the second based on choreography (traditional/classic/new creation) according to which Topeng is defined as classical, and the third based on function as defined in the Seminar (wali/bebali/bali-balihan), according to which topeng is bebali. Furthermore, as an alternative, he proposes what he considers a more common classification: 1) tari-tarian upacara, those ceremonial dances belonging to the wali group, connected
to a ceremony and performed in any space; 2) *tari tarian hiburan*, dances to entertain an audience of humans, ancestors and deities; 3) *tari tari tontonan*, dance shows? primarily for human audiences. Based on this last classification topeng Sidhakarya is in the category of *tari wali*, while topeng Prembon belongs to the group of *tari hiburan*.

Dibia participated in the 1971 *Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari* as a representative of ASTI. Despite accepting the classifications determined by the Seminar, he attempts to express aspects hidden by the rigidity of these terms. These reflect a classification closer to common usage, as he remarks in the text. But if we look at the terms that he uses to define the non-wali dance, *tari hiburan* and *tari tontonan*, he actually translates the Balinese term balih-balihan into Indonesian. He proposed this classification again in a 1999 publication, but here he does not separate *tari hiburan* from *tari tontonan*. Instead he collapses the two categories in one: *tari hiburan-tontonan*. These two early publications by Dibia do not present a uniform interpretation of the classification made during the 1971 *Seminar Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari* despite being sponsored by a government project. A third government sponsored publication in which Dibia was involved presents a different approach again. In 2000 Dibia with Aryasa, Granoka and Sindhu wrote a booklet titled *Tari Wali* as a result of a project of Dinas Kebudayaan-Department of Culture. This work describes in detail the forms of *tari wali* as indicated by the Seminar in 1971: sanghyang, rejang and baris. But it does not uncritically adopt the 1971 Seminar's decision. It criticises the principles that lead to the exclusion of some dances from the wali category and topeng Sidhakarya is one of these dances.

Another approach again is presented in Balinese Dance, Drama and Music, a recent publication that Dibia has written with Rucina Ballinger (2004). It briefly mentions the 1971 *Seminar Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari* and includes topeng pajegan together with wayang lemah in the wali category, giving that impression that this was a decision of the Seminar.
Comparing classifications – multiplicity, complexity

The large number of publications precludes exhaustive analysis. Some of the publications that I examined are explicitly sponsored by government, others are theses written by Balinese or Westerners. Looking at these texts it is possible to gain an insight into the general trend in the application of the dance classification proposed by the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari in relation to topeng.

Many publications explicitly adopt the Seminar's classification system (e.g. Pandji and Dibia 1977, Armada 1984, Kara 1986, Marajaya 1995). Some mix the terminology of the classification with a further distinction between dances for ceremony and for entertainment (e.g. Putra Agung 1981, Dibia 1999). Others, despite not explicitly describing the classification, use its terminology to define the function of topeng (e.g. Wardana 1993-94). Topeng, without specifying which type, is mostly included in the bebali category. Sometimes though, it is noted that people consider topeng as wali (e.g. Kardji 1992). It is also classified as wali if it is performed inside the temple (e.g. Pameran Topeng 1989-1990). Topeng Sidhakarya, also called topeng pajegan or pajeg, was not explicitly classified by the final decision of the 1971 Seminar. The publications mentioned here do not agree about its function. Despite being defined as bebali since the 1970s by Bandem and Rembang (1976) and Panji and Dibia (1977), successively, topeng is defined in these publications as wali, or bebali or both depending on the place where it is performed.

Topeng panca is classified as bebali or balih-balihan. Topeng prembon as bebali or bali-balihan, and bondres as balih-balihan, bebali and/or entertainment. In the case of topeng pajegan the classification varies not only from one author to another, but also within different publications by the same author. It is relevant to remark that the writers quote as their main reference the 1971 Seminar or Bandem. As already mentioned above, Bandem is often referred by both Balinese and Western scholars writing theses in the U.S. For instance Young
(1981) refers to the classification without mentioning the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan provan Bidang Tari. Rather she quotes Bandem and Rembang. Dunn (1983) refers to Bandem and Rembang, and not to the 1971 Seminar despite the fact that she includes it in the bibliography.\textsuperscript{15}

Bandem is often quoted in other works. In addition to the above mentioned booklet, Bandem has written a mini encyclopaedia of Balinese dances adopted “as a reference work” by STSI students and teachers. Furthermore he wrote a book on Balinese dances with Frederick deBoer in English (Bandem and deBoer 1995 [1981]). This is a sort of manual on dances with detailed illustrations, considered an important reference by scholars, but also read by the general public.

Bandem and deBoer's book presents a view of the evolution of dances and drama in Bali. With this work the popularisation of the classification of dances has crossed the borders of Indonesia. Bandem and deBoer proposed an extended Seminar classification. They not only consider the function of the dances, but also place them in relation to the temple and the kind of audience. As a consequence topeng pajegan is classified as bebali, performed in the second courtyard of the temple, having as its audience human beings and gods. But it is noted that sometimes topeng pajegan is also considered wali, when it is performed in the

\textsuperscript{15}I do not think it is a coincidence that in the 1970s the interest of western scholars increased. In this period, scholars wrote articles, theses and dissertations in USA universities. The work of those western scholars (from the USA), mostly with performance theory and/or practice as background, are based on participation in the learning process of topeng. The rediscovery of the body in theatre practice as mentioned earlier, exemplified in the work of Grotowski, the Living Theatre, the students of LeCoq etc., was a vital influence stimulating the interest of US scholars in Asian performance, along with more specific factors. These included tours by Balinese performers to the USA, and classes in Asian performance organised by the American Society for Eastern Arts under Bob Brown’s direction in 1972-1974. During the summer classes Balinese teachers taught music and dance to a group of people who without doubt have been very great influential in stimulating interest in Balinese dance-drama and music, such as Larry Reed, Andy Toth, Phillip Glass, Fritz deBoer. Among the scholars who took up a participatory learning approach to the study of topeng is Jenkins (1979), who described his own experience of becoming a topeng performer. Emigh's (1979) description of a topeng pajegan shows how it unfolds throughout the day, making evident its performative and ritual aspects. Emigh also published, in collaboration with Bandem, a transcription and translation of a particular performance by I Nyoman Kakul. This is an important tool for understanding the relation between text and improvisation in topeng.
inner temple courtyard and the main audience is the gods. Topeng panca and prembon are classified as balih-balihan, secular dances in the outer temple, whose public consists mainly of human beings.

In the actual conduct of ceremonies this spatial classification is not always applied by the organisers and sponsors of the ritual, or by the participants or performers. For lack of space a topeng pajegan with Sidhakarya can be performed also in the outermost courtyard of the temple. This fact does not change its function of completing the ceremony. The reality of actual performances seems to be more flexible than what is described in the text, and there are also publications which stress this flexibility.

Significantly a publication on the occasion of the Bali Art Festival 1997 stresses the fact that it is fruitless to try to differentiate sacred from profane, because all creations are made with the same spirit: to make an offering. This is affirmed in order to show tourists (Western and Indonesian) that it is still worthwhile to visit Bali because the Balinese spirit is alive. Another official tourist publication related to the Bali Art Festival, Taksu (1998), stresses the limits of the classification because the three functions indicated in the seminar (wali, bebali, balih-balihan) may be present simultaneously.

On the one hand there are publications that, in line with the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari, make classifications in order to preserve the sacred forms of dances that are at risk of disappearing because of the bad external influence of tourism, (Sumandi et al. 1992-1993 on topeng Sidhakarya). On the other hand, there are publications promoting culture for the tourist market, in line with the above-mentioned Cultural Tourism Seminar (Pariwisata Budaya 1971). This ambivalent policy was also applied by the Balinese station of the national television TVRI which broadcasts programs and performances in order to preserve and develop the "traditional" expressions of Balinese culture. At the
same time it broadcast programs to promote the same Balinese culture for tourism.

One of the programs through which TVRI Bali contributed to the plan to protect and develop traditional Balinese culture, as embodied in the performing arts, was called Lestari. This means “eternal”, referring to traditional forms of dance and music that have always been in Bali and will be in Bali forever. The main task, remarked Trie Somohardjo,\textsuperscript{16} was to protect forms of dance and music from external influences, tourism. The program Lestari was broadcast once every two weeks and usually consisted of the demonstration of a dance or music and an interview with an old and experienced artist who specialised in that form. The same TV station broadcast every day in English a program called “Bali Vision”, which was a sort of cultural news for tourists, enriched with documentaries of aspects of cultures and the performing arts in Bali as well as providing information on the ceremonies all over the island.

Did Balinese watch these programmes? Yes, including the ones in English. TV reaches the most remote places through satellite dishes.\textsuperscript{17} Watching television does not necessary imply paying attention to the programmes. Very often in the open houses the TV is on while all present are busy with their own daily activities. “The distracted audience” sometimes makes a remark on what has been just heard and a discussion could also arise. Or the TV on is just part of the sound landscape together with chickens, noisy tools or frying oil. Words from the television become a natural part of the house-hold usage. Nowadays TVRI has lost most of its share of viewers to the private TV station, Bali TV, whose programs will be briefly discussed in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{16} Trie Somohardjo was the responsible for the programs at TVRI Denpasar. Conversation in February 2000.

\textsuperscript{17} One of the TVRI Bali tasks is to promote Balinese culture and religion also outside Bali (Bali Post July 2002, Case of a parabola donated by TVRI Bali).
It is important to mention within the publications on topeng the booklet by I Wayan Karji: *Topeng Prembon, Leluhur Orang Bali* (Karji 2001). Through the stories used in prembon (not only stories from Babad histories but also folk tales and episodes from the Mahabarata epic) he demonstrates the role of the performance as a medium of connection with the ancestors stressing its sacredness to its important function in the non visible world (*niskala*). Furthermore, he contests Bandem’s assessments regarding topeng in a number of areas, such as such his definition of the word *topeng*, or his chronology of the development of topeng. The final important point is that he defines topeng pajegan, panca and prembon all as wali because Balinese nowadays say *istilah orang Bali dewasa ini*, (Karji 2001: 11). With this contribution the discourse on topeng is enriched with a further variation. Karji wants to act against the uncomfortable authority and predominance of Bandem’s work. In doing so he makes use of the terminology of the 1971 Seminar to reinforce the religious aspect of topeng, which, because of its historical and religious values, is seen to represent Balinese identity. Clearer assessment of the sacred-ness of topeng Sidhakarya comes from Atmaja (2004) whose thesis defines topeng Sidhakarya unequivocally as topeng wali.

Examining the written discourse on the categories of dance and the function of topeng Sidhakarya based on the 1971 categorization results in a confusing picture of multiplicity and variation. Scholars, government officials and public insitutions promote different views. On the one hand with the 1971 dance categorisation the Balinese intelligentsia tried to systematise the domain of the sacred and its relation to performance, in response to national pressures for religious regulation and tourist development. On the other hand, the marginalisation of topeng outside the domain of sacred was resisted, creating a discourse that located topeng (topeng pajegan-Sidhakarya) at the core of the sacred domain.

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18 Vickers (1999) affirms, referring also to Schulte Nordholt (1992), that the dynastic texts which connect ancestors and place are “continually re-written”. Vickers also underlines that in the 90s Babad cannot be separated from topeng.
It is easy to wonder if the written discourse has any influence in the domain of day to day life. Does it actually reach people? If so what do the people say about it? In what ways does the discourse on sacred and profane influence performance practice? In particular what are the effects on topeng? Can we actually observe a process of "sacralisation" of topeng in practice?

"Questioning" dance categorisation in conversation and daily practice

Tari wali, "sacred dances"; tari bebali, "ceremonial dances"; tari balih-balihan, "secular dances". This is the way in which Balinese dances are generally classified in publications and articles both in English and Indonesian. Sometimes speaking with Balinese that I meet in libraries and offices in Denpasar I receive clear explanations on the function of Balinese dances based on this classification. It also happens when during ceremonies somebody takes on the task of being my erudite guide. These are people that I meet for the first time to whom, during casual conversations, I express my interest in topeng dance-drama. Their clear and short explanations remind me of the brief booklets for tourist consumption. Although they surely do not refer to the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari, its terminology provides the tools to explain something about Balinese performing arts to an interested tourist. But people do not always spontaneously use the Seminar's terminology, and even when they do, asking questions on its use sometimes produces interesting discussions.

During informal conversations and interviews collected throughout 1999 and 2003 I attempted to investigate discourse on the function of tari topeng. I am aware that the response of my interlocutors arose from my interest and their interaction with me as researcher. Yet this does not negate their interest or involvement into the discourse on sacred and profane. In fact we shall see that the debate is quite alive even without the intervention of a foreign researcher.
Some performers and civil servants did not mention terms related to the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tantri’s classification unless they were asked, while others mentioned them without being asked. Some (few) fully accepted the classification, while others rejected it. Furthermore they refused the classification for a variety of reasons. Thus the positions are various and also when two individuals have the same view, the reasons are different. We might expect that all civil servants have a common attitude different from old performers or from the younger ones. Instead any variation of interpretation depends on the individual.

Within this confused picture full of variations, contradictions, and self contradictions, one can sense some common attitudes: resistance, opposition or simply lack of agreement. Even those who spontaneously used the 1971 Seminar’s terminology and seemed to support its principles, do not actually agree with it. In general civil servants and performers with whom I had discussions between 1999 and 2001 proposed an alternative definition of sacred (sakral-contemporary spelling). They provided many different solutions, which according to them were more suitable to day-to-day reality in the villages.

The inadequacy of the word sakral has been expressed more recently by I Wayan Madra Aryasa, Listibya’s secretary in 2003. He was very young when he attended the 1971 Seminar and since then he always provided a great contribution to Listibya’s work. Well aware that sakral and profan are foreign words, he said that maybe the word sakral is not adequate (pas). Questioning the adequacy of the term, though, came with the necessity to reconsider the value of the 1971 Seminar for the present day. As part of a Listibya project he searched for a better word by questioning pedanda and artists around the island. A pedanda from Batur suggested that the baris gede is not sakral, rather is pingit. Aryasa added that only the pedanda knows the difference. Paying particular respect to the care of a gamelan can be defined as sakral.

In Batur baris gede is one of the most important performance in the main Odalan temple ceremony

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I myself also I don’t know the deep meaning of the word sakral... if an object is considered pingit-(extraordinary), may be it is also sakral, may be.20

Pingit is the attitude that people have towards something, he explained, and this will reflect our attitude. Respect, good attitude will cause, as a consequence, the same reaction coming from the thing or person. This creates harmony. Another word for pingit is tenget, extraordinary (hebat in Indonesian).

In spite of the general opposition to the term sakral it seems hard to avoid using the 1971 Seminar’s terminology and concepts in redefining the concept of sacred itself. While people resist the “borrowed” terminology and recognised its imposition through government policy there seems to be little alternative.

The people’s response in regard to the dance categorization in reality mirrors the 1971 Seminar itself: the discussions that led to its conclusions as well the different interpretations that followed its dissemination. On the one hand the desire to establish rules and build boundaries; on the other, the attempt to make sense of these rules that everybody considers necessary, but inadequate for reality. In a similar way, topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya, that according to the Seminar’s categorization should have been considered definitively bebali, has been treated differently in both written discourse and daily practice.

Topeng pajegan: increased use?

In spite of the inadequacy of the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari’s dance categorization people keep using it even if not in the way indicated by the Seminar, especially in regard to topeng. In particular, it seems that

20 saya sendiri juga tidak mendalami arti kata sakral itu ... kalu sudah dikatakan sebuah benda itu mempunyai nilai ‘pingit’, barangkali itu juga sakral, barangkali. Interview with I Wayan Madra Aryasa, 07-08-03.
something went especially wrong with topeng pajegan. In spite of the fact that topeng pajegan was not included in the wali category, the written and especially the oral discussion of the category considered it as wali, as a fundamental element of the ceremony. Did the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari's dance categorisation address topeng pajegan as bebali because it was perceived as such in the late 60s and early 70s? Or was it a real effort to desacralise topeng? From conversations with performers it seems clear that in early 70s topeng pajegan was not as widespread as nowadays and performers were almost exclusively from Badung, Gianyar and Karangasem districts only. In the other districts it seems that topeng pajegan was seldom required and only on the occasion of high level ceremonies. A relevant aspect to take into consideration is that the anti-communist killings of the 1960s caused a decrease in the number of performers. The frequency of topeng may have been influenced simply by the lack of dancers to perform other genres. At the same time it seems reasonable to believe that the discourse on topeng explicitly describing it as sacred and as such necessary to complete the ceremony was a new message that reached the whole island and gradually made people want to have it as part of ceremonies.

Reports by practitioners indicate a recent spread of topeng pajegan-Sidhakarya related to the sacralisation of topeng. While until few years ago topeng was performed mainly in the south-centre and east districts of Bali, now it is possible to see topeng pajegan in almost all districts. I Wayan Tika a circa 70 year old topeng performer and pemangku (temple priest) from Mendooyo area, Negara (district of Jembrana, west Bali), during a conversation in January 2000, remarked that in his area topeng Sidhakarya had been used in the ceremony only in the last years. He himself was told by a representative of the Parisada Hindu Dharma religious organisation about the importance of Sidhakarya to complete the ceremony. As a consequence, he started to perform it combining his knowledge as pemangku-priest and performer.
Tika's statement was confirmed by Ida Bagus Kusuma, head of Parisada Hindu Dharma Bali and head of Department Agama Badung Regency in 2000. After an exhaustive explanation of the concept of sacred based on the role of the performance asking the gods to be present, he stressed the importance of the transmission of religious teachings to improve people's philosophical awareness. This was part of the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia program aiming to raise people's awareness in regard to the meaning of the ceremonies. This was a program that started from a group of ten high priests and has been implemented by PHDI through seminars, speeches during the big ceremonies such as the ones at the mother temple Besakih and through publications. Thus people do not have to follow the coordinator of a ceremony without being aware of what they do. This awareness has contributed to the recent extensive use of topeng Sidhakarya, Kusuma explained. "This is an important tool to complete the ceremony by filling the gaps made by mistakes of human beings that perform the ceremony. The higher the level of the ceremony, the greater is the risk of making mistakes", he added, "because of the complicated mantras to be remembered and other aspects. For this reason during high level ceremonies there is the need of Sidhakarya."

This increased awareness in the people of the religious aspects of topeng was also stressed by I Nengah Darsana, a puppeteer who graduated from STSI and who performs topeng more often than wayang. In 1999 in explaining the recent increase in requests for topeng Sidhakarya, he defined it as wali; people, in the past were not aware of this function of topeng. He further opined that now people are more aware because they have been informed by publications. He added that

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21Conversation with Ida bagus Kusuma, January 2000. Speaking about dance and topeng in particular he did not give a classification in Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang tari terms, but he used its concepts. He affirmed that there are dances that share sakral aspects with the ceremony. Those dances, like topeng, represent the past and gods as illustrated in the Babad. Through these dances the gods are asked to be present. There are other dances which are reflections of human beings' creativity, representing daily life. With this assertion Kusuma redefined the boundaries between sakral and profan, by differentiating dances representing the cosmological world and the human world. When asked about the 1971 Seminar he stressed the importance of dances like Pendet, which are manifestations of the gods. These need to be preserved from the destructive potentiality "of tourism and of the dollar" (commercialization). He added that people understand very well the importance of this distinction and apply it.
it is also necessary to consider the improved economic conditions as a factor in the improvement of the use of Sidhakarya.

In the years between 1999 and 2000, older performers like I Made Sija and I Ketut Kantor also recognised the increased use of Sidhakarya. They did not speak of major religious awareness, but they indicated as a reason the recent economic development. Kantor lamented the attitude of the topeng dancers: now they perform because they are daring, and not because they have skills. They do not know the basic rules of performing, they are not even able to use languages needed in a performance. They even do not know the stories correctly.

The spread of topeng pajegan also attracts criticism. However, it seems important to note that it is not only a religious phenomenon but is also related to the economy. The economic crisis of 1998 has contributed to this phenomenon. Topeng Sidhakarya met the need of Balinese for a perfect, complete ceremony, while better economic conditions provided the funds needed for offerings and other expenditure. The economic crisis in Indonesia caused an overall economic collapse, but paradoxically, most Balinese dealing with foreign currency were better off. The high exchange rate of the dollar made richer all the Balinese involved in business and tourism whose income was in dollars. Furthermore foreign businessmen, attracted by the more convenient exchange rate, invested more, bringing in more US dollars. The better economic conditions led the people to offer higher levels of ceremony to give back to the gods through offerings what they had received from them.
Topeng pajegan in context – the sacred and the material

The *panca yadnya*\(^{22}\) ceremonies can be of three levels: \(^{23}\) *Utama* (High), *Madya* (Middle), and *Nista* (Low). According to the level of ceremony a certain amount of offerings and consequently of performances are necessary: the higher the level of the ceremony, the greater the amount of offerings and performances required and the money used to pay for them. With the improved economic conditions not only the families linked to royal palace (*purī*) can afford a rich ceremony, but everybody who can afford it (and sometimes also those who cannot afford it) are willing to pay. Topeng pajegan has become a mechanism of social competition expressed through the display of rich ceremonies. It involves the neighbourhood level, the village level and all the way up to the regional level. It can be noticed also in the style of the private houses re-built using “traditional architecture... a way for people to flaunt their wealth and to parade their social status” (Popo Danes 2001: 100). And also at the Besakih temple “in this spirit of competition, all descendant groups (*warga*) renovate their respective warga temples to show off their power and prestige, as well as their sociological and ritual importance” (I Gde Pitana 2001: 120).

Topeng pajegan, in this context, with its sacred elements has the power to justify the ceremony and the role of the family or the community involved in it, reinforcing their link to the land and to their ancestors. Topeng pajegan during the performance also justifies its own role as an essential part of the ceremony. During topeng pajegan the performers contribute to the perpetuation of the use of the sacred Sidhakarya, ensuring themselves an income. The success of this mechanism has been proven in more recent times after the Bali bombings. The lack of tourists has deprived the island of the main income. To balance the

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\(^{22}\) *Panca Yadnya*, are the five offering or sacrifices, or in simpler terms ceremonies dedicated to: 1. *Dewa Yadnya*, sacrifice/ceremonies to divinities such as temple festivals, 2. *Pitra Yadnya*, sacrifice/ceremonies to ancestors such as on the occasion of cremation ceremonies, 3. *Rsi Yadnya*, sacrifice/ceremonies to sages, such as ceremonies of initiation of high priests-pedanda, 4. *Butha Yadnya*, sacrifice/ceremonies to nature and its spirit such as specific leasing ceremonies, 5. *Manusa Yadnya*, sacrifice/ceremonies to people and society such as what we can call rites of passage. Information of panca yadnya can be found on internet sites and various booklets. For simple and exhaustive information in English see Eisman 1989.

\(^{23}\) Each level has sublevels up to a total of about 90 levels.
terrible events, a large number of ceremonies have been held. While in general performers complained about the lack of work, topeng Sidhakarya performers have noticed an increased request for performances. Most of the performers say that people now know the importance of topeng Sidhakarya.

Between the years 2002 and 2006 the use of the word wali referring to topeng Sidhakarya has surely increased. There is a general feeling that the role of Sidhakarya is equal to the role of the priest celebrating the ceremony. Furthermore in order to preserve topeng pajegan (Sidhakarya performed by one performer only), since 2003 there has been a topeng pajegan competition at the annual Bali Arts Festival involving every regency. With all the judges from south Bali (Gianyar and Badung regencies) there has been an effort to correct the "bad habits" of the topeng pajegan performances\(^\text{24}\) while reinforcing its importance in the ceremonial context.

Even if the majority of people I interviewed consider the topeng pajegan or Sidhakarya as sacred or wali there are a few people who resist the concept. One of the things that makes some people upset is the idea the role of the performer as Sidhakarya as high as the priest. For example I Ketut Wirtawan\(^\text{25}\), son of Ketut Kantor, does not consider the Sidhakarya decisive in completing the ceremony successfully. While it is important to start the performance with the priest, it is not necessary to finish it with him; the performance can carry on even after the priest has left. Wirtawan does not agree with the commonly held belief which imposes a meaning on Sidhakarya making the topeng performer like a pendeta. Instead he believes that topeng Sidhakarya has a bebali function, it is not a tari sakral, a sacred dance. His knowledge of the category comes from reading books, he explained. As a former STSI student he has been exposed to that sort of

\(^{24}\)In the competition of 1993 the Buleleng regency participated to the competition with a topeng Sidhakarya, with more performers, because traditionally there is no topeng idhakarya in that area. The performance was out of competition, but they decided to show all the offerings that usually are employed when the Sidhakarya mask comes into the scene. Some judges expressed their concern about this fact: first the performers refused to participate in the competition, then they received the funding to perform anyway and eventually performed the full ceremony for the Sidhakarya.

\(^{25}\)Interview with I Ketut Wirtawan, 10-05-2005.
academic knowledge that sacralises topeng pajegan, but he clearly rejects the concept of topeng pajegan as wali. Nevertheless he does not mind performing it and receiving a fee.

Voices of dissent to the mainstream discourse are not uncommon. They occur in relation to the role of topeng pajegan as well as to the concept of sakral and profan. Open dissent has been more common since the Orde Baru period and even more intense since the Otonomi Daerah (provincial autonomy from January 2001). Nevertheless the object of dissent is not always clear and while we might expect dissent to lead to a more open or “innovative” discourse about Balinese culture, on the contrary it results in a more orthodox approach. Wirtawan’s dissent can be actually interpreted not so much as a resistance to an ongoing tendency of the sacralisation of the role of the Sidhakarya and as such of the role of the topeng performer. Rather it could be viewed as supporting the attempt to desacralise the role of Sidhakarya initiated by the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari as indicated by Hideharu (2005) in regard to wayang kulit - shadow puppet theatre.

Sacralisation or desacralisation of topeng?

Hideharu (2005) has demonstrated that because of the government’s requirement of a state religion in every region, in Bali’s case, National Hinduism, certain unsuitable religious practices were classified as custom, in contrast to those which were classified as proper religious practice, like the making of Holy Water by pedanda high priests. Following these rules, the work of the dalang, who actually carries out important tasks during certain ceremonies as mangku-low rank priest, making holy water among other things, was classified as adat and not agama. The desacralisation of the role of the dalang, according to Hideharu, officially happened with the 1971 Seminar when wayang kulit was classified bebali. Further desacralisation was caused by the arts schools, first
KOKAR and then ASTI, where the art of the dalang was (and is) thought of as a performance which does not include its religious role. Similarly the topeng performer, as Sidhakarya, has religious tasks that could have been sanitised in the process of the Balinese creating their religion, and especially with the 1971 Seminar. The contradictions arising from the different parts of the discourse on sacred and profane (and also specifically on the sacredness of Sidhakarya), could stem simply from the fact that not every body agreed with the existence of a National Hinduism.

The fact that Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia promoted topeng pajegan is not in total contradiction with Hideharu's theory. In fact there have always been disagreements within the PHDI. These disagreements have become even stronger in the years between 1998 and 2001, after the fall of Suharto and the implementation of regional autonomy, when the expectation for more regionally-based rules regarding Hinduism was stronger. In this period an intense debate on sacred and profane dance exploded in the written media. Most of the articles came to the conclusion that a new seminar on sacred and profane arts to update the decisions of the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari was necessary. But the debate started with news about a Balinese dance in Yogyakarta.

Sacred and profane: rediscussing the definition

The debate on sacred and profane dance was sparked off by the dance rejang dewa, performed at the Prambanan temple on April 3rd 2000 on the occasion of the Nyepi Day festivity I Made Bandem organised a rejang dewa dance performed by the ISI students of Yogyakarta. In the audience were the then President of Indonesia Abdurrahman Wahid and the First Lady Sinta Nuriyah Wahid. An article in English published in the Jakarta Post, on 20 April 2000 describes the debate aroused by this event. It reports that scholars and legislators such as Ngurah Bagus, Ida Bagus Yuda Triguna and Putu Alit

26 KOKAR Konservatori Karawitan Indonesia, Music Conservatory- established in 1960. It became SMKI Sekolah Menengah Karawitan Indonesia-Senior High School of Performing Arts in 1977-8.
Bagiasna have labelled Bandem's staging of the sacred rejang dewa dance at the Prambanan temple sacrilegious. The article gives information on the classification of dances as wali, bebali, balih-balihan indicating that this is Bandem's classification. The writer comes to the conclusion that the classification does not work any more and it has to be reconsidered.

The Jakarta Post article explains that the debate began with a previous article in the Bali Post, about rejang dewa at Prambanan in honour of the President. "Rejang Dewa Sambut Gus Dur, Seniman dan Budayawan Protes" (Rejang Dewa Welcomes Gus Dur, Artists and Academics Protest. Bali Post, 8-4-2000). The Bali Post article described the strong reaction of academics and artists: "apakah Gus Dur itu dewa? Acara ini merupakan pola orde baru" (Is Gus Dur God? This event resembles the New Order) one of the interviewees contributing to the article says. The main accusation is that the organisers who were supposed to protect the sacred-ness of rejang dewa, did not. The article in the Bali Post concludes by including the voice of the accused Bandem, who defends himself by saying that the dance was not performed in honour of the President, but to contribute to the sacred and religious atmosphere of a Balinese Hindu ceremony at National level. It is interesting to note that the article in the Jakarta Post focused on a matter that brought the Balinese to national attention, but only to English speaking readers.

The debate did not stop there. Articles and seminars contributed to this discussion and the Bali Post acted as its field. Starting with the criticism of the rejang dewa performance, the discussion went on to questioning the concepts of sacred and profane in general as well the function of the 1971 Seminar's dance classification in particular. For example an article on 22-April 2000 ("wali, bebali" dan "balih-balihan") analyses the Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan categorisation pointing out its inadequacy. The main problem, the article states, is that the categorisation does not consider the function of dances in the local context.
Furthermore it concludes that any dance, even the most sacred-wali, once it is watched becomes entertainment, seni tontonan. Several articles followed attempting to explain the meaning of “sacred” and the link to Balinese Hinduism, but some articles called for a clearer definition of “sacred”. There was also space for the voices of those who provoked the debate, Swasti Widjaja and I Made Bandem.

Widjaja and Bandem responded with the article “Tari Rejang Dewa, Sebuah Misteri Dalam Kesenian Bali” (Rejang Dewa Dance, A Mystery in Balinese (Performing) Arts, Bali Post 6-06-2000). In this article they explain that the rejang dewa at the Prambanan temple was organised for a Hindu religious function and not for the president, thus deliberately revealing the process of “making” the dance. Through an erudite theoretical framework they introduce the concept of continuity and change to explain that:

Rejang Dewa, as known nowadays, is the result of a reconstruction by ASTI Denpasar made on the occasion of a project to revive those forms of the arts nearly extinct. If afterwards the dance has been re-sacralised or performed as a secular dance, it is not something wrong, certainly if it is viewed in the above mentioned context.27

In brief, they say that the rejang used in the temples all over Bali is the result of an ASTI project aiming to restore all the various sorts of rejang that are in danger of disappearing. The authors pointed out that the rejang at the Prambanan temple was not the original rejang, but a re-creation which had been absorbed in ritual practice. This is indicative of the flexibility and dynamics of Balinese traditions in the making. At the conclusion the two authors call for another seminar to update the conclusion of the 1971 Seminar. Being so open and deconstructing the process of sacralisation of a form of dance did not find favour with all. An article on 12 May 2000 titled “Perlu 'Bhisama' Mengatur Posisi Seni Sakral dan Profan” (Wisdom is Needed in Determining the position of Sacred and

Profane Art) reports on a seminar organised at the Udayana University in Denpasar which discussed the boundaries between sacred and profane. The late Professor Ngurah Bagus was reported to have condemned Bandem’s article because his theory blurs even further the function of sacred dance. Ngurah Bagus also adds:

Is the theory of the expert Bandem going to enrich or make shallow the sacred value of a form of art? This needs to be discussed in a bigger seminar involving all relevant components.  

Several articles followed, some supporting and more contesting Bandem’s position. This debate is endless. After two years I was still able to arouse a lively discussion with the mere mention of the rejang dewa. For example I Nyoman Nikanaya expressed his disappointment about the protest against this rejang performed in Java, while the same people never thought to protest against the barong dance daily performed for tourists in Bali. Previously he said that there are some people who pretend to apply rules strictly to differentiate what is sakral from what is profan but it is impossible. “Our feeling or the fact of being in a temple can determine the sacredness.” The same performance can be sakral or profan according to its function. In any case it is impossible to make a fixed set of rules, everything is flexible. In contrast, I Kadek Suardana supported the opposition against the rejang dewa. He is aware that I Made Banden is not the one who created the classification; rather he is the one who spread it. But because of his important role in the diffusion of the classification he should have been a good example and respected it.

29 At the time of the interview, head of the Taman Budaya. Currently head of Dinas Kebudayaan
30 Informal conversations and interview 11-03-2002 with Kadek Suardana musician, choreographer, theatre director and co-founder of Yayasan Arti (together with Ulf Gud expatriet choreographer from Sweden and I Dewa Palguna, then lecturer at Udayana University and Member of DPR RI)
Why was this “protest” against the use of rejang dewa, a sacred dance, at Prambanan, performed in honour of the President so intense? It might be understood as an effort to protect Balinese Hinduism from further Indonesianisation. What happened at the Prambanan temple is not different from what happens at the Besakih temple, the mother temple in Bali, on the occasion of big ceremonies. Again, in the past, as in the present, Indonesian authorities, including the President, have attended the ceremonies. It has been a way to officially confirm Balinese Hinduism as one of the National Religions. At the Prambanan temple it was considered sacrilegious to perform the rejang dewa in honour of the President attending the ceremony. What we might see instead is that on that occasion the President, by his presence, gave recognition, in front of everybody, to Balinese Hinduism as an official national religion (Indonesian Hinduism), crossing regional borders. It may be only a coincidence, but the one who criticised Bandem’s action, Ngurah Bagus, is one of the first Balinese intellectuals researching, since the 60s, the role of the Dutch colonization and of tourism in Bali, and who maintained a certain intellectual-critical independence during the New Order period. We cannot be sure about this, but we can understand his strong reaction against the perpetuation of New Order values through the use of language “produced” by the cultural policy of the New Order.

Another interesting aspect of this debate is the opposing attitudes of the participants. On the one hand, Bandem openly deconstructs the process of construction of a sacred dance; on the other, his critics desire to establish clearer boundaries to identify sacred dance. The Balinese passion for discussions and seminars led both parties to call for a new seminar on sacred and profane arts. This seminar, organised like the previous one by Listibya, was held on December 20-21, 2002 in Denpasar with the title Semiloka Seni Sakral (Seminar on Sacred Arts), and the specific topic Seni Sakral Dalam Dimensi Masyarakat Multicultural (Sacred Art in a Multicultural Society Dimension).
The debate continues: a new seminar on sacred art

The focus of the December 2002 Seminar, *Semiloka Seni Sakral*, was not only on dance but on all forms of arts. The Governor of Bali, Dewa Beratha, in his opening speech, mentioned the current global era in which Bali is living, as well the Bali bombing of 12 October 2002. In the conclusion he stated that he hoped that the seminar would deepen the concept of sacred art and locate it within the tourist Bali, and then he warned:

... *don’t deceive and adopt foreign cultures that do not conform with the values of the culture of Balinese society, and let’s be aware all together of the sacred arts that belong to us as part of the culture, which carry the values of the ancestors and as such reinforce the rightness of Bali as a small island whose religion and culture are one breath.* (Laporan Hasil Semiloka Seni Sakral 2002: 5).

To reinforce Balinese culture based on religion, the Balinese Hindu religion is the ultimate message. The speakers of the seminar adopted this message, often introducing the concept of art as intimately linked to religion. But the eight speakers covering topics such as architecture, the visual arts, the performing arts, religion and tourism took basically two different positions in regard to the concept of sacred. Some affirmed that sacredness depends on the context, while others considered sacredness as dependent on the form of the object (specific religious symbols, dresses, shape of sacred places and so on).

More specifically, for example, I Gusti Made Putra (architecture) says that the shape of a building doesn’t ensure its sacredness; rather a process of sacralization (through a purification ritual) determines sacredness. Representatives of the visual arts from the University Udayana (Nyoman Sukaya and Tjak Udiana) state that sacred art is a work for ceremonial purposes whose  

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31... *jangan terkecoh dan mengadopsi budaya dari luar yang tidak selaras dengan nilai-nilai budaya masyarakat Bali, dan marilah kita pahami bersama tentang seni sakral yang kita miliki sebagai aset budaya yang memiliki nilai-nilai luhur dan justru memperkuat kebenaran Bali sebagai pulau kecil yang antara agama dan budaya menjadi satu nafas. Proceedings Listibya, was held on December 20-21, 2002 in Denpasar with the title Semiloka Seni Sakral, Seminar on Sacred Arts with the topic Seni Sakral Dalam Dimensi Masyarakat Multicultural.*

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creation process is accompanied by rituals. IB Gde Yudha Triguna and IB Gunada from the Hindu Indonesia University say that considering something sacred or profane is in the mind of the people participating (rather than in external aspects). I Wayan Rai and I Nyoman Sedana from ISI Denapasar clearly say that sacred depends on the context and not on the object; one dance may be considered sacred in one village, in another it is considered as entertainment.

With a totally opposite point of view is the head of DPRD Propinsi Bali, who among other things proposes fines to control the use of seni sacral out of context. G Made Ngurah (Kekanwill, Depag Prop Bali) makes a list of sacred objects and asks for a better awareness of the religious symbols already employed in religious practice, emphasizing the inaccuracy of Bali Hindu people in their use. Furthermore he does not agree with the use of religious symbols and names out of context, such as household items in the shape of sacred spaces or commercial products using divinities’ names. Gusti Gde Goda, writing on ceremonial items, has a similar approach. He appeals for strict rules to distinguish what is sacred from what is not. He advocates a less tolerant approach towards those in Bali who, not being Hindu, carry out Balinese Hindu ceremonies wearing Balinese traditional dresses. He warns that Bali cannot be sold to the tourist industry: Bali is not for tourism; rather, tourism is for Bali. In Goda’s paper the concept of Balinese culture based on religion becomes very strong and he continuously warns about the danger of losing Balineseness. Bali needs to be protected, he often says. Also he uses a term, ajeg that came to be used very frequently and prominently in the following months.

Goda stated that for the sake of making Bali ajeg (making Bali erect, standing on its own feet) there is no need to search for justifications for stopping the community destroying religious symbols for the sake of money.\textsuperscript{32} (Laporan Hasil Semiloka Seni Sakral 2002: irregular page number).

\textsuperscript{32}Karena itu penulis berpendapat demi keajegan Bali tidaklah perlu mencari-cari alasan pembenar agar jangan terkesan umat melacurkan simbul-simbul agama demi uang.
And in his conclusion he proposed:

a) Hindu people, let's all together maintain the preservation of Balinese cultural art through traditional Balinese Hinduism.

b) Let us avoid prostitution of sacred religious symbols for the sake of making ajeg the taksu (the vital power) of the island of Bali.33 (Laporan Hasil Semiloka Seni Sakral 2002: irregular page number).

On the one hand, a group of speakers proposes a flexible concept of sacred which considers the place, time and people related to it; on the other hand another group of speakers proposes a fixed set of rules determining the sacred art that has to be saved from exploitation and which will save the Balinese spirit. These opposing views were given expression in an intense debate, which arose from Nyoman Sedana’s34 presentation, as he described to me during an interview in July 2003. Sedana was asked to represent ISI Denpasar to talk about the concept of sacred in the performing arts. He explained that, while for him sacredness depends on the context of the performance, others insisted that the sacred connotation depends on the shape/form. He referred to “someone powerful” (he did not mention who the person was) who wanted to convince him that in Bali there are objects and forms that are inherently sacred such as the Ongkara and Mount Meru.35 He was accused of not being born in Bali, of not understanding the basic Balinese icons. He actually has a thorough knowledge of Balinese symbols, but understands them in a deeper way. He cited the example of someone using the shape of Meru as a bathroom item. In that case the symbol, the Mount Meru, cannot be considered sacred. In his powerful description of the debate, he pointed out several times that because he was the youngest participant, he was treated as someone who still had to learn more about Bali. But he had consulted with his senior colleagues and performers in

33 a) Marilah kita umat Hindu secara bersama-sama mempertahankan kelestarian seni budaya Bali melalui tradisi agama Hindu cara Bali.


villages in the preparation of his presentation, and had found that they agreed with him, especially about the fact that *sakral* is a foreign word coming from European Middle Ages. Nevertheless those opposing him in the discussion were very strong in their position.\(^\text{36}\)

I went on to ask his opinion regarding this opposition to him, and in a mixture of English and Indonesian he replied that the aim of his main opponents was to establish a clear set of symbols to recognise formally, without any possibility of mistake, the sacredness of Bali (or the Balinese religion) in order to distinguish it from Islam, Catholicism or other Christian religions. Sedana explained:

*Every religious man “wants to exist”, wishes to be prominent that’s why he wants to display its icons; surely he wants to build a church, a mosque, a temple, that’s why religion is displayed.*\(^\text{37}\)

He emphasised the necessity of a religion not based on imposed icons, as well as the necessity for a proper understanding of material culture.

*Material culture without the idea, the philosophical concept is not suitable.*\(^\text{38}\)


\(^{37}\)...siap orang religion itu want to exist, ingin menonjol, oleh karena itu yang ingin ditonjolkan ikon-ikonnya, memang dia ingin bikin gereja, bikin masjid, bikin pura, oleh karena itu agama yang ditonjolkan. Interview with I Nyoman Sedana, 23-07-2003.

Final decisions of the new seminar

An examination of the final decisions of the seminar reveals that this vigorous debate seems to have resulted in a victory for those who proposed a contextualizing approach in the definition of sacred. The final decision of the seminar contains four main points:

1) *Sakral* was identified as a ritual art commonly understood as wali with the characteristics of suci, pingit and tenget (clean, pure).

2) This art of the sacred has to be employed on the occasion of rituals and reinforced by religious symbols.

3) The sacredness of the symbols depends on the belief of the local inhabitants. Those objects that have undergone a purification/sacralisation process can be used in the place and time according to the custom of the local inhabitants.

4) Sakral art in Bali is various and changes according to the custom and ideas of the local inhabitants. (*Laporan Hasil Semiloka Seni Sakral 2002*: irregular page number)

However, this is just what is printed in the seminar's proceedings. On paper a very flexible approach prevails, but in the months after the seminar the need for fixing rules and setting boundaries between religions gradually became the reality. Slogans like those proposed in Goda's paper invaded the media and political speeches, and consequently became part of topeng performances as well.

As cited earlier, these slogans were:

a) Hindu people let's all together maintain the preservation of Balinese cultural art through traditional Balinese Hinduism.

b) Let us avoid prostitution of sacred religious symbols for the sake of making ajeg the taksu (the vital power) of the island of Bali.
Ajeg Bali has become another focus in the debate, and the call to save Bali the dominant discourse in the media. The search for an original Bali arose in a discourse first invented by the colonizers, then adopted at an official level and gradually incorporated into local, everyday practice.

On the one hand, in Bali the Balinese intelligentsia created a sanitised, sacred domain serving the aim of a national religion, creating thereby a non-sacred domain as well. On the other hand, local discourse and practice has resisted this sanitised sacralization, but adopted the concept of sacralization in order to carry an old-new discourse of Balineseness. Topeng was not defined as sacred by the 1971 Seminar Seni Sacral dan Provan Bidang Tari (its practice perhaps too indigenous?) but because it became representative of an “original” Balinese cultural identity, it was made sacred within the Balinese discourse and practice. The fear of the loss of Balinese culture seems to have created, on the one hand a sacred domain that needs to be defended and nurtured at any cost, and on the other hand, a non-sacred domain that has been providing space for new non-traditional expressions. The sacred domain on the one hand rises from the discourse on Balineseness, based on religion, a reinvented Hinduism. This can be reinforced by those traditional performances that are considered sacred, such as topeng Sidhakarya. While the non-sacred domain does not support the media-imposed discourse, it can be critical and hosts new types of performances, the so called moderen, kontemporer or purely popular entertainment. The next chapter considers the dynamics of the renewed discourse on Balineseness which aims to “restore” a Balinese identity based on religious-cosmological principles: ajeg Bali.
CHAPTER III

Post-Bomb discourse: harmony as resistance?¹

The previous chapter explored how "art", and in particular the performing arts and tari topeng, have contributed to the discourse defining "Balinese-ness". A recurrent theme from colonial to post-colonial times has been to defend Bali from external "bad influences". These bad influences have been increasingly described as a threat to Balinese culture.

This chapter will consider the motif "to protect Bali from outside bad influences" in recent years, from 2003-2006, in a period often described as "post-bomb". In particular it will explore how a new term, "ajeg Bali", has become part of the discourse on culture. The mass media have played a prominent role in the promotion of this discourse. Topeng, in its traditional function as an information medium, has also been used explicitly as a promotional tool.²

The first part of the chapter will explore the way ajeg is used and interpreted, and how this term, along with related concepts, is becoming part of a widespread discourse. The second part will explore in what ways topeng performances engage with this discourse. Three performances serve as examples, two

¹Part of the material of this chapter has been used in an article co-published with Pamela Allen (Allen and Palermo 2005). Here I limit the use of the data to that which I personally collected and wrote unless otherwise indicated.
²Topeng, beside its strictly religious function, is perceived as an information medium able to update the audience on the latest religious interpretation and practice as well promoting a health program or a political candidate, depending on the performer’s sponsor.
organised on the occasion of official events, and one held during a religious ceremony.

Ajeg Bali

The tragedy of the bombings on 12 October 2002 in Kuta, which killed many Balinese as well as Western tourists, and devastated the all-important tourist industry, has been an opportunity to consider past problems and potential future ones. The media at that time described Balinese reaction to the bombing as an important moment in time to reflect on themselves: they must have done something wrong to cause such a terrible thing, bringing destruction and imbalance! In this atmosphere of desperation and uncertainty for the future the only safe anchor becomes the past. Restoration of “traditional” values based on culture and religion will allow re-establishment of the harmonious order in which humans are “one” with the rest of the universe: a past of Hindu values.

In the previous chapter we saw how traditional values based on religion have been invoked at critical moments from colonial times through the period of Independence, the Sukarno Era and the New Order. The most recent discourse on culture however has taken on a new dimension. A new term has become predominant: ajeg. This term can be translated as “straight”, “undeviating”, but its meaning is not fixed. Its interpretation varies according to context because it has not been a common term in Bali. In fact I did not really notice widespread use of this term on a visit to Bali in February 2003, but in July and August of the same year it was impossible not to come across it, when reading the newspaper or watching local TV programmes or driving along the roads. The following

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3The term ajeg itself is also a mystery; Javanese recognise it but Balinese less so. At the beginning of the spread of the term in 2003 some Balinese suggested that the term could be understood if translated into Indonesian as lurus, which means “straight”, “undeviating”. It seems reasonable to interpret ajeg, to mean “to stand up straight”, on your own feet. In spite of its “mysterious” features ajeg appears in the Indonesian-English dictionary Echols and Shadily, (1994 [1982]) according to which ajeg or ajek means “steady, stable, constant”.

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exploration of the meanings and implications of ajeg begins with a review of the discussion in the media at this time, then moves on to other contexts.

**Bali Post and Bali TV**

The regional Bali Post Group comprising the Bali Post and Denpost newspapers, the Bali TV station and four radio stations (especially Radio Genta), has been the promoter of this "media propaganda". The concept of ajeg has been intimately associated with the Bali TV station, as an explicit aspect of its agenda since its inauguration in May 2002. On that occasion the governor of Bali I Dewa Beratha "urged his audience to *mengajegkan* Balinese *adat* and culture".\(^4\) Bali TV programs systematically introduced the concept of ajeg, supported by the Bali Post. In order to define and disseminate the concept of ajeg the Bali Post organised a series of discussions on strategies to strive for ajeg Bali, concerning different topics such as religion, tradition, economy, art and culture. The apex of those discussions was a conference/seminar on 1 August 2003 with the title: *Menuju Ajeg Bali* (Towards Ajeg Bali). The papers and discussions of the seminar were published in the Bali Post on 16 August 2003 on the occasion of its 55\(^{th}\) anniversary in a special edition, forty pages in length, and published in book form with the title *Ajeg Bali: Sebuah cita-cita* (Ajeg Bali: a goal/aspiration) in January 2004.

The first page of the special issue of Bali Post on 16 August confirms its ongoing commitment since 1948 to act as a *media perjuangan masyarakat Bali* a (medium for the struggles of the people of Bali). As a continuation of this commitment the newspaper organised the seminar "*Strategi Menuju Keajegan Bali*" (Strategy towards making Bali Ajeg). The explicit aim of the Bali Post is to be the media representative that together with citizens and government will improve Bali. The national dimension of the ajeg discourse is underlined in the

\(^4\) Quoted in Suryawan 2005 (prologue by Henk Schulte Nordholt): xix.
lead article: "Mewujudkan Cita-Cita Proklamasi". Ajeg Bali seems to embody the ideals of the proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia. The integrity of Balinese culture is a necessary aspect of the integrity of the Indonesian nation. The motif of the Indonesian constitution of 1945 is repeated and reinforced with a new language. However, the stress on a national culture, the product of the "peaks" of all regional cultures in their specificity, still recurs. Bali Post contributes to the maintenance of this discourse through its TV station; Bali TV. A major focus of the programming of this station is broadcasts of private ceremonies, paid for by the participants, and discussions on budaya (culture), adat (custom) and agama (religion) whose unity results in "the Balinese culture".

In this special number of Bali Post, there is an assumption that Bali is devastated by numerous economic and social problems related to religion, economy, environment, architecture and so on. The common way to address all these issues is to restore balance. All practical problems affecting the society are considered to be solvable through a better spiritual awareness. First of all, Balinese have forgotten themselves, their true nature, because of the economic and environmental exploitation of tourism. This exploitation is considered the main cause of the economic crisis that Bali is facing, particularly after the bomb. The solution lies in an economic master plan, whose reforms, above all, have to consider the fundamentals of Agama Hindu. In particular reforms have to consider the concept of Tri Hita Karana a principle which focuses on a balanced relation between humans and god, humans between each other and humans with nature. Reforms in the monetary and fiscal systems and in the legislative system must

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5 As I have shown in the previous chapter, Bali TV is a private TV station, with no public (governmental) financial support. Income, apart from advertisements, comes from all those private citizens who wish to have their own ceremonies, events and performances broadcast. The payment is considered as a free contribution to the TV station. This financial contribution is addressed as Dana Punia a generous contribution that is usually given to cover expenses for ceremonies or communal events. Bali TV has fixed the amount of the contributions. This system could easily surprise and attract negative judgments, nevertheless it allows Bali TV to broadcast new programs in contrast to the local public television station TVRI which has lost the usual public funding and broadcasts mainly old programs.

6 Tri Hita Karana regulates a balanced relation between three elements of Nature; God, humans and environment. These principles often mentioned in the discourse on ajeg Bali is considered fundamental by Wirya, "Diperlukan 'Masterplan' untuk Keajegan Ekonomi Bali" (a Master plan is needed to make ajeg Balinese economy), Bali Post, 16-09-2003:15.
ensure a balanced distribution of the income. Particular attention has to be dedicated to the small industries.

This is a recurrent topic in this thesis: traditional values based on Hindu philosophy are considered as solutions to restablising or creating order. The persistent theme is that a harmonious relationship between all the elements of the universe ensures the continuation of life. Humans are responsible for maintaining that harmony. The articles in the special number of *Bali Post* repeat this same concept applied to different topics: the articles underline imbalance in the environment, in the economy, in the administration of tourism, in agriculture and in building development. Being ajeg seems to lie in remembering one's responsibility to re-create the lost balance.

**Fear of the other**

Newcomers, specifically non-Balinese Indonesians, are described as a new source of disharmony, a potential cause of "cultural degradation" if they are not controlled. A strict control of these non-Hindu and non-Balinese is conducted through a special resident permit that they can obtain by payment. This is the *Kartu Identitas Penduduk Pendatang*; KIPP (Identity Card for New Inhabitants): a sort of visa for Indonesians within Indonesia, which identifies them as newcomers, distinguishing them from the original residents. Several articles

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8 Suana, "Rumah Susun tak Sesuai Filosofi Orang Bali", *Bali Post*, 16-08-2003: 23

9 Diria Arsana, "Memberdayakan Adat, Strategi Menekan Konflik Kependudukan", *Bali Post*, 16-08-2003: 26

10 At the time of the publication of this article in *Bali Post* (16-08-2003) this special identity card was coming into use. More recently, especially in Denpasar, the observation of this regulation is ensured by the local traditional guards, known as pecalang. These pecalang also patrol private residencies to make sure that everybody owns the new identity card or the so-called KTP (Kartu Tanda Penduduk) the ordinary Identity Card proving their residence. The pecalang can only enforce payment for a temporary residence permit but cannot arrest offenders. Suryawan (2005) speaks about the pecalang activity pointing out the authoritarian connotation of the ajeg discourse.
stress the decreased percentage of Balinese Hindus in the population, especially in Denpasar, accompanied by an increase in the number of Muslims, Protestants and Catholics. Such a noticeable number of articles (not only in the *Bali Post*) on the decrease of Hindu population is a sign of anxiety in the society.

*Bali Post* itself gives voice to different views on this issue. On 2 January 2003 it published an article reporting a speech of the Mayor of Denpasar Puspayoga on New Year’s Eve; “Rapatkan Barisan Menuju Bali Ajeg” (Gather the troops to Make Bali Ajeg).11 He stressed that Bali can be ajeg not despite the new comers, but thanks to the new comers. Denpasar, with diverse ethnicities, is presented as the reflection of the National Unity in Diversity. But in the 16 August 2003 special issue we read the words of the regent (Bupati) of Jembrana, arguing the need for special financial support for the Jembrana regency, because it is the area suffering most from mass immigration from Java. This causes an increase in theft and all kinds of illegal activities carried out by these immigrants attracted by the relative prosperity of Bali.12

The articles reporting the decrease of the Hindu population in Bali reflect differing attitudes. Some support the regulation for non-Balinese to have identity cards, not only for Denpasar but for the whole region. Others articles opt for the solution we have seen for the other issues: Hindu teachings are considered the solution to the new problem, but it is necessary to translate and rationalise the Hindu principles. There is also a call for a more spiritual Hinduism, a call to not use ceremonies as lavish, extravagant festivals. Agama with adat and budaya, are considered to be the weapons with which to face outsiders within Bali.

What we see in these articles is reminiscent of slogans widely promoted in New Order times such as *melestarikan, membina, dan mengembangkan kebudayaan*

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Bali (protect, perpetuate and develop Balinese culture). In order to develop Bali it has to be protected (from external attacks) and culture should be perpetuated (culture based on adat and agama, custom and religion). Most of the articles propose a balanced, harmonious and peaceful solution reachable through traditional values, even if those values are still defined as weapons. Reaching this harmony seems to define the quality of ajeg. A similar concept was expressed by the Bali Post slogan used before ajeg, Jaga Bali, protect Bali. This slogan was associated with the Bali Post logo in promotional signs and on the occasions of activities organised by Bali Post, but the intensity of the ajeg campaign is different.

The question is whether there is anything special, different from the old discourse, or whether the term ajeg is actually used with the same connotations of the “old” lestari or jaga. It seems that the official discourse promoted by Bali Post, a nationally oriented paper, aims to bring peace. Ajeg Bali does not try to arouse anti-Muslim feeling, neither is it chauvinistically Balinese, otherwise it would look separatist. Nevertheless the discourse in itself, because it embodies wide possibilities of interpretation, leads in other multiple directions. We have seen in the previous chapter that the theme of protecting Balinese culture was in reference to protection from bad influences coming from overseas: dance had to be protected from tourism. The new discourse does not refer so much to this sort of external danger (foreign tourism and globalisation), rather it focuses more on the danger coming from within Indonesia.

Specifically it refers to the danger presented by people who, facing economical and political crisis especially after 1998, left their homes in search of the more secure conditions that Bali offered. These newcomers were both rich people who could buy land and business, and people in very deprived circumstances seeking jobs in the urban and tourist areas of the island. The waves of immigrants, especially from 1998, and the bombings aroused an intense sense of danger for certain Balinese Hindus. Their voices, finding a space in the ajeg discourse, often express extreme hostility against the non-Hindu newcomers. The poet and writer
Tan Lioe emphasised that these new comers were actually refugees that were part of a national political problem. They were Chinese and the poor population escaping from the violent riots of 1998. But when they arrived in Bali, attracted by the relatively safer conditions, instead of receiving assistance from the national government, they were treated as a danger, as a problem for the local population.\textsuperscript{13} When ajeg discourse is expressed in the \textit{Bali Post} it is modified by a sense of nationalism, but outside this media the term is absolutely out of control. Ajeg can either have a nostalgic connotation of returning to the historical past of Balinese kingdoms or it can have more violent, aggressive connotations. Other voices may raise the same issues without using the term ajeg, but are clearly part of the same discourse.

Other media, other voices

The potential multiple connotations of the term ajeg include a strong reference to continuity with the past, considered as source of true, pure culture. The articles with this perspective, mainly found in \textit{Bali Post}, refer to the past with nostalgia, referring to the golden times when Bali was a real paradise, and argue that making Bali ajeg implies a return to those times. This sort of discourse is not favourably received by everyone. Some opposition comes from a recognition of the impracticability of introducing elements from the past, while others claim that there is an underlying agenda for promoting "old Bali" to the tourist market.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Interview with Tan Lioe, 01-11-2004.}

\textsuperscript{14}From conversations with several Balinese a sense of discomfort is evident from this sort of interpretation. First of all it is not clear which past should be considered the reference point of the original Balinese culture; the past of pre-Hindu Bali Aga villages, or the past of the Majapahit kingdom. Going back to the past also implies "no" to use of cement in house building, "no" to gas for cooking, "no" to hygienic services. Do people in Bali want to go back to that past? Preservation is not practical. This is how some people perceive the idea of the consistent resort to the past to rescue the present.
This uncomfortable feeling regarding the discourse on ajeg is expressed in the Hindu magazine *Sarad*. A 2003 article in *Sarad*\(^5\) denounces the massive construction and restoration of temples done in the name of *keajegan budaya* (making the culture ajeg) which aims to transform those places, those adat places, into tourist objects and facilitate an income for the regency, without regard to the inhabitants. The article asserts that the economic benefit should go to the adat community rather than to the government or the private sector.

The same issue of *Sarad* provides multiple voices on the discourse of Balinese culture raised during a seminar (another seminar!), organised by the local branch of the Indonesian National Student Movement (Dewan Pimpinan Cabang Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasional Indonesia) on the future of Bali.\(^6\) An article reviewing the seminar summarises the statements made there by public personages such as Luh Ketut Suryani, Ida Bagus Agastia, I Wayan Bawa and I Dewa Gede Palguna. The word ajeg is not explicitly mentioned, but the views expressed mirror those encountered in the ajeg debate. The article summarising the seminar points out a new problem that Balinese are facing: while in the past the Balinese population was homogeneously Hindu, nowadays more religions are represented. The fear of outsiders within Balinese territory recurs in the article.

During this seminar an analysis of this problem was presented by the psychiatrist Luh Ketut Suryani. She considers this phenomenon to be the consequence of globalisation. While in the past Balinese felt that they could trust each other, because they were sure that each individual believed in the law of karma, nowadays, in the era of globalisation, Balinese have to interrelate with people coming from different ethnic groups, religions and cultures. The law of karma is substituted by the law of jungle. Suryani hopes that Balinese will not lose their direction (*arah*) in the jungle of globalisation. Suryani conveys an idealistic image

\(^{15}\) *Sarad*, April 2003 No. 37, pp 9-10.
of the Balinese as pure and honest people, thanks to their religious values, who should at all cost avoid contamination by others.

Another contributor, Ida Bagus Agastia (a former member of Parisada Hindu Dharma), is not as uncompromising as Suryani about the invigoration of Balinese religious values while Prof. Wayan Bawa (lecturer in Indonesian language at the Udayana University-Denpasar) finds the solution in the culture. He thinks that Bali should have the right leader, able to govern Bali based on culture, with a nationalist spirit and the capability to "go international". In the same article, however, we find a different voice that distances itself from the ones described above. I Dewa Gede Palguna (an expert in international politics and at that time member of the the provincincial parliament) considers the cultural approach inadequate. In order to achieve the real development of Bali, all the regencies should stop competing and start co-operating under the guidance of the governor. Clearly Dewa Palguna is more politically oriented in his concern with the recent otonomi daerah law (regional autonomy) and does not follow the recurrent pattern of the discourse.\(^\text{17}\)

Dewa Palguna's kind of opposition is unusual. What we usually see is a discourse based on cultural self protection, the necessity of being more Balinese than ever through traditional values. This is expressed either in the old discourse on culture or the new one where the "ajeg discourse" is predominant. The question is whether the authors of the more recent crusade against the external "influences" have actually changed attitude compared to the past. "Stand on your own feet" can also mean "stand and be ready to fight for your own culture". Degung Santikarma is a Balinese anthropologist currently working on violence in Bali, who is trying to interpret this new aspect of the discourse on culture. Santikarma finds in the term ajeg a specific aggressive, masculine and militaristic connotation. According to him, the term has been promoted by the conservative Bali Post with the support of Bali TV using the terrible event of the Bali bombing "to erect new boundaries between cultures and religions and to spark new

\(^{17}\text{Sarad, 37 April 2003: 10-11.}\)
fundamentalism as a response to fundamentalisms elsewhere in Indonesia and around the world".18

In his article published in English in Latitudes in November, 2003, Santikarma proposes “erect” as the only translation of ajeg. He is more expansive in interpreting ajeg in his Indonesian language version of the same article published in Kompas in December, 2003 kokoh, tegak, tegar, kekal, kencang, kuat dan stabil —“strong, erect, rigid ever lasting, tight, forceful and stable”-.19 While his English article stresses the masculine/macho and fundamentalist connotations of ajeg, in the article in Indonesian he also emphasises the local political and economic aspects of the ajeg discourse. He asserts that this discourse created by bureaucrats and media aims to legitimise the power of the traditional elites (Brahmans, aristocrats etc) through the promotion of the traditional culture and language based on Hindu traditions, and through the elimination of foreign competitors who have invested in the island for many years.

The content of these two articles is not very different. However in the English version we notice a denunciation of Hindu fundamentalism indicating a tension between Hindu and Muslim, while in the Kompas article, Santikarma focuses more on economic and political power dynamics. The difference may be due to the fact that when writing for Kompas, a national Catholic newspaper, Santikarma tries to avoid mentioning religious issues (and so does not show that Balinese are actually anti Muslim). Similarly the discourses on culture in the Bali Post are relatively restrained. There are other channels though, such as the Internet, where authors of discussions can remain anonymous, and where we can find an unrestrained exchange of opinions.

The internet and informal discourse

By cruising the internet it is possible to discover significant dialogues on ajeg Bali characterised by a different atmosphere from the one created by Bali Post. A message posted on 18 November 2003 to the internet discussion forum titled “Umat Hindu Bali BANGKITLAH” (Hindu Balinese ARISE) expresses the concern that Bali is already being dominated by Islam. One of the discussants has a conspiracy theory that the Muslim immigrants are sent to Bali in order to increase the number of Muslims on the island. When they marry Balinese they succeed in converting them to Islam, whereas Balinese fail to convert their Muslim consorts to Hinduism. Muslims do not eat in Balinese food stalls. Balinese should do the same. Balinese should fight Muslims with the same weapons, including making it difficult to build new mosques, just like Muslims do with Hindus in Yogyakarta. At the conclusion of his message he incites Balinese to be ajeg in order to avoid Bali becoming an Islamic territory: “Sekarang tergantung kita, ingin menjadi daerah Islam atau Bali tetap ajeg” (Now it’s up to us, whether we want to become an Islamic region or to still be ajeg Bali). Furthermore he suggests spreading his message to Hindu Balinese or “diamkan saja, acuh tak acuh tetapi pasti kita akan disesalkan oleh anak cucu kita kelak” (remain silent, indifferent, but our grandchildren will curse us for it).

Responses to this message were diverse. There was one who agreed that Bali had to be “tegas dengan virus muslim” (vigilant about the Muslim virus) (19-11-2003). Tegas, according to Santikarma is one of the meanings of ajeg. Someone else (a Muslim) calmed the atmosphere, speaking of universal teaching of religions based on love, cinta kasih (27-11-2003). In reply the same day a Balinese Hindu disagreed saying that he was subject to work discrimination for being Balinese Hindu. Later, on 11-12-2003 someone else was not surprised by the fact that the bomb was placed in Bali, a place where Australian tourists go

20 www.stormpages.com/kebenaran2/wwwboard/387.html
naked like *babi* (pigs) because they imitate the habit of the natives. He also predicted more bombs until the island will vanish into the sea.\footnote{This aggressive attitude becomes manifest during private conversations and it often results in anger and a strong sense of competition. After the first Bali Bombings I heard of people from West Java being glad of the bombs as a punishment for Balinese who have too much pride and consider themselves so special and different. After the 2004 tsunami in Aceh some Balinese were convinced that the disaster was a punishment for the people of the area from which the bombers originated. The refined and gentle public attitude disappears in unofficial conversations.}

In the light of these statements we can understand Santikarma's reference to the aggressive connotations of the term *ajeg*. It seems that he sees only one discourse, the violent one and he indicates the *Bali Post* as the instigator of this aggressive mood. A similar point of view comes from Ngurah Suryawan (2004 and 2005) who, drawing upon the work of Robinson (1995), links the discourse of *ajeg* to a "tradition" of violence in Bali which has been obscured through the years in order to provide an image of Bali as paradise based on culture, art and religion.

Those who oppose the *ajeg* discourse as a violent one all indicate the *Bali Post* as the instigator of this aggressive mood that penetrates into the daily life of the villages and cities. However, there is some evidence that *Bali Post* seems to try, although not always successfully, to bring peace.

**Is the *Bali Post* aiming for harmony?**

*Bali Post* itself in fact gives warnings about fundamentalism and provides precise boundaries to limit the potential explosion caused by the bomb for those who believe that Bali was targeted, and for those Balinese who felt themselves targetted. Some *Bali Post* articles explicitly condemn fundamentalism and express the necessity to fight it through the restoration of "traditional" principles (based on agama and adat). Once again "traditional" principles are seen as a solution to recently developed problems in Balinese society and following them does not mean closing Bali off from the rest of the world. In the 16 August 2003
special edition of the *Bali Post* there is a small section summarising the strategy for achieving ajeg Bali in eleven points. Most of these points claim the necessity of following religious principles, which have to be concretely lived in the daily life of each Balinese. It is also hoped to reduce controversy within the body of Parisada Hindu Dharma. The last point says:

In order to achieve ajeg Bali it is necessary to avoid radical-primordial attitudes and self exclusiveness thereby creating hope fully the condition of: “inside” we are strong, “outside” we are tolerant.\(^\text{22}\)

We can interpret this last point as an appeal to avoid fundamentalist attitudes and to include consideration of the outside world. This appeal could be also interpreted as an effort to re-establish order on Bali, order which has in the past created its image of a safe place, a basic element to attract investors and tourists on which the Balinese economy depends.

The matter seems to lie in the precarious balance between inside Bali/outside Bali or better relations between Bali Hindu and non Bali Hindu within Bali. The outsiders are enemies that must be controlled. Kadek Suardana, closely connected the massive arrival of immigrants with the rise in the concept of ajeg Bali. Indeed, he maintained that ajeg Bali originated with this arrival. He also added that if people are honest they would be open about the fact that their main anxieties are about immigrants. This voice, though “unofficial” and not approved publicly, is significant.\(^\text{23}\) The official national oriented discourse does not openly support the necessity for controlling outsiders or immigrants with force.

The *Bali Post* launched a slogan that has taken different forms. As the *Bali Post* journalist and poet Mas Ruscitadewi acknowledged the main aim of ajeg is harmony. Nevertheless such “journalistic slogans”, easy to remember, can be


\(^{23}\)Interview with I Kadek Suardana, 02-11-04.
interpreted in different ways, with the risk of a rise in fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{24} As Suryawan demonstrates it happens at local level through the "traditional" corps of vigilantes, the \textit{pecalang}.\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{Bali Post} journalists may be concerned about the result of such a campaign, and they may not totally approve certain aspects of it. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that from the beginning the \textit{Bali Post} group interacted with the population at a discourse level and through local ajeg Bali competitions and performances with the goal of inculcating a sense of ajeg. More recently though, the \textit{Bali Post} has made more concrete efforts towards this goal by becoming the main sponsor of local movements explicitly aiming to control the presence of Muslims on the island. Between 2004 and 2005 several movements have been created favouring sweeping of immigrants and against terrorism,\textsuperscript{26} but other less explicitly aggressive movements with similar aims were also funded. In order to support local Balinese workers in competition with Javanese immigrants (mainly street food sellers) the \textit{Bali Post} funded the \textit{Koperasi Krama Bali} (Hindu Balinese Citizens’ Cooperative).

This project was inspired by a sentence that the star of Bali TV, the High Priest Ida Pedanda Made Gunung, said during his program: "The Balinese people sell their land so they can buy a bowl of \textit{bakso}, whereas outsiders sell \textit{bakso} so they can buy land in Bali". This assessment struck Balinese powerfully. People often repeated it and it has been mentioned several times during performances. Bakso is a meal based on meat balls sold mainly by Javanese on the streets. It is a very popular snack for Balinese, but it is a Muslim meal made by Muslims. In the new

\textsuperscript{24}Interview with Mas Ruscitadewi, 02-11-04.
\textsuperscript{25}Suryawan 2005 talks extensively about the connection between the tradition of violence in Bali, traditional vigilantes and their role in carrying out the most extreme aspects of the ajeg discourse such as the raids of non-registered newcomers.
\textsuperscript{26}For example KMHDI: Kesatuan Mahasiswa Hindu Dharma Indonesia ("Indonesian Hindu Students Association")
FPMHD: Forum Persaudaraan Mahasiswa Hindu Dharma ("Hindu Students Fraternity Forum")
FIMKHD: Forum Intelektual Muda Hindu Dharma ("Hindu Young Intellectuals Forum"). And also Gerakan anti Teroris "Anti-terrorist movement") developed after the 2005 bombings, by young Hindu males, demanding the execution of Amrozi et.al. I am indebted to Pamela Allen for providing an organised list of those movements.
atmosphere a Balinese bakso had to be invented; Bakso Babi or bakso ajeg based on pork. *Bali Post* supported the training of the new sellers of bakso as well as other newly invented popular Javanese meat dishes like soto ajeg and sate ajeg, and offered loans to set up the food stalls. Furthermore food scandals regarding Muslim food were carefully highlighted by the press to make Balinese trust only Balinese food made by Balinese.

This is not the way in which ajeg has been officially promoted. Since the beginning the ajeg slogan has been associated with harmonious images connoting traditional Bali. One of the recurrent images employed by *Bali Post* is Balinese dance, especially topeng, promoting the long-accepted connection between culture and the arts, in particular performance, in Bali. The *Bali Post* has promoted this connection in general, not just in the ajeg campaign. In fact one of the danced masks of topeng dance drama, topeng tua, the old man, is used by *Bali Post* as its logo. It can be found on the covers of several books published by *Bali Post*, included the book on ajeg Bali. The image of this mask is often used in the Bali TV adverts, on the *Bali Post* carry bags and it cannot be missed entering the main lobby of the *Bali Post* headquarters: on the left side an enormous topeng tua mask fills up the wall. The message was, I believe, that *Bali Post* has an educative role for the people in Bali just like topeng.

Keeping this opinion to myself I discussed the spread of the use of the topeng tua image in *Bali Post* activities with I Wayan Madra Aryasa who worked for more than 30 years at the Listibya.\(^2\) He believes that the image of topeng tua for the *Bali Post* Group is a promotional tool: they want to run the business through the arts. In fact the TV stations (as well as the radio stations) regularly host competitions of Balinese traditional recital, reading and singing. These competitions aim to preserve traditional arts by encouraging especially young children to participate. But there is a fee to participate in these competitions. Aryasa after calculating Bali TV's probable income of for each competition agreed that with the ajeg campaign Bali TV has taken over Listibya's task of preserving

\(^2\)Interview with I Wayan Madra Aryasa, 02-11-2004.
and developing the arts in Bali. Nevertheless while Bali TV aims for economic gain, Listibya has never made any economic profit. Of course disappointment at the closure of Listibya caused by lack of funding lay beneath Aryasa’s words, but an examination of my conversation with Satria Naradha, leader of the *Bali Post* Group, might be seen to confirm Aryasa’s assessment.

Multiple meanings of ajeg: interviewing the leader of the *Bali Post* group

I had never met Satria Naradha, head of the *Bali Post Group* before the interview on 23 October 2004. This was one of the few interviews with someone who didn’t know me at all. I just telephoned him and he welcomed me very cordially at the *Bali Post* headquarters. Seeing again on the wall of the reception hall that big mask of topeng complete with head dress and framed like a huge painting made me change the plan of my interview. Instead of asking about ajeg Bali I asked about that mask and all the topeng tua masks used throughout the *Bali Post* media. Naradha told me that the same big mask is also displayed in their office in Jakarta. It is really like the *Bali Post* logo, but he had never thought about why they use it. He said that because I asked, he would consider the question. He thought that topeng and *Bali Post* share a common function: their aim is not business, but rather to provide people with ideals.

Naradha also talked about another mask, the mask of Gajah Mada, a copy of the original mask of Blahbatuh  

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28 Satria Naradha is leader of the *Bali Post* group and son of I Ketut Nadha, the founder of what later became the *Bali Post*. Ketut Nadha founded the newspaper *Suara Indonesia* in 1948, which changed its name to *Suluh Indonesia* in 1965 and *Suluh Marhaem* in 1966, and became *Bali Post* in 1972.

29 Sebelumnya itu adalah suatu keseharian kita bahwa kita ini mengemban suatu tugas, suatu misi yang kita dapat transfer nilai-nilai makna itu dari simbol-simbol yang kita dapatkan dari budaya topeng, dari perwatakan topeng itu dimana kita melihat bahwa peran media ini mengemban, mengemong fungsi-fungsi yang hampir sama dengan perwatakan topeng yang kita taruh, yang ada di mana-mana itu karena lembaga kita ini berdirinya, eksistensi berdirinya oleh pendiri kita ini bukan untuk bisnis, bukan berorientasi bisnis tapi ada misi idealisme untuk memberikan suatu peran yang besar dalam kehidupan masyarakat di Bali. Interview with Satria Naradha, 24-10-2004.
which is kept at the Bali TV as symbol of “unity”. He stressed the importance of topeng for its credibility: topeng is a tool to revitalise the old values, those that are relevant nowadays to be precise. When it is performed properly people believe in the mask wearer and in what he says. The important value that needed to be revitalized is precisely the value advocated by Gajah Mada who unified the Indonesian archipelago.

Naradha used the word ajeg several times spontaneously. I asked him about the origin of the idea of Ajeg Bali. He explained that it had always been part of his prayers during the period of his studies in Surabaya to find a way to make Bali Ajeg. I persevered hoping for a more explicit answer. As I listened to Naradha I recalled the Denpasar urban legend about the Balinese university student who proposed the Ajeg campaign to the *Bali Post* Group. This student, returning home for a holiday after many years in Jakarta, found Bali so changed that he felt he had to do something to stop the degradation: a cultural campaign was the solution. This student wanted to have the Bali of his childhood memories, his “imagined” Bali. This sort of romantic attitude could well be compared with the mindset of the Dutch colonisers who invented Bali as the living museum of Hindu India. But did this student really exist? Was this legend based on true fact? I didn’t dare to confront Naradha with a question about this. He connected the origin of ajeg Bali to his period in Surabaya when he was far from Bali, so the legendary Jakarta student was not so different from Naradha anyway.

After talking about the inspirational period at the Surabaya college Naradha started to introduce the discourse on “Balance” and “Harmony” and the necessity of including all the inhabitants of Bali in the process; he emphasised the “holistik” connotation of ajeg. Then he explained how he had already set up a TV station in Lombok with the intention of bringing the concept of ajeg to Yogyakarta and in Bandung. His aim was *menajegan Indonesia* (make Indonesia ajeg) through his

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30 The former president Suharto kept the original mask for years, and it is said that he lost his power when he gave it back to Bali. Mask started to shake indicating it wished to be returned to Bali. Suharto returned it following advice of spiritual teacher and after that lost his power.
TV stations. Unfortunately my video camera broke down, but he was happy to keep chatting and explaining about his plans. From that moment on his conversation became expansive: he talked about plans for new TV stations all round Indonesia: all Nusantara had to become ajeg.

Henk Schulte Nordholt came across Naradha’s complex attitude regarding ajeg in even more extreme terms. In the prologue to Suryawan 2005 Schulte Nordholt reports that Naradha “talked about Ajeg Bali in terms of ‘cultural renaissance’, but when we asked him what this meant in practice he immediately put the sweeping out of migrants on the top of the agenda” (Suryawan 2005: xxiii). Suryawan was assisting Schulte Nordholt during that interview with Naradha. During a conversation in December 2005 Suryawan explained to me the dynamic of that reply. Naradha’s statement about sweeping was in answer to a direct question from Suryawan and the answer was directed to him rather than Schulte Nordholt. For a moment it was like a conversation between Balinese.

From these two examples it seems that for a video-camera and an official interview Ajeg Bali is harmony, inclusiveness, cultural renaissance. When the video-camera is off, when foreign ears are not listening, ajeg Bali connotation is business/political expansion. In official contexts balance and harmony are used as inclusive terms considering Bali as part of Indonesia and the rest of the globe. But the same balance and harmony also function as instruments to isolate and protect Balinese Hindu from non-Balinese, non-Hindu, separating the one from the other. Naradha had explained the educative, communicative function of topeng. How do topeng performances engage with this ideology?

Performances marking state celebrations and religious ceremonies staged in the official, public domain are likely to feature the inclusive definition of ajeg. Indeed none of the topeng performances that I watched between 2003 and 2004 promoted a radical, exclusionary message. Yet the variations that occurred, the different interpretations of the concept are important to note and analyse. The
main message, concerning the necessity of being ajeg, defending Bali from external dangers, has been widely included in performances, both those sponsored by the Bali Post group and others, but mostly in terms of the old discourse of the preservation of culture. The topic of ajeg becomes part of a performance because it is a wide-spread slogan that the audience can easily recognise. It belongs to the sort of material that performers normally use as sources of inspiration for their performance. There are interesting variations, though, and they can be observed in the three performances that I will now take into consideration; one sponsored by the Bali Post group, one on the occasion of Independence Day and one on the occasion of a religious ceremony in north Bali.

Ajeg in Performance: August 16 2003 - Bali Post Anniversary

The Bali Post's ajeg campaign culminated in a special event called Bali Merah Putih (Bali Red and White) at the Denpasar Arts Centre, an event broadcast by Bali TV on the occasion of both the 55th anniversary of Bali Post and the 58th anniversary of Independence of the Republic of Indonesia.

Held on the open stage and arena known as Ardha Chandra, this was an event comprising contemporary dance, a fashion show, Balinese pop songs and a bondres performance. These items regularly alternated with TV advertisements broadcast from two big screens situated to the side of the main stage. At the far side of the stage were two red and white curtains and at the centre of the stage a red motorbike was displayed as a promotion for the main sponsor of the event. The candi-like entrance of the Ardha Chandra was still visible, but on the upper edge, instead of the expected Arts Centre emblem, a big panel displayed the logo of the 55th anniversary of Bali Post. The number 55 overlapped the red and white flag of the Republic of Indonesia. It closely resembled the Independence Day logo and was a symbol of the dovetailing of the mission of the Bali Post and that of the nation. The Bali Post was clearly setting out to establish itself as a symbol of nationalism, and this was reinforced in Balinese pop songs such as Baline Suci.
(My Pure Bali), Bali Pulau Dewata (Bali the island of the gods), Bendera Merah Putih (Red and White Flag), Indonesia Asri (Beautiful Indonesia) and Milet Membangun. Two presenters, a male a female, emphasized the aim of the event by reiterating the main topic of the evening — Bali Red and White (Bali Merah Putih). They stressed how Bali, more Balinese than ever, being ajeg, could contribute to the nation. Such expressions of trust in a future Bali ajeg and the necessity of being united with the nation represented a sort of intermezzo between presentations.

Part of the event was a fashion show, parading exclusively Balinese textiles for male and female models, with lines inspired by traditional costumes but with a very modern flavour, designs that were clearly suitable for export and the Jakarta market. They represented modern, marketable Balinese culture. The call to the original Balinese culture was also supported by “Bali pop” songs; they were a major attraction, which also accompanied the fashion show.

The pop songs, beautiful models, contemporary dance, smoke and special effects were interrupted for about forty minutes to give space to the bondres group Gita Ulungan, winner of the Lomba Lawak Bondres (Bondres Comedy Competition) organised on 15-16 April 2003 by Bali Post.

Topeng bondres grew from performers’ efforts to adapt their practice to audience tastes. In Bondres, a popular segment of Topeng Sidhakarya, unconnected with the story narrative, and consisting entirely of jokes, has been separated out, and is performed as an independent show. We have already seen that one of the roles that people recognise in topeng is the teaching role and the link with the past through the stories. The stories told during the performances represent those values of Topeng able to revitalize the old values that Naradha

31The reference to ‘red and white’ would be immediately understood by an Indonesian viewer as a reference to the Indonesian national flag, respectfully known as Sang Merah Putih (Exalted Red and White).
32For an extensive description of topeng bondres see chapter V of this thesis.
referred to during the above interview. Bondres does not act out the full stories from the chronicles of kings as other forms of topeng do. Instead it mainly focuses on humor. Nevertheless the teaching role of certain characters is maintained. Topeng bondres was chosen because while being a traditional form, it is the most suitable for contemporary times. As the journalist Mas Ruscitadewi emphasised: it is highly flexible, in its length and topics.  

The *Sekaa Bondres Gita Ulungan* comprises three performers I Wayan Sunatra, from Batuan, I Made Kariyasa from Batubulan, I Gusti Putu Yasa, originally from Tegallalang living in Batubulan. When asked why they had won the competition mentioned above, Sunatra answered that their strength is being able to make the audience laugh and working together tightly as a team. The *Bali Post*, in reporting on their performance on the occasion of the 16 August event, also described the group as exceptionally funny (celetukan-celetukannya menggelitik) and reported that the group succeeded in making the audience laugh throughout almost the entire performance. While delivering its message about the preservation of culture, tradition and religion, this bondres group was “tight” and played well off each other.

On the occasion of the *Bali Post* Anniversary the group was given the topics *Ajeg Bali* and *Merah Putih*, to be developed within forty minutes. However, in the subsequent dialogue *ajeg Bali* and *Merah Putih*, appeared rather marginal. Gusti Yasa performed the *penasar*, staying on stage all the time, while the other two performers changed masks to represent different half mask characters. Each introduced a topic including “ethika”, religion, stress, job matters, extra-marital

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33 Interview with Mas Ruscitadewi, 02-11-04.
34 Interview with I Wayan Sunatra (Wayan Balik), 16-08-03.
35 *Bali Post* 16-08-2003, p.31.
37 The favorite comic characters in the Balinese topeng performances are two brothers who translate the Sanskrit text of the traditional drama into Balinese vernacular, spiced with bawdy dialogue and physical comedy. The brothers are called the Penasar (from “dasar”, the people who tell the root of the story). The older brother is the pompous penasar kelihan; the younger is the loud-mouth penasar cenikan. They serve as attendants to the central characters.
relationships, lack of tourism. The last mask was the character of the bendesa, an old villager who usually makes remarks about village matters. This was the only character who explicitly mentioned ajeg Bali. The three performers were all together on stage for this finale. Gusti Yasa kept the penasar mask, Sunatra put his first mask back on, the wijil (penasar's younger brother), and Kariyasa was the bendesa. The exchange of jokes was between the three. At first there were a few jokes to attract audience's attention as Sunatra explained during an interview (21-10-04). Later on the bendesa was in need of medicine. When he asked who was going to pay for it, the wijil answered that the one who uses it pays. The bendesa replied:

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**Bendesa:** It is not allowed to speak like that to an old man, one day you'll be old and you may be worse than me

**Wijil:** Why is it like that?

**Bendesa:** It is not allowed; if you have young people eh, old folk, you surely hope they will die soon

**Wijil:** Why is it like that?

**Bendesa:** So that you can sell their land

**Wijil:** No, it is not like that

**Bendesa:** Here in Bali we are not allowed to do so. Why not? If we do not defend Bali who else is going to do it?... Applause, please!... Because of that Bali has to be ajeg, we live in Bali, our Bali has to be preserved, if we want to develop it, in order not to be in complete chaos

**Penasar:** It is founded like we are celebrating now, on what it is called red and white.³⁸

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³⁸ Bendesa: Sing dadi ngeraos keto kapining nak tua, bindan ci tua bisa jelekan ken bapa
Wijil: Adi keto?
Bendesa: Sing dadi nak keto, awane yen ci ngelah nak teruna e... ngelah nak tua jeg madakan ci nake pang mati.
Wijil: Adi keto?
The dialogue went on with the Bendesa explaining how difficult is to be Balinese nowadays:

Bendesa: The difficulty? It's that we live in the era of globalization, there are all sorts of influences from outside coming to Bali. We have to be smart in discerning what it is suitable to use, what is not we throw away, that's what it means to be Balinese.

Wijil: It's surely like that, so with whatever we have we make the earth what is called ajeg, so that it is really based on a pure heart, it's like that.

Bendesa: That's why still within the national unity of the Republic of Indonesia, look at it (the flag), raising the flag is not in vain. 39

The conclusion briefly reminds the audience of the occasion of the event, the Bali Post Anniversary and Independence Day.

Summarising this brief dialogue we can identify the following main points:

The need to respect the elders who are the protectors of the land that should not be sold, thus ensuring continuity of tradition;

The need to apply a filter to elements of “overseas” cultures coming to Bali;

Universalisation of the concept ajeg - being united for a better world;

Application of the concept of ajeg with a nationalistic flavor, stressing the importance of maintaining a united Indonesia.

Bendesa: Tanah ne pang dadi adep ci
Wijil: Sing keto sing ki
Penasar: Medasarin cara jani ane kebaos merah putih.

39 Bendesa: Kewehne? Ragee idup di jaman globalisasi, banyak pengaruh luar ane kal teke ke Bali, dueg ragene ne kal nyaring, cen ne pantesna kal jemak lan anggon, cen ane sing patut lan kaadang, keto nak dadi anak Bali.
Wijil: Mula saja to ne patut, mawinang iraga ada lantasang apa adane, ngae ne madan ajeg gumi, pang saja madasar kenehe ane suci, sing keto.
Bendesa: Mawan an masih dalam rangka NKRI, Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia, to tolih to, pang sing ngapung nak menekang bendera.
The message is that by being ajeg, Bali better serves national unity and contributes to harmony in the world.

It is noteworthy that most references to ajeg take place during the last 5-7 minutes of the performance. Kariyasa explained that the main topic has to be developed at the end of a performance as a climax, to surprise the audience and prevent them forgetting it. Sunatra confirms this, saying that the “teaching” section has to be at the end after that they have conquered the audience with laughter. Gusti Yasa also argued that only a small portion of the performance developed the given topic, because the main task of Bondres is to make people laugh. In fact, he agreed with Sunatra that because of the current difficult times, people nowadays need comic performances more than anything else. Furthermore he emphasises that comic characters are not suitable to talk about serious topics, and that’s why only the Bendesa/Dukuh mentions ajeg.

Examining the whole performance more carefully, we find that even if the word ajeg is mentioned only at the end, some “ajeg principles” are expressed throughout. These express the old discourse of preserving Bali, menjaga Bali, or matters regarding ceremony. Gusti Yasa in fact felt that the whole performance had an ajeg flavor (berbau mengajegkan Bali); he did not see a great difference between old and new discourse on preserving Balinese culture. Again, the interpretation of ajeg is personal, its perception and verbalisation vary according to the individual. During separate conversations, the three performers defined ajeg in different ways: Gusti Yasa (21-10-04) defined ajeg as “bahasa media”, a language used by media and politicians: a trendy slogan that everyone repeats but does not necessarily act on. Gusti Yasa spoke of the necessity for change and especially for filtering the elements coming from overseas. For Kariyasa ajeg was just a symbol to remind everyone living in Bali, foreigners included, that they have to protect Bali. Sunatra gave a long list of interpretations and among those:

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40 Interview with I Made Gede Kariyasa (Made Aple), 24-10-2004.
41 Interview with I Wayan Sunatra (Wayan Balik), 21-10-2004.
42 Interview with I Gusti Putu Yasa, 21-10-2004.
conserving Balinese budaya (culture) and adat (custom); preserving Bali from destruction, keeping Bali in harmony.

These are interpretations of ajeg given during interviews, but not explicitly employed in the performance. Nevertheless the ajeg discourse is so widespread that performers can use it during performances as a trendy discourse and not only if requested. It is also adopted during performances in different contexts. This was the case in a bondres performed the day after the Bali Post anniversary, at an Independence Day celebration with IG Ngurah Sweca as penasar, the king's servant, and I Ketut Kodi as wijil, the penasar's younger brother, performing for fifteen minutes an introduction to a lawak bondres (bondres with make-up instead of masks).

On this occasion the performers were not given any special topic, but because of the occasion there was an assumption that the performers would speak about Independence and the veterans of the Revolution. Nevertheless in addition to this familiar and expected Independence Day material, the performers also explicitly referred to ajeg discourse.

**Ajeg in Performance: August 17 2003 - Hari Proklamasi**

On the 17th August the banjar (sub-village) all over the island were busy with activities celebrating the 58th anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Indonesia with singing and sport contests, speeches and rituals in honour of the national flag, the Red and White. In Denpasar the regional offices were engaged in the same sort of celebrations, the square in front of the Governor's office being transformed into a stage for parades and speeches. That evening there was a bondres performance sponsored by the Governor of Bali. The invited guests were officials, military personnel, politicians, and diplomats. While Balinese pop songs...
provided the main entertainment, the Governor himself had apparently asked for a *bondres* performance.

The dialogue between Kodi as wijil and Sweca as the *penasar* lasted about fifteen minutes during which time Kodi, supported by Sweca, unfolded its arguments as follows (a summarised version of the dialogues between penasar and wijil):

We are here on the occasion of the 58th anniversary. Our nation is already mature. It's time to examine what we have achieved and what still needs to be done, even at this time when we are in such a critical state because of the bomb. But we must not stop; we have to look to the future. Maybe this is a way to get us to understand the mistakes of the past and plan a better future, in the interest of *ajeg Bali*, which is the aspiration of Balinese, and the aspiration of the proclamation [of Independence].

People complain and suffer. The solution? We should do what the Balinese people used to do in the past; we should have a greater variety of professions. Instead we have been concentrating on developing the tourism industry, then came the bomb and dorrr...death.

In the past in Bali a person was accustomed to having more than one profession: he worked as farmer, and if it failed he could work as a builder, if that failed in turn he could work as sculptor and so on. Instead now everybody is employed in the tourism industry. If tourism fails, the people, no longer used to working in agriculture, are left without a job. The investments should be equally distributed between agriculture and tourism, half and half fifty/fifty. In that way one sector guarantees the other one...

...This nation has been built up by the veterans and as children of the Nation, as the new generation we have to continue what was done by our heroes...

Three days after this performance I asked Kodi about its topic, without showing him the video recording. He explained that he spoke about the veterans and their service. They provided the land and the new generation has the task to fill it. The second topic was the necessity for Bali to have twin sectors: tourism and agriculture. Because only the tourism industry has been developed, the risk is
that all the other sectors will disappear and if so Balinese culture, the original one (the totality of Balinese culture), will disappear as well.\textsuperscript{43}

When I watched the performance, the images and words of Kodi and Sweca performing overlapped in my mind with my image of Kodi reading the \textit{Bali Post} on the day prior to the performance when I visited him at his home in Singapadu. He was sitting in his pavilion totally immersed in the newspaper. He did not stop the reading when I came up. Instead he involved me in the activity commenting and pointing out some articles of that special edition of 16 August. The issues referred to by Kodi during the performance were spread throughout the special edition of the newspaper. Nevertheless it seems that he was inspired mainly by one page (page 11) dedicated to Ajeg Bali. He used many sentences and concepts drawn from two articles, "Bali, Siapa yang mesti Menyelamatkan?" (Who must save Bali?); and "Kehancuran mesti Dihindarkan" (Destruction must be avoided).

An example of his direct use in the performance of the phrases taken from the \textit{Bali Post} article, is his statement that \textit{Ajeg Bali merupakan cita cita orang Bali merupakan cita cita proklamasi} (ajeg Bali is the aspiration of Balinese and the aspiration of the proclamation). He combines the title of an article on the first page of the newspaper (ajeg Bali as an aspiration of Independence-proclamation) with the opening sentence of the article "Kehancuran mesti Dihindarkan" (destruction has to be avoided).

This is not an uncommon practice for topeng performers. They prepare themselves and decide what to say according to the occasion of the performance, (religious or official), and according to the audience. Kodi gets inspiration from the newspapers, TV programs and other sources. Sometimes he starts from a particular idea, then he looks for the necessary references. His plan can change if the situation changes just before or during the performance. Kodi,

\textsuperscript{43}Kalau kita hanya akan berpegang pada sector pariwisata, bisa sector-sector yang lain itu hilang dan dengan kehilangan itu berarti hilanglah budaya Bali yang utuh. Interview with I Ketut Kodi, 20-08-03.
just like any performer, has to please his sponsor/s using the story or theme requested. When there is not a specific request, whatever he chooses to say has to be suitable for the event and the sponsors. Nevertheless, if there is a problem in the community or a politician within the audience, Kodi takes the opportunity for suggestions and criticisms.

As has been mentioned, he was not asked to speak about anything specific for the performance on August 17. However because the audience comprised mainly veterans and officials (functionaries) he felt that it was necessary to praise the former and remind the latter that all have a debt to the veterans for their service. The new generation has to give recognition to the freedom that the veterans have achieved for Indonesia. Kodi, in explaining this point in conversation, just as he had during the performance, made the connection with the Bali Bomb as a proof that Bali's economy cannot survive if Balinese focus on the tourism industry only. Instead it is necessary to invest in the agriculture sector (just like the veterans of the past), as much as in tourism. When I asked why he talked so much about agriculture and where he got his inspiration from he said:

*I prepared the material at home because I knew ...post bomb and anniversary, about ajeg Bali, because ajeg Bali is also the aspiration of the Independence. Indonesia hopes that the culture of all regions should be ajeg, and one of those is ajeg Balinese culture. And currently ajeg Bali is a hot topic on Bali TV.*

The current “hot topics” are a great resource for attracting audiences and ajeg Bali is a very public hot topic. In Kodi’s words ajeg Bali means that “Balinese culture must endure, not in the sense of enduring without developing, but developing for the prosperity of all”. This sort of assessment resembles the old slogan melestarikan dan mengembangkan budaya Bali, preserving and developing Balinese culture. Kodi emphasises, however, the necessity of interpreting ajeg not as a nostalgic return to the golden old times and the consequent rejection of technological commodities. And anyway which old times? He asks: what do they mean when they talk about ajeg – the concept is still not clear.

The dialogue between Kodi and Sweca was followed by the intervention of the group Balian Sakti, stars of lawak, a sort of stand up comedy with the performers wearing make up to characterise a comic character, like the masks of bondres. They interpreted ajeg as regional (Balinese) unity. The theme was that the absence of discrimination and a commitment to “brotherhood” could make Bali ajeg. A final song reinforced this idea, mentioning the necessity of keeping alive...
the Balinese language, the mother language. During an interview with one performer from the group, Suanda/Chedil, the fact that they talked about ajeg because was a current "hot topic" also became clear.\textsuperscript{48}

The fact that a performer speaks about ajeg does not automatically imply that there is a complete adherence to its concept or agreement with the use of the word itself. Rather it seems that some of those who use \textit{ajeg} pick up one of the social issues they are interested in, like the selling of land or the economic crisis due to an unsuitable distribution of jobs, or they go with the flow. In any case because the current most popular media in Bali speak about ajeg, everybody does, criticising or supporting the term. Nevertheless in the domain of topeng performances, there are performers who are uncritical of ajeg, or even have no awareness of the connection between the term and \textit{Bali Post}. An example comes from a topeng group from Singaraja coordinated by Nyoman Durpa.

\textbf{Ajeg in Performance: Topeng Sidhakarya in Singaraja-15 November 2004}

The group Dwi Mekar coordinated by I Nyoman Durpa is particularly popular; it performs nearly every day and it is commissioned by sponsors from all over the island, from Java (especially Jakarta) and from overseas. The necessity of making Bali \textit{ajeg} has been expressed by the different performers of the group on a number of occasions. In particular we briefly discuss here a \textit{topeng Sidhakarya} performed in Singaraja on 15 November 2004, on the occasion of ceremonies related to a cremation.

One of the performers wearing a \textit{bondres} mask characterising a young Rasta-like fellow first explained how the fact of having a ceremony was helping to make Bali

\textsuperscript{48}Interview with I Ketut Suanda/Chedil, 07-05-2005.
ajeg. I just made Bali ajeg, as I performed my prayers and offerings. Soon afterwards the same character complained about the fact that his interlocutor, the penasar, was using a coarse language that wasn’t the ajeg attitude. *Eh...to make Bali ajeg you are not allowed to talk in a coarse way.* He then invited those present to use *Om Swastiastu* as a greeting, in proper ajeg Bali style. The message was that the formal gesture is a very important marker of being ajeg, of being Balinese.

Ironically, people have to be taught to use this greeting because the Balinese have not always used it. It originates from the opening sentence used in the sacred Hindu texts. In Bali in the past it was used on special occasions only. But more recently it seems that Balinese living in Jakarta adopted and spread it as a counterpart to the Muslim greeting *Salam Alaikum, Alaikum Salam.* The adoption of this greeting in Bali started before the ajeg campaign, but as the performer’s remark shows, it is associated with it. One of a number of measures taken to mobilize Hindu religious practice in explicit competition with Islam is the use of speakers on the occasion of ceremonial broadcasting of prayers and chants in the villages; their sound system speakers have to be at least as loud as the speakers of the mosques. Another example is the selling of framed Hindu sacred letters and texts, reminiscent of extracts from the Koran that Muslims in Indonesia display in their houses. The general effect is like witnessing a war of images and sounds between Hindu and Muslims in Bali, in which each side shouts louder and louder over the years. With the ajeg campaign the Balinese Hindus seem to use a louder voice. In the Singaraja area (province of Buleleng) the percentage of Muslims is particularly high and in the city not everybody speaks Balinese. As a consequence, to be heard the voice of topeng performers has to be particularly simple, clear and very loud. The sense of loss of Balinese culture is more intense and the ajeg campaign is perceived differently from the south.

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49 Eh, mara busan ngajegang Bali, ngaturang bakti.
50 Eh. Ngajegang Bali sing dadi omong kasar-kasar. Om Swastiastu...
During separate conversations with two performers from this group, they explained that *ajeg* Bali is a government project and *topeng*, like other media such as TV programs and other type of performances, contributes to the dissemination of information on *ajeg* Bali. Nyoman Durpa\(^\text{51}\) in particular explained that the government did not explicitly request the group, but, rather, as Balinese, they felt it their duty to give information about *ajeg* Bali in order to avoid the destruction of Bali.\(^\text{52}\)

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The *ajeg* discourse often appears very aggressive, but in practice it has broad, flexible connotations. The perception/awareness and endorsement of the slogan *ajeg* Bali change according to individual performers and according to different locations in Bali. Performers do their job of passing on current values in a generally non-aggressive way. Whether fully endorsing the values of *ajeg*, or not they contribute to the spread and reinforcement of the slogan, linking it even more closely to the metaphysical dimension. This function is traditionally connected to the role of the performer who is, as we have seen in the first chapter, a *guru loka* a teacher of the world. *Ajeg*, the word spread by *Bali Post*, acquires multiple meanings from the most fundamentalist to the most open, aiming for "world peace and harmony". It results in an overlapping shape of chaotic realities in which the effort of protecting the sacredness of Bali has created a non-sacred domain, which is a questioned but undeniable reality. At the same time there is an attempt to sacralise the island aiming to define Balinese identity against "the Other". While in the past the discourse on "protecting Bali from outside bad influences" referred mainly to tourism and values brought by globalisation, in recent times the "fear" of the "other" is emerging within the society. In the midst of the voices a call for introspection comes from the articles published on the *Bali Post* by IBM Dharma Palguna:

\(^{51}\)Interview with I Nyoman Durpa, 16-11-2004.
\(^{52}\)Interview with I Nyoman Durpa, 16-11-2004.
Hindu literature does not teach people that the enemy is outside oneself; rather the enemy is within oneself. It means that the unity togetherness can be shattered from inside. What can potentially destroy is the outsider within inside.

Are Balinese going to listen to this sort of call? As IBM Dharma Palguna during a conversation said "if everybody is talking, then who is going to listen?" In the effort of Hindu sacralisation of the island some feel saturated; there are those who want to just stop talking or listening and prefer to get distracted; there are those who try to contest the current discourse and choose other media with the hope of being heard. This ambivalent attitude is reflected in the domain of performance.

The next chapter will focus on the mask performances that are outside the sacred space. The "contemporary" style attempts to re-interpret the sacred and traditional in a present day framework The question again will regard the distinction between sacred and profane, but also the concept of kontemporer - contemporary from the aesthetic view point of those involved in producing contemporary works in Bali.

CHAPTER IV

Masks: tradition-inspired practice of contemporary forms

In the last chapter it was shown that even if the ajeg Bali discourse is surprising in its strength, it is not a sudden phenomenon. By contrast, as Suryawan (2005) demonstrates, it is linked to the history of violence that Bali has lived through during the 20th century, and especially in the 60s. Furthermore, its basic idea of the sacralisation of Balinese culture is closely connected with the ongoing discourse on Balineseness based on culture, custom and religion. The difference lies that the discourse on sacredness has been made more explicit and available to everyone, especially through the media. It is intended as a didactic tool making all the Hindu Balinese people aware of the roots of their identity based on religion. A question arises with important implications for performance: how are Balinese people, who are used to philosophical teachings, reacting to the overwhelming volume of information providing instruction on their spiritual life, assaulting them daily?

Before the ajeg propaganda phenomenon, philosophical themes were widely propagated through the arts. For example, we have seen that one of the traditional roles of the topeng performer is to transmit to the audience Hindu-Balinese values. The same role is embodied by the dalang (puppeteer) and by dance-dramas with mythological stories. Academic writing as well as media discourse has always insisted on that the Balinese arts are intimately linked to religion. This is a concept applied within the island, but it also sells overseas: visual art works and dance tours are sold internationally in part because of their religious aura. The spirituality of the island attracts a certain type of tourist.
Bali, "The Island of the Gods-Pulau Dewata" provides a magnified example of a society promoted as "sacred" where the non-sacred claims its life. I have already explored efforts in Bali to create a sacred dimension of inviolable performances, in contrast to profane performances that could be consumed by the tourist market (see chapter II). Over time this effort has not only resulted in the designation of a secular space for tourists, but has also contributed to the development of a secular audience within the Balinese population. A non-sacred space of performance has grown for the Balinese themselves, exclusively for entertainment.

In this chapter I will look at those performances originating outside the ritual context that create a non-sacred space bound up with the idea of sacred. I refer to the *tari kontemporer*, contemporary dance, whose function is definitely not sacred, but which sometimes has sacred themes. The concept of contemporary dance stimulates heated discussion among Balinese performers and intellectuals trying to distinguish explicitly "contemporary" forms from those which are simply done today. These performances, having no functional links with ritual, have to attract an audience to justify their existence. They are the result of a voluntary act of a choreographer or director. This is a domain of Balinese performance that in Turner's terms can be labelled as "liminoid". By contrast, when theatre is linked to ritual, people need it, organise it, reinvent it. In this case theatre is compulsory for the society; it is what Turner defines as "liminal". This distinction of thought in Balinese contexts has its limitations, however, just as there are limitations to the ideas of a clear distinction between sacred and profane or efficacy and entertainment.

The terms liminal and liminoid are used by Turner\(^1\) to refer to differences in activities between traditional societies and modern ones. In traditional societies, activities related to ritual are liminal and compulsory. In modern industrialised societies leisure activities, defined as liminoid and voluntary, function as a

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\(^1\)Turner draws on the concept of "liminal" used by Van Gennep in his study of initiation rites (1960 [1908]) in developing his theory of liminal and liminoid events.
substitute for ritual (Turner 1985). Turner describes the passage from activities belonging to traditional or pre-modern societies to modern societies in a chronological way. But he also recognises that there are times when modern societies want to reclaim elements of the pre-modern ones.

In an attempt to find a link between ritual and theatre Turner sees the life of the latter as a chronological evolution of the former. Theatre is a substitute, in what he calls "complex" or modern societies, for the ritual that generally belongs to a "simpler" society. To Turner, traditional or simpler is contrasted with modern or complex. In drawing an evolutionary line between the traditional and the modern, Turner, like other scholars in search of the origin of theatre, is influenced by evolutionary theories (Schechner 2002), without necessarily implying the superiority of modern society. The tendency is to establish a distinction between those societies that make use of ritual and those that do not. In spite of his effort to systematise through boundaries, Turner recognises the "exceptions" to the same boundaries. Even in Western societies the absolute distinction between liminal and liminoid, and therefore between sacred and profane, does not really work. The loss of "the sacred" has resulted in its "rescue" through, among other developments, Spiritualism, Buddhism, New Age and the resurgence of Christian sects. The stage has used exotic rituals from the end of the 19th century to attract new audiences or to search for the roots of theatre. It is as if, on the one hand, Western societies, feeling the lack of "the sacred", search for the origin of theatre in ancient rituals. On the other hand, where theatre has been described as still having an exclusive religious function, as in Bali, performance claims an autonomous life from ceremonies, even if not necessarily losing its links with the religious domain. Coexistence of sacred and secular seems unavoidable in spite of all the efforts to build safe boundaries separating the two.

My reflection dwells upon Turner's perspective, because of his importance for the development of performance studies. Performance studies, in contrast to drama or theatre studies, have been able to go beyond Western text-centred theatre to include a wide range of phenomena that we now acknowledge as performance. The origin of this openness, pioneered by Richard Schechner, was actually inspired by Turner. Nevertheless most of Turner's inspiring theories such as the chronological explanation of the passage from ritual to theatre, seem based on an understanding of Western society at the time he was writing, in which the two forms of performance, liminal and liminoid, did not coexist. Therefore he implies a sharp distinction between a sacred and a secular understanding of life.
In the Balinese context, to what extent can we define this domain as non-sacred? Is it non-sacred for us regular visitors to Bali, tourists, non-Hindu Balinese? Or is it non-sacred for the Hindu Balinese themselves? If we follow the disputed, but accepted, dance categorisation of the 1971 *Seminar Seni Sakral dan Provan Bidang Tari* (Seminar on Sacred and Profane Art in Dance), we may consider as non-sacred (or better, "not strictly sacred") those performances included in the balih-balihan category. These performances generally have the function of entertainment for humans as opposed to the gods. The number of performances belonging to this category, though, has grown from the 70s: it is still a growing space. How do these performances relate to the dominating discourse on Balinese identity based on religion?

This space has not only continuously grown but also includes performances that are considered classical as well those called traditional. Along with projects and seminars aiming to save or maintain classical and traditional performances, more or less linked to rituals and as such fundamental to maintaining Balinese culture, choreographers, directors and performers create new performances. Often these performances are offshoots of those linked to ritual through their structures, characters, techniques, principles, or stories.

The performances included in the wali and bebali categories are sources of inspiration for new creations. Tradition seems to comfortably and indifferently lie between sacred and non-sacred (or across all categories); the "new" generally grows out of the "old". Especially in the domain of dance-drama or dance, very rarely do artists reject tradition to explore new dimensions. The coexistence of "old" and "new" has a positive connotation for Sal Murgiyanto; what he prefers to call "new dance" in Indonesia is inspired by local traditions which are mostly linked to religion (Murgiyanto 2004). With similar terminology, but different connotation, Barucha (1993), talking about performances in India, says that theatre artists are in limbo:

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3See chapter II of this thesis.
They don't know how to free themselves from tradition or live with it without compromising on their own truth. In the meantime, they 'invent' tradition not so much from an inner necessity, but in deference to larger cultural and political factors that favour a sanctification or dressing-up of the past. (Barucha 1993: 209)

In Bali the limbo acquires more complexity: it is not easy to distinguish tradition from "their own truth". The attitudes of men and women of the performance world in Bali are manifold. Some consciously serve the "larger cultural and political factors" identified by Barucha; some serve "truth" without being aware of it. Some explicitly propose a reinterpretation of tradition and religious values in opposition to official public rhetoric. Some complain about tradition as constraint, and some aim to satisfy audiences' requests. They all move in the space of performances created for non-divine audiences. This is a relatively new space which still does not have a definition. As such it attracts attempt at systematisation from both artists themselves as well as cultural observers, through debates, newspapers articles and seminars.

These performances, taking the form of theatre/drama, or dance, or dance-theatre are defined in terms of these debates as kreasi baru (new creation based on traditional dance), kontemporer (contemporary) or teater modern (modern theatre) according to who is speaking. The term "contemporary" in Western performance, especially dance, is already a widely-debated concept, often used as an umbrella-term to include several dance genres from modern to post-post modern. Like any western concept used in the Indonesian (or Asian) and especially Balinese context, the label "contemporary" is not always easy to apply without further clarification. One cannot assume identical meanings. Like any controversial term, seni kontemporer "contemporary art" has been the subject of several seminar (seminars) in Bali until very recently. The interesting aspect is, again, the diversity of opinion which the same genre of performance can arouse.

Beside the discussion on the nature of performance, there is the question of the nature of audience-performer relations in Balinese theatre. In spite of this current search for the "new" and the production of new works, the nature of audience
consumption has not changed. Performances are generally sponsored, and most commonly, for example on the occasion of ceremonies, the audience members do not pay an entrance fee. Patronage is still the predominant system in performance consumption. This fact raises questions as to the nature of the “modernity” of performances and the “professionalism” of performers. From a Western perspective, the main connotation of professionalism beginning in the Renaissance was a direct economic relationship between performers and audiences, as established by the “Commedia dell’Arte” troupes. Professionalism depended on the presence of a paying audience in contrast with sponsored court performances (Taviani and Schino 1982). But it is not so simple even in the West. Nowadays in Western countries most performers survive because they are government-sponsored. In the West as much as in Bali those performers considered professionals receive a significant portion of their income through teaching. Where does the concept of professionalism lie then?

To be able to appreciate this debate, through a comprehension of “contemporary” performance practice, we need to look to the work of the performers and choreographers-directors. I will investigate the domain of new or current performances, focusing mainly on performance where masks are employed. I will focus on forms labelled as kontemporer that have a strong link with the domain of what is considered sacred or sacred performance. Starting with a specific example I will attempt to show how this performance fits within a framework of conceptualization. The first performance considered was created to question the status of contemporary dance in Bali, but, along with the audience, we may ask if it “makes it” as a performance and how one would judge it.

Sunya: a contemporary work-12 August 2002

Kosong, berisi dan kembali ke kosong...terjemahan agamais dalam proses menemukan Sunya. Mulat Sarira... tujuan jatidiri...terkandung pertanyaan akan awal dan akhir mengapa manusia dilahirkan...(Suteja 2002: 83)
Emptiness filled and returned to emptiness... this is the religious translation of the search for Sunya. Mulat Sarira, self-introspection ... the aim of the true-self... contains the question of the beginning and of the end, why humanity was brought to life.

This excerpt describes the topic chosen by the choreographer Ketut Suteja in creating the dance Sunya performed for the examination for his Master's degree. He reports it in his thesis and he repeats this key concept in conversations. The true self is achieved only when the individual is able to liberate himself from the sad ripu, the six internal enemies: kama-lust; lobha-greed; kroda-anger, mada-drunkenness; moha-confusion; matsarya-jealousy. In the dance Sunya, those enemies are defeated by the Sidhakarya.

Suteja defines the dance Sunya as a contemporary work inspired by topeng Sidhakarya. It expresses what, according to Hinduism, is the highest and ultimate state that the individual can attain in his journey of dharma. This is Sunya, emptiness, silence: the absolute nothingness which is everything, the absolute detachment (freedom) from worldly bounds: membebaskan diri dari ikatan-ikatan duniawi (Suteja 2002: 10). This is the state of oneness with the supreme manifestation of the divine to which Sidhakarya contributes. His tools are the mantra, the dance, the music, the story - all the elements involved in a performance that are part of the ritual.

Suteja states that Sidhakarya symbolically represents Wisnu Murti (Tuhan=God) who completes the ceremony. Sidhakarya's actions aim to achieve, for those who celebrate the ritual, oneness with the highest manifestation. This state ultimately is Sunya. The religious and ritual values of Sidhakarya are linked to aesthetic values and those are expressed in the dance Sunya.

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4Suteja underlined that the topic of Sunya was inspired by the the work by IBM Dharma Palguna (1999), titled Dharma Sunya. Memuja dan Meneliti Siva.
5Other performers, such as I Ketut Kantor, say that Sidhakarya represents Vishnu, Shiva or Buddha when He is not represented by the pedanda-priests who carry out the ceremony.
There is equivalence between the Sidhakarya within tradition, in topeng pajegan, and the Sidhakarya in Sunya, as Suteja confirms. Both dominate the world/universe (jagat). In topeng pajegan, the Sidhakarya dominates the universe, throwing yellow rice towards the four main directions and then on himself (in the middle). With mantra, in simple terms, the Sidhakarya invites people to be good. In Sunya, Sidhakarya instead rotates while the other characters lie on the floor representing his power over the world.

The staging of Sunya: Natya Mandala Stage ISI, duration: 35 min.

Darkness... from the dark a figure on the top of the step moves, turning his back to the audience. Soon he reveals himself: he wears a totally white Sidhakarya mask and a white costume. He moves, accompanied by the rebab music (a sort of two-stringed violin), and comes down from the stairs. A sudden and strong drumming introduces other instruments from the traditional gamelan orchestra and a keyboard. A final gong which changes the atmosphere accompanies the Sidhakarya back to the top of the stairs where he remains during the rest of the performance. During this time a female and male performer are in a sitting position in front of the stairs facing the audience. Once the Sidhakarya is back in his position the woman starts moving from sitting into a low position, accompanied by the gamelan (predominantly flute and rebab) and a singing voice. The male figure is still. Then the woman moves towards him and, after standing up, moves around him. Movements and music are not necessarily synchronised. Then the male moves his hand and starts to interact with the female figure. It is noteworthy that while sitting or moving on the floor, the dancers' movements are rather abstract, while when they stand, their bodies acquire Balinese and partially Javanese dance technique. The atmosphere and movements are reminiscent of the duets common in the structure of many "new creation" style traditional dances. Their movements mimic love-making. An

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6 Interview with I Ketut Suteja, 08-01-2005.
increased tempo concludes the duet; the two lie on the floor at the centre of the stage close to the stairs. Six other dancers come on stage: as couples they move independently (each couple different from the others). The drums introduce the entrance of a new character (Suteja) who moves in a more vigorous way. He draws attention to the first couple who are still on the floor. The other dancers follow his movements. Then he climbs the stairs where the Sidhakarya is, and grabs a Sidhakarya mask. He comes down in silence with the mask in his hand. Then he joins the rest of performers and the music starts again. He wears the mask and moves: he is like the Sidhakarya, but darker. He looks like Sidhakarya’s antagonist. He moves close to the first couple still on the floor. Because of his presence, the couple starts moving. After the Sidhakarya/antagonist leaves, the two interact with the rest of the performers. Then the three female figures start to move together on the left of the stage while the three males move slowly from sitting position. Increased speed of music does not always correspond to an increased speed of movement. The atmosphere changes: the women are in sitting position, the men move, trembling. The Sidhakarya comes down from the stairs, all the dancers fall down. The dark Sidhakarya comes on the stages and tries, in vain, to attack the white one. The two Sidhakarya move to the centre. The white one seems to be more powerful. The dark one lies on the floor with the mask in his hand. The white Sidhakarya passes over the dark one and goes back up to the top of the stairs, dominating over the universe, over greed and over the sad ripu, the six enemies.

Suteja, with the work Sunya, explicitly explores a theme dear to Hindu-Balinese. It is central to an understanding of the function of ceremonies and performances linked to ceremonies. Because of this strong connection with sacred themes, can we define this work as a liminal performance? Suteja has some practical-academic reasons to use a topic drawn from tradition: he aims “to test whether traditional values can be expressed in contemporary works.” (Suteja 2002: vii), as well as stating his view on how the concept of kontemporer should be employed within the Indonesian Institute of Arts from which he graduated.7

7Apasih sesungguhnya pendidikan kontemporer? Interview with I Ketut Suteja, 08-01-2005.
performance in itself thus embodies Suteja’s perspectives on issues central to the discussion on contemporary dance.

Suteja expresses his position on the concept of *tari kontemporer*. What in Indonesia is defined as *tari kontemporer*, contemporary dance, is a relatively new phenomenon born of fruitful exchanges (a phenomenon common also in the rest of Asia) between Indonesian and North American and Dutch performers. The term “kontemporer” is quite common in Bali, but its use is not totally clear. Furthermore, through his work he underlines a clear point of view on the figure of Sidhakarya. In Suteja’s case we look at a traditionally inspired performance engaging with sacred concepts, but contemporary in its technique.

**Defining the contemporary: varying views**

The choreographer, dancer of *tari kontemporer* and ISI dance instructor I Nyoman Sura, links the concept of *tari kontemporer* to freedom of concepts and movements. Another choreographer and dancer, Ni Made Ayu Lingriati, defines *tari kontemporer* as dance with characteristics linked to the present, free from the rules of traditional dance, but without excluding the possibility for traditional dance to be the source for contemporary dance. She emphasises that in general choreographers try to find something from outside tradition, even if the source is tradition, aiming to express their own thoughts or feelings with more freedom: *For the time being contemporary dance is equivalent to freedom.* The word kontemporer and freedom are criticised by the Swedish choreographer Ulf Gadd who has been teaching at the ISI for several years:

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The word kontemporer is derived from "contemporary" which means of-today. In my opinion contemporary dance refers to any recent and current work whether it has modern characteristics or so-called traditional. However modern dance is a different matter. Modern dance, is something different. Modern dance requires the use of specific technique and that's what we don't have in Bali, we don't have any modern dance technique at all. In Bali contemporary dance is intended as "free movement", "free thought" without a technical basis and maybe that's the main problem in Bali, that contemporary dance is shallow.\(^{10}\)

With this assessment Gadd raises the important question of the use of word "contemporary". In the USA and Europe contemporary dance was used to indicate distance from modern dance. But modern dance in itself has a very broad application in space, time -from very early 1920s- and in styles. Post-modern is another label, along with many others, that can be applied to dance. If the debates on modern dance are full of contradictions in the places where modern dance started, then they become more complex in Asia and especially in Indonesia. I Ketut Suanda, known as Chedil, star of the comedy world but also a very talented contemporary music composer, has a distinctive point view on this matter. Convinced of the link between North American/European contemporary and Balinese works, he asserts:

The term kontemporer is non-existent in Bali. Precisely those who have studied in America or in France made up the term kontemporer to look exceptionally intelligent, even it is not sure that those people can create a contemporary work. Maybe they have an idea of it because they have seen something in America and they bring it here. Here people are amazed, while over there it is common.\(^{11}\)

\(^{10}\)Kata kontemporer berasal dari contemporary yang artinya... sejaman. Berarti tari kontemporer menurut saya semua garapan yang diciptakan hari ini baik yang disebutkan modern atau yang bersifat tradisi. Kalau tari modern itu lain... Kalau ada tari modern atau modern dance harus ada teknik dan itu tidak ada di Bali kita tidak punya teknik modern dance, satupun. Dan tari kontemporer itu diciptakan sesuai dengan pikiran bebas atau gerak yang bebas tanpa ada dasar teknik apapun dan mungkin itu masalah pertama.Iutama di Bali bahawa).. tari yang disebut kontemporer itu dangkal, menurut saya. Interview with Ulf Gadd (aka I Wayan Putra Karya), 12-01-2005.

This view might seem extreme, but it is signifier of a perception within Balinese artists and audiences of the inadequacy of the term seni kontemporer, which is a foreign term; to define local creative works. Some do not even like the intense discussion about the term: Cok Sawitri, a well known writer and performer, says that the concept of kontemporer depends on time. Something that is kontemporer now in 10 years can become classic. This does not need to be debated. May be the activists enjoy debating but she is more interested in the creative process.¹²

The Balinese passion for debates, often resulting in seminars that do not reach any conclusive result, can irritate artists such Sawitri who are so intense and focused on their work. Nevertheless she cannot escape the debate. When asked, she contributes to the debate, siding with those who believe that any recent work is contemporary. With the passing of the time, the newest work is destined to become classical, meaning well-established within Balinese tradition and a source of inspiration for new creations.

This phenomenon of the gradual canonisation of a new work may be caused by the strong presence of traditional dance. Traditional dance has been nurtured as regional culture representing Balinese identity and is at no risk of destruction by any foreign element such as “tari kontemporer”. It is also true that any work created in recent days has contemporary connotations indicated by the fact that contemporary, living audiences appreciate it. In other words, those works that are labelled as traditional, are also contemporary because of their participation in living traditions connected with the community. Their existence depends on a sponsorship system based on commission which encourages innovation and new creations to satisfy the ever-changing tastes of audiences. Classifying as kontemporer both those dances recently created, based on traditional Balinese dance technique, and performances of pure dance or dance-theatre based on a search for new expression, could be a way to attract that section of the audience that still resists the new, the strange and foreign associated with the term kontemporer.

¹²Interview with Cok Sawitri, 10-05-2005.
Reconciliation of traditional and contemporary Art

This mood of conciliation seemed to characterise the Diskusi Seni Kontemporer (Discussion on Contemporary Arts) held in Denpasar at the Arts Center on the 6 May 2005. The discussion was followed by a festival of contemporary performances. The opening speech of the festival by the head of the Department of Culture (Dinas Kebudayaan) I Nyoman Nikanaya in a way summarizes the aim of the Diskusi Seni Kontemporer. Before a large audience for a contemporary musical piece he expressed the hope that masyarakat, (people) will appreciate seni kontemporer, contemporary art. One of the introductory topics of the Diskusi Seni Kontemporer was that seni kontemporer cannot be considered as hostile to seni tradisi, traditional arts.

I Wayan Dibia, the sole presenter at the Diskusi Seni Kontemporer, firmly believes in this assessment and does not see any dichotomy between seni kontemporer and seni tradisional. During the Diskusi Seni Kontemporer he emphasised that Balinese have always had an open attitude to change as witnessed by the early anthropologists in the 30s. In fact, seni tradisi continuously transforms itself to adapt to contemporary time, space and context. Seni kontemporer is linked to seni tradisi, and so it is not true that these two forms are in competition. He also emphasised how in calonarang or topeng traditional and contemporary attributes are co-present. The stories are from the 16th century, but the dialogues and jokes are relevant to current issues. This is a proof of flexibility. The difference lies in the domain: some forms tend more towards tradition, others more towards the contemporary.

We hope for an art that has a more prominent current connotation, said Dibia.

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13I Nyoman Nikanaya head of the Department of Culture from 2003.
14Dibia used the concept of desa, kala patra generally translated as place, time and context the concept refers to the contextual variability of events.
The material can come from tradition; the rest is up to the artist's skill in using those idioms.\textsuperscript{15}

Dibia's conclusion was that \textit{all arts in Bali are actually contemporary},\textsuperscript{16} and as such seni kontemporer is an expression of the culture.\textsuperscript{17} Dibia's point of view becomes more explicit in his recent publication, co-written with Rucina Ballinger, \textit{Balinese Dance, Drama and Music}. In this brief but comprehensive overview of Balinese performances, the chapter "Contemporary Dance and Drama Forms" deals with dances created from the 60s based on traditional movements, those inspired by animals and by Javanese technique. Also included are dances based on "traditional Balinese dance" (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 100) as well as "much more contemporary forms" such \textit{Cak Rina} created by Sardono W. Kusumo in 1972 and "revised" by I Ketut Rina. The wayang kulit performance, \textit{Wayang Dasa Nama Kerta}, "Wayang of the Ten Element" performed by I Made Sidia to aid post-trauma victims of the 2002 Kuta bomb blast (Dibia and Ballinger: 2004: 98-101) is also mentioned.

Any examination of Dibia's ideas must take into account the fact that he, together with Sardono W. Kusumo, is considered the pioneer of tan i kontemporer in Bali. According to most people graduating from or teaching at ISI, tan i kontemporer began with the creations of Sardono Kusumo and I Wayan Dibia, both of whom are credited with the introduction and spread of the use of the term kontemporer. They all used traditional topics but sometimes quite challenging forms, not well accepted at the beginning, especially in regard to Dibia's work.

\textsuperscript{15}Kita menginginkan sebuah seni yang ...lebih, [beri] expressi kekinian. Materi bisa saja yang [datang] dari tradisi tinggal saja bagaimana kepiawai[an] ... seniman menggunakan idiom idiom itu. I Wayan Dibia during Diskusi Seni Kontemporer, 06-05-2005.

\textsuperscript{16}Semua kesenian Bali sebetulnya seni kontemporer. I Wayan Dibia during Diskusi Seni Kontemporer, 06-05-2005.

\textsuperscript{17}This assessment provoked a question, why, if contemporary art is expression of culture, do very few people watch contemporary works? While Dibia proposes the inclusion of all current performances in the definition of "kontemporer" some participants to the discussion clearly used the term in a different way.
Sardono is well known for the above mentioned Cak Rina created with the children of the banjar Teges Kanginan-Peliatan in 1972 (I Ketut Rina at that time was one of the dancing children). Furthermore he will be always remembered for Dongeng Dari Dirah, the "Sorceress of Dirah", a contemporary version of calonarang performed in Krambitan, Tabanan and Paris.

Dibia in 1978 caused a certain uproar with his Setan Bercanda, "Joking Devils", because it crossed the boundaries of traditional roles in regard both to the use of the body and of the sacred dances which inspired it (baris and sanghyang jaran). Setan Bercanda derived from Wabah "Plague", Dibia's final examination work at the ASTI (the Academy of Indonesian Dance) in Yogyakarta in 1974, took a few years to be fully accepted and to begin to inspire younger generations of choreographers. Dibia's career as choreographer has not always traveled an easy path. In spite of his international success, he often talks about his difficulties in gaining the acceptance of Balinese audiences. Maybe this contributes to Dibia's perspective when he seems to reconcile the domain of tradition and liminal with the concept of kontemporer which is more liminoid. In other words, he says that any performance may contain both traditional and contemporary elements and all the new creations based on liminal-traditional-classic dance technique can be categorised as contemporary.

Technique as the differentiation tool between traditional and contemporary

However not everyone agrees with Dibia's concept of contemporary. Suteja's point of view is different. Through Sunya, he wants to establish that the contemporary quality of a work is not determined by the theme, but by the technique. The topic of his work Sunya, as we have seen, is traditional, while

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18 See also McGraw 2005. McGraw underlines the importance of Dibia in the shaping of contemporary works in Bali not only in the field of dance but also in music.
19 Interview with I Ketut Suteja, 08-01-2005.
dance movements are new, as a result of research. Where does this research come from? Does it imply a search for "base technique" for contemporary dance, which had so been lacking according to Gadd? Suteja for his Master's on contemporary dance spent two years at the STSI in Solo, which is well known for its contemporary productions. He also spent some time in Germany. Contemporary/modern dance and dance-theatre in those centres have surely contributed his creative process.

However technique does not seem to be Suteja’s main concern in choosing the dancers for his works, rather high enthusiasm is more important. He refers to traditional dance technique; he does not mention modern dance technique. Rather his research method aims to use material, which he calls also "media", that the dancers found during improvisation exercises. Suteja prefers to apply what he calls the contemplation method, which starts from an idea and the activation of an outer energy, then directs the energy to specific parts of the body.

One of the dancers of Sunya, Ni Made Ayu Lingriati, explained that at the beginning of the rehearsals the dancers did concentration exercises, then they started to move part of their bodies, the hand for example, trying to feel the direction of the energy, or the head, focusing on the awareness of the specific parts of the head. Lingriati specified that Suteja wanted the dancers to understand the source and direction of the energy. Similarly, during rehearsal Suteja would not give specific examples to be imitated; rather he would give indications about direction and speed. Dancers explored the movements by themselves. Then Suteja would choose those movements he found suitable and modify them. So the material was originally created by the dancers. Lingriati really appreciated the creative freedom she had as dancer and said that

20 Interview with I Ketut Suteja, 08-01-2005. Suteja's thoughts on this topic are clearer in an article where he distinguishes materi subject, the subject that can be a traditional one, media, movements coming from improvisation and meditation exercises, imagination, and, bentuk the final shape of the creation. He also considers the creative process a tool to establish the vertical relation between world and superior Entity or God. Suteja (2004: 65-76).

21 Interview with I Ketut Suteja, 08-01-2005.
Other sources of movements were mudra gestures, and traditional dance movements. But those movements were not employed as they stand, they were developed first as underlined by Suteja. The dancers who wore masks had to pay special attention to their movements: these had to serve the mask's life/character.  

The reality of performing  

Sunya was performed just once, on the occasion of Suteja's Master's Degree examination at ISI Denpasar. Students, academics and people from Suteja's banjar were the audience whose response was mixed. The performance was also recorded for broadcast by the regional branch of the national television, TVRI-TV Republik Indonesia. In a conversation with me, Suteja expressed the intention to apply for funding to perform Sunya elsewhere throughout Indonesia, especially in Java. However, it seems that in spite of the fact that the work has been broadcast it has not attracted local sponsorship, nor has it been part of contemporary dance festivals, or the annual Arts Festival in Denpasar. Later on, in 2005, Sunya was performed on the occasion of the Indonesian Performing Arts Mart (IPAM) in June 2005. This situation highlights a key issue regarding the viability and legitimation of contemporary performance and its relationship to audiences. We might ask whether this is a common profile of a contemporary work.

The complex ISI-Arts Center is no longer the only stage for contemporary works. Some cultural centres in remote places have been the home of contemporary  

\[\text{Interview with Ni Made Ayu Lingriati, 14-01-2005.}\]  
\[\text{Interview with I Ketut Suteja, 08-01-2005.}\]
works, often resulting from collaboration between Balinese and American or European performers. Villages like Pengosekan are regular sites for intercultural dance projects resulting in performances open to general audiences. I Wayan Dibia has opened a new theatre in his home village in Singapadu. Restaurants in Kuta, Sanur or Ubud are sometimes venues for tari kontemporer on the occasion of fund raising events. Recently art galleries (in Bali these are numerous) are often keen to open exhibitions with a contemporary dance. Singaraja has venues that have been used to stage "modern teater" (text-based theatre modelled on western drama) for years. Recently tari kontemporer have started to be performed on the occasion of ceremonies.

Denpasar offers more opportunities to perform. Apart from the yearly Bali Arts Festival at the Arts Center, tari kontemporer are often part of the programs of concerts, performances during special festivals and TV-events. Most of these events, excluding the fund raising events, were free until few years ago. In 2002 the only performance that anyone could remember charging admission was work by Sutasoma Dance Company titled Sutasoma, when it was performed at the GWK (Garuda-Wisnu-Kencana) complex in 2000. The premiere had a ticket price of about US$ 20 as fund raising event, while the regular performances cost about US$1. The same work was performed in 2003 at the 25th Bali Arts Festival. During the last two or three years the number of performances selling entrance tickets have increased.

My description may give the impression that there are many contexts where tari kontemporer is performed. In reality the opportunities for performing are very few, compared to those for traditional performances. Artists generally lament this fact, but few recognise that is their own responsibility to create an audience for their works. I Nyoman Sura suggestes that it is the task of performers to create an audience by performing as much as possible. He considers performers' attitudes problematic because they wait for orders and funding instead of putting themselves forward on any occasion and performing also for free. He promotes himself at fashion shows and exhibitions; this is his way of exposing himself and
becoming known. He is one of the few contemporary choreographers and dancers who actively promotes his work in search of new audiences, apart from the usual circle of academics, students and artists. He has performed for politicians as well as at pop music concerts and for villagers. While it is not unusual for people not to pay attention or just to leave, as he points out, some stay.\textsuperscript{24}

**Contemporary as challenge to traditional?**

The strong presence of traditional performances is blamed for the lack of enthusiasm towards contemporary works, and also for the lack of quality. The director-musician Kadek Suardana often complains that in Bali (modern) artists cannot produce valid contemporary works because Balinese are expected to perform for rituals: Balinese are trapped into traditional dance as an expression of "Balinese identity". According to Suteja, people in general believe that contemporary dance destroys tradition, a fear that would justify an a priori rejection. This aspect created an interesting debate during the Diskusi Seni Kontemporer held in Denpasar. If in fact, as according to Dibia, seni kontemporer is current work reflecting the current society why is seni kontemporer not popular? Are Balinese still linked to the ancestors' rules or is art failing to reflect contemporary times? Dibia reacted to this issue by saying that seni kontemporer needs more opportunity to be performed to make people used to it and stop their fear of the unknown. This would make them aware that seni kontemporer does not destroy tradition. Dibia further blames the lack of popularity of kontemporer works on the fact that most of the works performed are unfinished: they are works in progress and only a few people are keen to watching unfinished productions. Instead, those works that are already established and have been performed several times receive a better response.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24}Interview with I Nyoman Sura, 15-01-2005.
\textsuperscript{25}I Wayan Dibia during Diskusi Seni Kontemporer, 06-05-2005.
Obviously, a well-known artist can attract more of an audience than a lesser known one, and as underlined during the Discussion, the well-known artist will receive favourable criticism from the media, in spite of the actual quality of the performance. However it is also obvious that frequency is the key to creating an audience of loyal fans able to support a work in its most experimental phases.

Creating an audience

An example of the kind of work whose success depends on its frequency of performance is that created by Cok Sawitri. Researcher in classic Balinese literature, journalist, writer, poet, performer and theatre director, she has been working on a particular performance project for about fifteen years. The work is titled Pembelaan Dirah, "the Plea of Dirah". Based on her manuscript research, Sawitri aims to show that the image of Dirah/Rangda/Calonarang as the dark and ugly widow whose anger causes death, is the result of a power conflict for religious control. Male religious authorities, aiming to limit women's power in the religious domain, characterise the widow witch in this way. In Cok Sawitri's interpretation, Dirah is instead a female priest dedicated to Buddha and a spiritual leader, but she is also a batari (or btari), a goddess. "Btari is the bridge that reveals consciousness to the sakti, a feminine strength and power that has faded in the consciousness process, affected by the way of life, thoughts, and daily behaviour." (Sawitri 2004: 2).

The performance is composed of four main sections each of which has been performed in full or in part on several occasions over the last fifteen years in different forms (poetry reading, dance-theatre) and involving different performers. As Sawitri explained during an interview, in creating a piece her interest is in spirituality and history. Furthermore she wanted to create a performance which would be able to grow over time instead of one that is dead once it has been performed. In this way Sawitri involves the audience in the creation process, in the experimentation of the pieces, presenting them the work in process and not
as a finished product. As Dibia emphasised, not everyone is keen to watch an unfinished work but Sawitri has created an audience. Apart from those writers and artists who are part of the usual contemporary arts audience, Sawitri has a close following among her own high school and university theatre students. Those students started the warm applause at the end of the performance *Badan Bahagia* held at the Arts Centre as part of the above mentioned Contemporary Arts Festival.

*Badan Bahagia,* literally “Joyful Body”, is a fragment of *Pembelaan Dirah* which expresses Dirah’s message for humanity to choose the good way. (*Badan bahagia* is a concept dealing with the eternal dance between the material body and the eternal consciousness. *Sawitri 2004: 2*). I watched the performance on two different occasions; during the Ubud Writer Festival in October 2004 and during the 2005 Contemporary Arts Festival in Denpasar. Sacredness is the main component of the work. Sacred *aksara,* the Balinese letters, are inscribed in the air. Two female dancers are brought on the stage on the shoulders of two men, like the sacred Sang Hyang dancers. These two dancers wear female white masks and they move slowly, accompanied by the chant of the text by Sawitri, and minimal music. In 2004 the predominant colours of the performance were black (the darkness of the stage with very low light) and white (the two dancers in white dresses and white masks). In 2005, the performance acquired another colour, red-orange. Furthermore there were other characters mostly standing in the background and from time to time crossing the stage. As Sawitri explained, the two dancers represent Dirah; a white beautiful Dirah. Through these two masks, Sawitri explores the philosophical aspect of Shakti, the female power. Sawitri underlined in fact that:

*the choice of the mask is not an aesthetic one, rather it comes from her knowledge of the fact that Rangda-Dirah is not a dark woman.*\(^\text{26}\)

\(^{26}\)Tentang memilih tapel bukan kebutuhan estetetika...saya tahu presis kebutuhan saya itu Rangda Dirah bukan perempuan yang gelap. Interview with Cok Sawitri, 10-05-2005.
In fact Dirah is commonly described as negative, as evil, especially when her role has to be explained to a non-Balinese audience or reader. To convey Dirah’s beauty Sawitri specially commissioned two white masks for the Badan Bahagia performance, but they were too special to be used. Instead Sawitri chose to use cheap putri (princess character) masks that any tourist can buy at the market. Sawitri explained that she is keeping the “real” masks safe because they have been especially made and have already undergone the pasupati ceremony to awake the spirit. Therefore she does not dare to let the dancers use them.

Because of the use of cheaper masks during the performances of Badan Bahagia, the audience experienced sacredness through the absence of sacred elements: the designated masks are so sacred that they were not used. The sacred masks are going to be used only for the final performance. Sawitri explained that these inferior masks used for rehearsals and unfinished performances were acquiring beauty because of their continued use, in spite of being not so good. This is a common effect, caused by the marriage, she undelineled, between the mask and the wearer that makes the two as one. In simpler terms the wearer gets used to the mask and learns how to embody it.

Because of all this, I was surprised by the fact that the dancers had never worn the actual “sacred” masks. It is also possible this unity will be reached only through proper offerings.

Instead of explaining why she does not dare to let the dancers use “the serious masks” Sawitri preferred to stress the fact that she is more interested in their spiritual experience. She is not interested in dance technique: her aim is the rasa. In the same way she is clearly not interested in attracting the audience with beautiful body shapes, with their sensuality, which is such common practice in Balinese dance. Sawitri is very proud of the synchrony of the movements of the

27 The masks resembled those used by the telek characters present in calonarang dance-drama, but Sawitri insisted that there was no connection. They were also very similar to those used in the masked version of Sang Hyang performed in Ketewel (See Bandem and deBoer 1995 [1981]).

28 Interview with Cok Sawitri, 10-05-2005.

29 Interview with Cok Sawitri, 10-05-2005.
two dancers in spite of the fact that they move with closed eyes. She explained that the source of the movement is the breath, just like in yoga. The repetitive circular movements are inspired by the twirling meditation movements of whirling dervishes of Sufi practice, and synchrony is reached when the dancers are concentrating deeply. During this detailed conversation with Sawitri she insisted on the fact that the audience is not the aim, nor is their applause, instead the aim is spirituality.

Her attitude is reflected in the performance. The masks are there, full of the deepest meaning, but they could also not be there. The dancers' movements do not relate to their presence and they do not take into account the relation between audience and masks. All mask performers insist on the fact that performing with a mask is different from performing without one, but it seems that Sawitri's performers did not consider this aspect. Sawitri explained how deep her understanding of masks is, but it is also true that her original idea was to use make-up to colour the faces white. She made her own face up white when she performed in Pembelaan Dirah as Dirah. But because make-up is uncomfortable, she explained, she thought of using masks. So the masks are actually substitutes for white make-up. The dancers wear masks like make-up, focusing on their own breath as they move, and forget that there is an audience. In this way Sawitri creates strong spiritual meaning, with the aim of reviving the power of Shakti, the forgotten tantric tradition which is at the base of Balinese religion. The performance is a great spiritual exercise or ritual for the performers themselves, apparently without any involvement by the audience.

At the end of the performance in Denpasar, I spoke with some people from the audience. In spite of the apparent enthusiasm displayed in audience applause, it seemed that people did not really appreciate the performance. Most of them liked another performance at the festival better. This was a theatre piece, full of crude comedy but aiming to stimulate the audience's thinking in regard to water pollution. One member of the audience wondered if Sawitri was thinking about the audience with her piece. Another commented in English, in order not to be
understood by those around us, that the apparently good audience response probably related to Sawitri's work in general, and her capacity to build a community of support around her, rather than an appreciation of this particular work. The ritualistic elements seem incomprehensible and maybe because of that, the work is highly respected, but not really liked.

I do not want to undervalue Sawitri's work by reference to the audience's response. Her work is a great example of the use of liminal elements to create a liminoid performance which explicitly re-creates a liminal environment, where the human audience is not important, even though an important message is directed to the audience, requiring its full attention. Works like Badan Bahagia, as well as Sunya, come from the need to re-interpret and reinforce traditional values. They represent a sincere criticism of the current interpretation of religion. Tradition in these cases shapes the performance, but in a way that cannot fully reach the audience. Moreover the audience, because it has been shaped by performances in ritual contexts, has a particular attitude in watching performances and may not yet to be able to appreciate this kind of work. The kind of analytic concentration required to appreciate contemporary works is different from what the audience is used to.

**Audiences' consumption - multiple sites of attention**

A performance in a ritual event is never the only activity the audience is involved with. Often, it is not the only performance going on: other performances may be taking place in the same area or close by at exactly the same time. One or more pedanda-priests may be carrying out a ceremony while people belonging to the temple or to the household are busy making things happen. A good joke or a particularly good dance can make them stop for a while, and soon recommence their tasks. This does not exclude the fact that some people (mainly guests) actually watch the performance. But it suggests that the performance, if not particularly attractive, is not the only focus: their attention is multiply focused.
When a performance is part of an evening entertainment organised after a day (or days) of rituals, it is part of a rich programme of performances, gambling games, food stalls and all sort of vendors. This sort of event can be any size, depending on the importance of the ceremony. The annual Bali Arts Festival recreates the same atmosphere. Most of the venues are open and admission is free. Only the Ardha Candra theatre charges an entrance fee, especially on the occasion of the competitions where attendance is always full. Otherwise people walk around from morning until night watching different sorts of performances and events: from a joged dance to a children's game competition; from a topeng to a food stall; from a contemporary dance to a Chinese shoe vendor and stalls of refined Javanese silk batik or of precious stones. Popular music is not excluded.

The fact that the Bali Arts Festival becomes more like a big fair every year (a fact widely criticised) attracting an increasingly large audience, is a clear sign of what the general public is used to and appreciates. The general audiences, the ones outside the circle of lovers of contemporary works, want entertainment. But I have seen the same kind of audience coming to Denpasar from far villages by motorbike to watch a new legong creation performed on the occasion of New Year's Eve, a non-traditional occasion. Audiences in Bali look for entertainment, but also for good quality dances with innovative choreography. Innovation within tradition seems to be the favourite type of performance, after the purely entertaining forms where slapstick predominates.


In an article on his experience as a choreographer of contemporary dance, I Wayan Dibia gives an insightful analysis of the attitudes of Balinese audiences. Comparing audiences in Bali and in Jakarta, he observes that their reception of performances is totally different. A work highly appreciated in Bali for its clear story plot and rich innovation was considered "too traditional" by the multicultural
audience of the Indonesian capital city. On the other hand a work “rejected” in Bali—because it is too abstract—is appreciated in Jakarta (Dibia 1997: 163).

Having a story to follow seems to be an important element in general audience appreciation. Furthermore, the dance gestures of traditional dance, even if they have lost their original denotative meaning linked to Indian mudra or their imitative evocation of the movement of flora and fauna, are easily understood by Balinese. Audience members accordingly expect to recognise the aesthetic elements of other types of performance. However, in contemporary dance, movements are unrecognisable, so people do not have a frame of reference. As Gadd emphasises “audiences are focused on trying to understand the meaning of the performance instead of just being transported by the performance”.30 Sura stresses that this happens especially in the villages, where people define contemporary style dances as “crazy”.31 Similarly, according to Suteja’s experience, whatever is new or strange, off the planet, is labelled “kontemporer.”32

Some choreographers, aware of audience tastes, are keen to adapt their works by avoiding abstract themes and introducing entertaining elements. But a small audience may not be a sign that the performance lacks aesthetic value. It may just be that there are not many interested in contemporary dance in that area. In general, outside Bali as well, contemporary dance audiences are smaller than those for other forms of performance. The struggle for life of contemporary work is universal. Yet is Ulf Gadd right when he asserts: “there is nothing wrong with the audience. The problem here is that contemporary dance is not good enough”.33

30 Mereka terlalu sibuk untuk coba dapat arti dalam pertunjukan itu daripada kesan saja. Interview with Ulf Gadd (aka I Wayan Putra Karya), 12-01-2005.
31 Interview with I Nyoman Sura, 15-01-2005.
32 Interview with I Ketut Suteja, 08-01-2005.
Is it a matter of quality?

Is it the quality of the kontemporer works which is causing a poor response, or are the audiences not used to them yet? Is it a matter of time until tari kontemporer in Bali finds a wider audience? Is the search for the new by these performers going to meet the taste of the audience? The use of religious topics is addressed as a problem by Murgiyanto: he believes that because of the strong influence of globalisation and the global market "many dance artists fail to reinvent their performance tradition with artistic integrity" it is hard to argue with Murgiyanto when he observes that the display of God is a tool to worship the idols of fame, flesh and funds (Murgiyanto 2005 quoting the film director Cecil B. De Mille). Nevertheless this fact can be applied not only to contemporary works, but also to traditional ones, as well as to all those aspects of culture that are commercialised for the tourist/culture market.

The relative lack of success of contemporary performance with Balinese audiences could be caused by lack of technical awareness, or lack of artistic integrity, nevertheless in other fields of arts contemporary works have been very successful nationally and internationally. During the Diskusi Seni Kontemporer in Denpasar an interesting question was raised: why is that Balinese contemporary visual art has such a good response, especially at the international level, while contemporary performance does not? Dibia pointed out that the conditions are different. Dance, even if it is created by an individual, is related to the collective in which it is created, while visual arts are the product of an individual. The existence of the visual artwork is not linked to a community.34

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It seems that Dibia believes that performance, because it is linked to, produced, and consumed by the community has less chance of success when something

34 Wayan Dibia during Diskusi Seni Kontemporer, 06-05-2005.
new is proposed than visual art work, produced by an individual and consumed in a wider context such as exhibitions by individuals. It also implies that performances are mostly linked to ceremonial contexts, while only a small quantity of works of visual art, and in limited contexts, are linked to ceremonies. To some extent Dibia seems to agree that the ceremonial framework of performance, which is collective, influences its consumption when it tries to cross traditionally established boundaries. The individual expressions of traditional sacred values in tari kontemperor seem not to fit into the established framework and struggle to find an audience. Even if the themes are known they are not sufficiently compelling.

However, there is at the same time, another kind of performance, contemporary in the sense of here and now, considered profane and based on humour, which is very popular. Why do people like it? Why is it so popular? There have always been elements of performance that respond to the desire for humour, but here a whole genre of performance focuses on the creation of laughter. Bondres, or bebondresan, first appeared in early 80s as a result of performers’ continuous search for the new in order to satisfy the audience. It has become particularly prominent in recent years as a response to public eagerness for comedy. Performers have to please the human audience, even when the performance is part of the core of a ritual. The next chapter focuses on bondres, which, thrives on a close although sometimes constraining relationship with its audiences, in contrast to the creatively free, but less well-grounded and appreciated art of the kontemperor.
CHAPTER V

Masks: contemporary adaptation of traditional forms

The previous chapter analysed liminoid performances, created by the voluntary act of a choreographer or director. These contemporary works exist in the domain of entertainment separate from ritual. Nevertheless, the examples that I have examined contain strong liminal elements aiming to make the audience reflect on metaphysical aspects of Balinese religious life. As previously mentioned, these performances do not seem to receive as much attention from the audience as another form of performance also defined by some as “contemporary” - topeng bondres or bebondresan.

This latter type of performance, also considered profane, was originally part of the liminal performance genre topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya. It has acquired autonomous life as a liminoid performance in response to demand from current audiences, modern audiences. The defining characteristics of bondres are their ridiculous humour and explicit focus on present day reality. This chapter explores how this combination of humour and contemporary reference works, in what kind of contexts, how its novelty and popularity is maintained, and where bondres fits in a social and artistic context so intensely focussed on the sacred and traditional. Intriguing enough the most recent innovations in bondres are now being employed in the original liminal performance, topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya. Stock characters often based on Javanese models are being used in topeng pajegan to satisfy the audience’s desire for laughter. What might be the implications of this reabsorption of the ridiculous and profane into the domain of the sacred itself? In
what ways does it impact on the traditional role of the topeng pajegan performer who completes the ceremony by characterising all the masks by himself?

In this chapter I shall explore bondres’ relationship to other types of topeng by first looking at its origin and development. As a very flexible, contextually-shaped form, the emergence and growth of bondres provides insights into both performers’ behaviour and audiences’ responses and tastes. We are able to observe performers’ creative processes, as well as audience responses to current social-political contexts, in particular, to the discourse on contemporary Balineseness and ajeg Bali.

**Origin of Bondres**

The origin of Bondres as an autonomous performance is explained by Kodi (2006: 72-75) in his masters’ thesis. The idea of performing bondres as a separate genre rather than as part of a full topeng performance, came from I Gusti Ngurah Suparta when he was director of the SMKI in the early 1980s as a way of entertaining the school’s guests. The performer and SMKI lecturer I Dewa Kgakan Nyoman Sayan had the task to perform by himself at the School’s venue. Later he repeated this experimental form in other places outside the school. In 1982 I Nyoman Sayang with I Nyoman Sumandi and occasionally I Nyoman Sedana (as reserve) performed bondres during the 1982 European SMKI tour. Kodi (2006) explains that during this tour bondres acquired characteristics that still shape the performance today, for example the use of languages other than Balinese and making the audience laugh without understanding. Kodi clearly characterises the nature of bondres: “At the beginning bondres arose from the need and the creative impulse to present a humorous, short and engaging performance.” Kodi asserts that the birth of Bondres is rooted in the transformation of the society (sosio-kultural-ekonomi). New social conditions

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1 Jadi semula bondres muncul karena kebutuhan dan dorongan kreatif untuk menyajikan hidangan seni yang bersifat humor, singkat dan memikat (Kodi 2005: 75).
created the need for a compact, amusing and totally secular entertainment. (Kodi 2005: 75 quoting also Dibia 1995: 51-68; and Soetarno 2002: 4). Kodi mentions Western cultural influence as the main source of change in both Balinese society and bondres, transforming bondres from an element of a sacred performance to a profane part of popular culture. Kodi doesn’t specifically indicate the changes and the elements of “modernity” causing these changes at societal level. By contrast he is very specific about the transformations in the content and structure of the performance, providing examples of practice of four topeng bondres groups coming from different areas of the island.

Two of the groups taken as case studies by Kodi form part of my research as well: a group from Carangsari-Badung led by I Gusti Ngurah Windia which achieved fame in the 1970s performing topeng prembon, and a group from Singaraja led by I Nyoman Durpa founded in 80s which is still very popular. Both performers are active in different degrees in all types of mask dance-drama - topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya, panca, prembon and bondres. Before proceeding to the investigation of bondres it is necessary to understand the differences between these genres of topeng. Kodi clearly explains the relation between the structure of topeng pajegan and its offshoots, focusing on the structure of bondres. His description illustrates the literal meaning of bondres, potongan, a cut, a portion. In fact bondres is a portion of topeng pajegan.

From topeng pajegan to bondres: structure of the performance

Kodi (2006) explains that topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya’s structure consists of six parts:

Petegak, Pengelembbar, Penasar, Patangkilan, Bondres, Sidhakarya

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2 Windia’s group in the ’70s was unequivocally understood as performing prembon. Nowadays it is also called a bondres group. We shall see in the following paragraphs the differences between the two types, nevertheless sometimes what according to the roles should be called prembon is called bondres.
**Petegak** a musical introduction aiming to communicate to both audience and performers that the topeng is about to start.

**Pengelembar** the dances unconnected to the story of the standard courtly figures of topeng performance, aiming to show the technical ability of the performer. (topeng keras and topeng tua are usually part of this section).

**Penasar** the narration of the story starts.

**Patangkilan** the meeting between the main characters of the story, often the king and the minister, but also the priest.

**Bondres** appearance of the popular characters with funny faces.

**Sidhakarya** entry of the mask that has the task to complete the ceremony with special offerings.

In topeng panca the structure is the same as topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya with the difference that the patangkilan section focusing on the story and therefore on the protagonists' actions is more relevant than in topeng pajegan and there is no Sidhakarya at the end. This is replaced by the **Pasiat** which is the representation of the closing scene of the story narrated.

Topeng prembon, which is a combination of arja and topeng panca, differs from topeng panca in the use of female arja performers with characters such as **Mantri Manis, Liku** and **Desak Rai**. The two servant narrators (penasar and wijil), as in arja, may not wear masks.

Topeng bondres is made up of three or four sections from topeng pajegan: 1) petegak, 2) penasar, 3) bondres or 1) petegak, 2) pengelembar, 3) penasar, 4) bondres. There is also a version of bondres without pengelembar, and with the introduction of a female comic character, Desak Rai, from arja dance-drama, who wears make up. While in the previous types of topeng the story narrated is central to the performance, in bondres very often there is not a story in the traditional sense. Rather, one or more topics related to current events replace the
tales of the semi-historical past. Figures resembling the comic characters of other types of Indonesian theatre chat and joke and argue with one another about these topics. Before investigating this aspect we look more closely at the comic characters, as they appear in many forms of traditional Indonesian theatre. (Kodi 2006: 78-91)

**Comic characters in Balinese performances: the ever-present penakawan-servant**

The presence of comic characters in performing arts is common in Indonesia. It has already been discussed extensively with reference to the shadow puppet play (wayang kulit), and performances derived from it such as wayang wong and sendratari (e.g deBoer 1987, Bandem 1980) In all these forms there are comic characters that are a result of performers’ creativity, which are not present in the original epic texts on which the performances are based, such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

In Bali there are at least four common comic characters: two servants of the heroic protagonist (Twalen and Merdah) and two servants of the antagonists (Delem and Sangut). There is often also a female servant, the Condong. Figures like these acting as servants to principal characters, are present in almost all forms of dance-drama in Bali: gambuh, topeng, arja, prembon, janger and drama gong (Catra 2005: 54-58). Their main role is translating the words of the main characters, who speak mainly in kawi or high Balinese, into colloquial Balinese. They connect the world of the heroes (eternally existent) with the audience’s daily life. Furthermore, they link the different parts of the narration and, especially, make the audience laugh. Their physical features, in contrast to that of the main characters, are exaggeratedly ridiculous, and include a vast number of possible human physical deficiencies. Their way of walking alone provokes laughter. This characteristic is drawn upon in other genres of performances, where comic characters intervene on stage, even for a short time between scenes, just walking
or doing a short dance, functioning as a sort of intermezzo. I don’t think I have ever watched a dance-drama in Bali without this comic element.

Penasar and Bondres

In topeng, there are two half-mask comic servants to the king, penasar kelihan (also called punta) and the younger brother penasar cenikan or wijil (also called kartala). When topeng is performed by only one dancer-actor there is only the penasar kelihan. They are the narrators of the story and the translators for the figures in full masks such as the king who express themselves only through movements. They are the foundation (penasar means foundation) of the performance, and provide the connection between contemporary topics and audience with the main story and history. In theory, the penasar kelihan is smarter and more knowledgeable than wijil, especially in philosophical matters, but if the actor who performs wijil has a better knowledge, he will be more active in philosophical and historical elucidations. Their masks are not particularly comic: the penasar mask is a dark brown half mask without eyes or with big eyes; the wijil is a light brown mask without eyes. They do not have big or buck/protruding teeth or particular physical defects, but while the penasar requires a large body with a low pitched voice, the wijil requires a small body with a high pitched voice. The physical contrast between the two is comical, but as a medium of interpretation between the ancestors and the current audience, these two servants are expected to be the narrators, rather than to be hilariously funny. When there are two or more performers on stage, usually the penasar kelihan provides the link, taking a leading role in the comic dialogue.

Apart from the principle characters of the story – the kings, ministers, and villains – the other characters in topeng are the bondres. Adnyana (2001) describes bondres as portraits of commoners, having all sorts of physical and mental

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3See Jenkins (1994) and (Emigh) 1996 on the role of penasar and bondres within topeng performance.
illnesses. They are stock characters such as the deaf one (bongol), the one with jagged lips and piled up teeth (cungih mrongos) or the one with big lips (boes). Adnyana points out that they are symbolic of people who have problems within the society (Adnyana 2001: 15). Bondres can be seen as caricatures of physical or mental deficiencies that actually occur in the society.

The comical effect arises from these extreme characteristics and the ability of the mask wearer to embody them through movement and voice. They become villagers who connect the story of topeng with their own contemporary reality. Jenkins observes how penasar and bondres operate through laughter, by mocking damaging Western influence while reinforcing spiritual values, a sense of community and ultimately, Balinese culture. It is interesting to notice that “Balinese culture” is in the hands of deformed characters (Jenkins 1994: 43-44).

In Bali, deformation, according to Howe (1984), is considered the consequence of a curse by ancestors. The sick and deformed are beings of a different kind, belonging to a domain between animals and humans and as such are marginalised (Howe 1984: 206-207). It can be said that there is a sort of cathartic value in the ridiculous portrayal of such terrible illnesses. Laughter is an instrument to restore balance in an embarrassing context, as well as to facilitate identification and empathy and overcome difficulties. This attitude is common in daily life interactions and very much emphasised in performance, especially when performers are particularly skilled.

Important proof of the skill of the performers is their ability to continuously find new jokes appropriate for their audience. As Dana (2002) emphasises, the success of bondres depends very much on the originality of what they say. Furthermore, the performers have to be able to read reality quickly and adapt their dialogues to the daily life of the audience (Dana 2002: 102-103).

The search for "the new", able to satisfy audiences' ever-changing taste led to the creation of bondres, or bebondresan, as an independent type of performance. The occasions for performance can be various. But, even when bondres performances focus on the pure entertainment of the audience, they still maintain their role as media of communication. This role is present in all types of topeng, pajegan included. During the bondres section of any type of topeng the performer refers to current events and he can interact directly with the audience. When bondres became a separate performance without connection to a story or a specific philosophical content, it became a valid medium for the promotion of a candidate for election, or to inform the population of a new law or a special program to prevent diseases. Both live and broadcast performances are used in the anti AIDS campaign, for example. Recently, also bondres has been used in commercial advertising. Television and both governmental and non governmental bodies have surely contributed to the popularity of bondres.

When I use the term "popularity" I indicate the current status of bondres, which can change at any time. Keeping this in mind it is understandable that when a particular group is often invited to perform and its performances are broadcast on TV, it extends its popularity very quickly all over the island. It is common that the audience of a certain area, in its search for novelty, would enjoy the performance of a group from a different area. As a result certain groups perform every night and, sometimes, more than once a night.

The frequency of bondres performances and the availability of performances on TV and DVD increase the need for new original characters and jokes to satisfy the audience. What about well-known performers who have to be on stage up to two or three times every evening: how do they manage to respond to this need? To explore performers' mechanisms of adaptation to different sorts of audiences and contexts I will take as a case-study a project conducted by the International Medical Corps (IMC) Bali-Indonesia, aimed at assisting the recovery of those suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after the 2002 Bali bomb blast.
One of the vehicles chosen to diffuse the project all over the island was bondres performance.

This is a very common phenomenon: as I noted earlier, bondres often serves to educate the population about new services, laws, or projects. The IMC project is of particular interest, because it enables us to observe the behaviour of bondres groups involved in spreading the same message over a period of about two years. Before focusing on how the bondres works to convey a specific message and at the same time retain its popularity, some background information on the IMC project is given.

From mask to make-up: the lawak phenomenon, in the context of post-trauma healing

Elisa de Jesus, as a IMC program field manager, explained to me in a conversation (December 2002) that the program started when she was working as nurse at the Sanglah Hospital in Denpasar, just after the Bali bombings in 2002. She had worked as a nurse at the hospital for two months, starting the first day after the blasts. She realised that in that period the people who were coming to the hospital to receive treatment and medication, also had wounds other than physical ones. She had just met the psychiatrist Dr. Robert Reverger, so she started to send some people to him. In the beginning, a group of twelve people suffering from the blast injuries started to be regularly treated by him. Then, in November, just ten weeks after the blasts, the IMC counselling service was set up. The group of people in need of this sort of assistance soon increased, with the IMC focussing solely on the psychological wounds caused by the blasts.

With the initial funding, the IMC had the task of informing the population that they could receive free treatment at the IMC premises. Nevertheless, Balinese were not aware of the concept of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, a disorder...
defined in Western psychology. With the Bali bomb blasts of 2002, Balinese (and not only Balinese) discovered that besides sharing with the rest of the world the threat of terrorism, they were also sharing with the rest of the world, particularly the Western world, a psychological disorder.

Stress, pronounced "setres", is a word in common use in Bali, colloquially describing a state of pressure and worry. But Balinese did not know that sleeping problems, aggressive attitude, anxiety, depression and the like were consequences of trauma and not a strange sudden madness, and that such trauma was curable. The trauma was of course caused by being involved in the blast, or even just watching the Indonesian news at the time which was continuously broadcasting scenes of completely burned bodies. The IMC's message had to reach the whole population of Bali because not all of those who survived the blasts were from the Kuta area. Most of them were employees from different parts of the island. Furthermore, in the latter part of the project, the IMC realised that because of the economic impact of the blast, the whole island was traumatized, and so their message had to reach as many as possible.

The means used to promote the IMC program were radio interactive television programs, brochures, cartoon booklets, tee-shirts, training for school teachers and local government clinics (PUSKEMAS, Pusat Kesehatan Masyarakat - Community Health Centre) all over the island to enable them to take over the program. Furthermore, bondres performances were held in each area of the island and broadcast on TV. All the means used merit our attention, but given the focus of this thesis, I will examine the bondres performances. Putu Gede Teryl Adnyana, a member of the IMC staff, was a coordinator of the bondres project. He explained why and how IMC chose topeng bondres as promotional tool.
Choosing topeng as a promotional tool

Teryl explained that it was not the first time that a humorous style of topeng had been used in a media campaign to reach a wide portion of the population. In the early 1970s, the Regent (Bupati) of Badung regency’s new family planning policy (known as Keluarga Berencana, KB) was supported by I Gusti Ngurah Windia’s topeng educative performances. Later on, in the late 1970s, the governor of Bali, Ida Bagus Oka, asked Windia’s group, known as Topeng Tugek Carangsari, to promote family planning all over the island. The campaign was so effective that the birth rate in Bali drastically decreased, especially in the villages. Windia was also asked to promote agriculture projects and other projects as well. In an interview, Windia stressed that his main task was to simplify the information for the audiences in the villages.

Teryl consulted different people, including performers, before taking the decision to use Bondres for the project. They all agreed with the choice of bondres and in particular with Topeng Tugek Carangsari: Windia was still famous and his innovative work made him and his group a natural choice. Topeng Tugek Carangsari first performed for the IMC project in the area of the blasts at banjar (sub-village) Legian Kelod in February 2003. The group performed two other times: on 22 March 2003 at banjar Penyaringan, Mendoyo, Jembrana; on 25 April 2003 at Wantilan Sasana Dharma, Niti Batur, Kintamani, Bangli. Other scheduled bondres were also performed: one by the Petruk Dollar group, stars of lawak, comical entertainment by performers who wear heavy make-up that transforms facial features, who were explicitly requested by a community in Kuta on 20 March 2003 at banjar Pengabetan; and another four by the Salju Group Bondres on 22 February 2003 at banjar Jaba Tengah Pemogan; on 12 April at Balai Desa Padang Bulia, Sukasada, Klungkung; on 15 May 2003 at JI. Mayor Wisnu

5 Windia during informal conversations and an interview (15-02-2004) told me that he spread this message during his own performances, topeng pajegan included. The female Bondres Tugek usually instructed people on family planning (more details are in the following paragraphs). Only in the following years did he formally undertake the task to promote the project.


7 Interview with I Putu Gede Teryl Adnyana, 09-07-2003.
(Lapangan Puputan), Denpasar; on 29 May 2003 at Sasana Budaya, Klungkung). In this context I shall focus on two groups, the Topeng Tugek Carangsari and the Salju Group, first briefly introducing them, then describing a performance of each and finally observing the response to their work.

Topeng Tugek Carangsari

Windia's group is known as Topeng Tugek Carangsari from the name of one bondres, Ratu Jegek, the "beautiful woman", and from the village where he comes from: Carangsari. Windia as Ratu Jegek, dispensed advice on birth control. (Jenkins 1994: 31). The particular use of masks, whose success inspired other performances, wasn't the only characteristic of this group. Windia has been considered an important innovator of the prembon genre, establishing the use of female arja performers, and unmasked penasar and wijil. In that form, only one performer, Windia himself, wore masks (Karji 2001:10). Topeng Tugek Carangsari in this arja-like form, topeng prembon, won only second prize at the topeng Festival in 1974, but, as Kardji (2001: 10) notes, after the festival, Topeng Tugek Carangsari became well known, while no-one heard about the group who came first at the festival. Since then Windia's fame has not decreased.9

Topeng Salju

Salju stands for Sugama, Lanang and Juana. These are the names of three performers of the well-known group of Arja Muani, an all-male arja dance-drama

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8There are several performers (the Bali Post in an article said hundreds, Bali Post 26-03-2000) who use the same sort of mask- Ratu Jegeg in their topeng performances. We have to take into consideration that imitation is on the one hand is a sort of infringement of non-spoken copyright, and on the other a sign of success: if people reproduce a character it is because people like it. In any case Tugek is so well known that everybody recognizes her original creator, I Gusti Ngurah Windia.

9Kodi (2005: 110) considers Windia one of the most imitated (and as such respected) performers and he included Topeng Carangsari in the bondres performances.
group: I Wayan Sugama, I Gusti Lanang Ardika, I Wayan Juana Adi Saputra. After the domain of all-male arja became populated by several new groups while the demand for this form had declined, the three performers decided to form a new group to perform mainly topeng, topeng Sidhakarya included. Forming a new group did not imply dissociating themselves from the old one, nor from the several other groups they regularly work with. They retain their other activities as well as invite their colleagues from Arja Muani (like I Made Sudarsana/Cilik) to their performances as Topeng Salju or Bondres Salju.

Topeng Tugek Carangsari performing

In spite of the great enthusiasm and respect for I G N Windia, the IMC people did not have an easy working relation with him from the beginning. The first bondres commissioned by IMC to Windia’s group was partially recorded by Bali TV and included in the following day’s news. The idea was to broadcast a full performance (limited to 1 hour) to reach a wider audience in the island. According to Teryl, Windia did not like the idea of being recorded and broadcast, because once a joke is broadcast, it cannot be used anymore during live performances. Teryl explained that the only way to convince Windia to perform again was to point out the social aspect of the program, because he was not interested in the economic outcome. Teryl had to prove that it was not a commercial project.

Ultimately, Windia performed two other times because the group was especially requested by the villagers of Mendoyo and Kintamani. I shall describe here the performance in Mendoyo.

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1°This is what Teryl refered during the interview.(Interview with I Putu Gede Teryl Adnyana, 09-07-2003). In order to fully understand Windia’s attitude it is also necessary to add the fact that Windia in 1975 had the unpleasant experience of being audio recorded for commercial purposes without his knowledge. The producer of the recording label later compensated Windia who accepted his apologies and never officially denounced him (copyright rules were first applied in the same year).
The structure of Topeng Tugek Carangsari Bondres always includes petegak, pengelembar, penasar, bondres. Like the Prembon the penasar section is performed by unmasked performers, while Windia and one or two other performers, change bondres masks.

The performance in the village of Penyaringan-Mendoyo, Jembrana was entitled *Bendesa Braban* – “The Village Head Braban” (22 March 2003). It begins with two servants (un-masked penasar kelihan and cenikan arja-like appearance) talking about the village head Braban. They tell that their master in a village of the Buleleng district had to deal with disorders in his village. After unrelated jokes about their own singing ability, the two provide some more details of the story to introduce the entrance of the village head. Windia, as the masked character of Bendesa Braban, tells all the details of the story that involved the kings of Buleleng and Badung. The illness and deaths in his village were caused by Kala Bebau. Bendesa Braban managed to defeat Kala Bebau, thanks to a *keris* (weapon-sword) that he inherited from Dang Hyang Dwijendra when he was at the Tanah Lot Temple. Having defeated Kala Bebau, Bendesa Braban asked his king/raja to arrange a ceremony for the deaths. Nevertheless, his worries did not stop. He was thinking of all those who saw so many people dying and the consequent stress. Bendesa Braban explained that sleeping problems, depression and similar, were caused by the trauma. They could be cured by doing meditation, cultivating hobbies like fishing, singing or with the help of the doctors from IMC. The Bendesa left the stage and this main message was repeated in different ways by other three bondres right up to the conclusion of the performance by the penasar and wijil.

**Salju performing**

While Topeng Tugek Carangsari maintained the traditional structure of bondres topeng each time they performed for this project, the Salju Group, after their first performance, generally did not. When I watched their first performance for IMC
on February 22nd, the group respected the distribution of roles, following the traditional Bondres structure: Juana and the guest star performed the introductory characters of pengelembar (topeng keras, topeng tua); Lanang characterised the penasar kelihan, staying most of the time on stage, Sugama was the Liku, the crazy princess of arja, who, in this case is an expert on philosophical matters, and Juana returned to the scene with several changes of bondres. The sections of the performance were petegak, pengelembar, penasar, bondres with the Liku added, a make up character not usually present in bondres performance, personified by a man. Their guest star, Suanda, added to the variety of bondres masks. These contributed, through humour, to the success of the performance, which aimed to inform both the live audience (circa 200 people) and those at home watching Bali TV about PTSD.

However, the structure of this first performance, which is clearly based on that of classical topeng, was not maintained for all performances. In the 15 May, 2003 performance, titled Jagatnatha in JI. Mayor Wisnu (Lapangan Puputan) Denpasar, the topeng structure as well as the masks, other than that worn by Juana, disappeared completely. As Juana and Sugama explained to me in separate conversations in December 2004, the multicultural audience of the city of Denpasar, always needs new forms of performance. In order to satisfy their taste, the Salju group presented a performance, which resulted from a mix of make-up bondres, drama gong and sendratari. The cast included female dancers and actresses, as well as children and more comical characters. Dialogues interspersed with dances told the story of a family dealing with PSTD, which was encouraged, of course, to ask for help from IMC. The 400 people in the audience loved it.

The topic of the Denpasar performance was, as with classical topeng, introduced by two characters resembling servants (wearing a drama gong-like costume), who presented themselves as employees, but who talked at length about the difficulties of finding a job. Their boss, Juana wearing a half mask, came on stage. A child came on stage playing with a fire-cracker and the boss over-
reacted. He explains that he thought it was a bomb. Then he describes the destruction caused by the bombs in Kuta, and the consequent financial loss. The employees told him that he could ask for help from a psychologist, but he replied that he would rather consult a dukun, a traditional healer, instead. Lanang was the dukun’s assistant who got this job because he could not find anything else. Sugama was the dukun: a paranormal (a psychic) from Java. All these characters were without masks, but with make up. After few jokes and misunderstandings, the time of the consultation came. The boss explained his problem to the dukun: the bomb in Kuta not only destroyed his business, but also killed his wife, leaving him with his children continuously asking for their mother. The boss asked if this was caused by black magic. The dukun encouraged him to look at this problem in a “logical” way. He explained that his problems were not caused by black magic, but rather by the trauma caused by the bomb. The dukun, mysteriously, opened a black and white box. Inside was the IMC logo. He explained that IMC offered consultations and medication to those who had the same problem. The dukun encouraged him to tell everyone who might have those same symptoms to go to the IMC. Everything was for free.

Clearly, the two performances from the two groups differ in structure; while Carangasari still kept the topeng structure, Salju did not follow it at all. Nevertheless, in both cases the role of performer as guru loka, a teacher of the world regarding issues of Balinese society, is firmly maintained. Both performances provided entertainment and moral guidance (Catra 2005: 2). They aimed to reach a balance between opposite forces: what Catra (2005) explains in philosophical terms with rwa-bhineda, two opposite powers, whose actual unity is at the source of life. As Catra demonstrates, the role of the performers is to contribute to the actualisation of the necessary balance between these two opposite forces, the performers are a manifestation of it (ibid. 2005: 4). Therefore, the performance itself has to be a manifestation of this unity. Restoring the balance is the path towards the healing process caused by the trauma.
In spite of the fact that both groups were communicating this fundamental concept, the IMC staff decided to hire only the Salju group when the new funding allowed an extension of the program. From August 2003 to July 2004, the Salju group performed live and then broadcast their show ten times. Why did IMC choose the Salju group to promote the PSDT program? Why did the group accept the deal, considering the fact that their performances were going to be broadcast so many times? We have seen that the experienced performer Windia was reluctant to be broadcast. In order to attempt to answer these questions, I will examine the perspectives of both the IMC and Salju.

The IMC's perspective: choosing the Salju group

Teryl\textsuperscript{11} explained that while the first part of the program aimed to inform the people about the symptoms of PSTD through the performances, during the second part they dealt with some of the manifestations of the disorder in Bali. Suicide caused by depression was one of the topics. Stress was described in depth, with all its manifestations, to make it easier for people to recognise its symptoms. Another topic was linked to pedophilia, and children in the performance contributed to the topic. Confident of the funding to carry out the program for another year,\textsuperscript{12} IMC wanted to plan the bondres differently, by choosing only one group for the entire program. Of course, they had to decide on the most effective group.

Teryl said, that according to his survey, Topeng Tugek Carangsari did not receive a warm response from the audience. This was due to the idealistic attitude of Windia, who repeatedly stressed that he was not a salesman or a promoter.\textsuperscript{13} But

\textsuperscript{11}Interview with I Putu Gede Teryl Adnyana, 22-11-2004.
\textsuperscript{12}Funding for the program came from different sources and, as any non-government program, its life was always uncertain. The second part of the program could be carried on also thanks to Red Cross financial aid.
\textsuperscript{13}Saya bukan jualan, bukan promosi: I G.N. Windia as reported by I Putu Gede Teryl Adnyana in interview, 22-11-2004.
the express aim of the bondres performances was to promote the project, to attract people and make them go to IMC for treatment. The main problem, according to Teryl, was that Windia's group performances were too linked to the Babad stories, and as such were difficult for people to understand. The proof of this was the decrease in the number of patients coming to IMC after their performances. The point is that, if the message is conveyed through something complex, it is not accepted by everybody. In other words, according to Teryl, Babad stories telling about ancient kings are too complex to be understood by everyone.

Teryl emphasised his point by making reference to the use of the kawi language in the Babad stories. Kawi is not understood by everybody and because of that it becomes an obstacle in the transmission of the main message. On the contrary, the message will come through if there is a combination of comedy and serious message (humormya dengan serius). The Salju group is very successful at this, because, according to Teryl, they are able to use the current daily language of people without losing the serious aspect of the main message. This skill derives from their experience in satisfying different sorts of audiences all over Bali. In Karangasem for example, the audience does not like bondres, but prefer joged. Tabanan residents preferred songs. Teryl explained that the capacity of Salju to respond to the tastes of their audiences made the performances continuously improve. I also asked Teryl why Salju soon stopped using masks. Teryl said that the performers suggested when to perform with masks and when without. Their choices were always confirmed by local people.

In reality both groups, Carangsari and Salju, mixed the use of make-up and masks. For example, the servants to the principal in both cases were un-masked,

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15 Once, according to Teryl, there was a misunderstanding: they decided to have an arja-style performances, but the promotion of the performance was as Bondres Salju. The people of that place, not really keen for masks, did not come in great numbers, but when they realized that that was an arja they asked for the same performance again. Interview with I Putu Gede Teryl Adnyana, 22-11-2004.
while the principal was a masked character, an half mask-bondres. As Teryl noted, the treatment of the story made the difference between the two groups. This can be observed thanks to the story-line of two performances described above. Salju’s story is absolutely contemporary and direct, while Windia’s group refers to an historical past as an example to solve a current issue.

If we look at the two performances, the main difference is the rhythm. Carangsari is slower, partially caused by the two servants who entertained for too long from the beginning with jokes that had nothing to do with either the topic or the story. But it was also caused by the longer introduction necessitated by the historical story. Salju, instead, started straight away with setting up the topic in a current context allowing the audience to recognise their own condition in a very direct way.\(^{16}\) This rhythm seems determined by the tastes of both the live audience and the television audiences.

However, the similarities between the two groups are greater than it may seem at first glance. Both groups gained popularity in different periods (Carangsari in the 70s-80s, Salju nowadays) in similar ways - that is, by using more arja elements and fewer masks, or by not using masks at all. The question arises whether the mask is an impediment for entertainment. The accounts of Sugama and Juana concerning their success in the IMC project shed light on this question, within a more general understanding of creative processes in bondres.

**Salju’s perspective**

During interviews and conversations between 2003 and 2004, the performers of the Salju group often stressed that changes in the structure and modality of the

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\(^{16}\)This is an ideal description. In some cases Salju also had very long performances full of jokes unrelated to the main topic. It especially happened when guest stars took over. Comparing live performance and broadcast ones it is possible to notice the “adjustments” made in the TV versions of the performances editing out those parts that are repetitive or not entertaining enough.
performances were mainly determined by the availability of funding and awareness of the TV broadcasts. One of the frequently mentioned aims was finding ways to avoid boring the audience. They even contemplated replacing the very popular character of Liku, performed by Sugama but decided against it. Instead, they made major changes to the rest of the performances by adding characters, introducing dance elements and new music. They all spoke enthusiastically about the performance in Denpasar, where they transformed the bondres performance into what they call drama-tari, a dance-drama. What they actually did was to integrate into the performance some elements of the obsolete drama-gong. Recycling styles is a common practice. All performers agree that the audience's taste is cyclical: what is popular today will soon become unpopular, substituted by another "temporary" favorite form of performance. This, in its turn, will become unpopular, to give space maybe, to the old form that was previously considered boring.

I consider the IMC project to be of great interest, because it allows us to observe how a group transmits the same message to different audiences, how performers behave in dealing with the variability, and unpredictability, of audiences. I see the main impediments, repetition of performance and being broadcast, as providing stimuli for the performers to reinvent themselves and to take a different direction. Salju, has developed from a small group dedicated to ceremonial performances, following the decline in popularity of their earlier speciality, Arja Muani, to become a large group, including several performance genres in their repertoire. As a consequence, the chosen name, Salju, linked to the names of the three founders, has changed its connotation. As Sugama explained, Salju is the snow (in Indonesian salju means snow) that comes in very hot weather with the hope of bringing change, even very small changes. Sugama is the philosopher of the group and he is able to find a nice justification for anything.

In an interview with me, Sugama, without being asked, pointed out what made Salju special. This was the fact that they not only wanted to perform for the IMC

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project, but also were happy to be broadcast, in contrast with their "competition", the other groups, such as Carangsari and the popular shadow puppet Wayang Cenk Blonk. Why he thought the others did not want to be broadcast and why Salju agreed so easily are made clear through his own words:

C: Why were the other groups afraid to be broadcast?

Sugama: This is the reason. If what they own, the jokes that they created are broadcast on television once, that material is dead. They would never use the same jokes again with a live audience. So, if we consider this from an economic point of view they suffer a financial loss.¹⁸

In fact even if the group receives a higher amount compared to a live performance, the material can be used only once. By contrast a live performance, although less lucrative than a broadcast performance, can be repeated many times, eventually attracting a much higher income the single broadcast.¹⁹

In a similar way, Sugama described the use of masks. At the beginning they used more masks to promote themselves, he said. In fact, because Salju was not the only group working for the IMC project, they were in a way forced to compete with the others who used masks. They were not afraid to use such a great number of masks because they were ready with other characters, which, could be developed just like their store of varied jokes, because "creativity does not stop". Its source is reading, discussing and the actual interactions on stage when the performer quickly has to use all the elements around him, Sugama explained.²⁰

¹⁸C: Kenapa grup yang lain takut direkam?


²⁰Sugama affirmed that in the beginning they used many bondres for promotional purposes. They used all those bondres because they were available, But these characters could also develop, Creativity does not stop, he repeated more times. Interview with I Wayan Sugama 11-11-2004.
Sugama does not wear masks even though he embodies the mad princess Liku, while Juana is the one who changes masks (when the performance includes masks). In fact, Juana is more specific in regard to the use of the mask. In an interview he pointed out some aspects that determine the choice of not using the masks so much.

First Juana explained that the difficulties of using masks consist in making a fixed facial expression come to life, in contrast with other forms of Balinese dance-drama, where changing facial expressions are central. Then he specified that the choice of not using masks during the IMC project depended on the taste of the audience, at that time, having a preference for a mix of lawak (make-up comedy), arja and drama gong. Another difficulty of using masks arises from the associated obligation to respect the structure and the rules of topeng - order of entrance of characters, use of Babad stories, and so on. He began elaborating the difficulties of using masks. He started to demonstrate movements, comparing the movements of masked characters’ performed by young pupils with the performances of experts, emphasising that rasa (the feeling) makes the difference. I asked whether it is the audience who is not able to appreciate the rasa, or the performer who is not able to achieve it. He answered that it is the performer, because it is difficult: of ten performers, maybe only two are able to reach it.

According to Juana the Salju group used masks less often because audiences currently prefer other types of entertainment, but also because few performers are able to characterise masks. I was intrigued that a good mask wearer, such as Juana, could be so keen to perform make-up comedy. His explanations made me think more about the relationship between audience and performers. It is true that the audience has a very definite taste, but it is also true that performers are those

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21 By contrast Suanda/Chedil in an interview reported earlier stated that in wearing the mask modifying the facial expression is unimportant. The difficulties lies in being able to be “pas”, fit with the mask’s character, having the right voice fitting to the mask’s character. Interview with I Ketut Suanda/Chedil 07-05-2005. See also chapter I of this thesis.

who create this taste. The audience prefers make-up comedy (lawak) because they have become accustomed to it. They watch the same sort of entertainment on state and private TV; Javanese performers interpret stock characters in comedies in the Indonesian language. Mrazek notices a similar dynamic in regard to Javanese dalang in the way in which they follow and create audience taste (Mrazek 1999: 87), and in regard to the influence of TV on audience taste (ibid:100-104). Balinese (in Balinese language or mixed Balinese-Indonesian) lawak performance is inspired by these programs which are broadcast on regional TV as well as distributed in the form of VCD or DVD. Balinese performers follow the flow, adding Balinese elements such as the mad princess, Liku, but they maintain the general atmosphere of the broadcast performances. Performers transfer this style to all sorts of contexts, topeng pajegang included, as we shall see later in this chapter. They do so not only because the audience currently likes it, but also because it is easier.

In fact, as the conversation with Juana continued, he became more specific about why they used make-up during the IMC project, instead of the masks that they used initially. Because they had to broadcast one performance each month, it was easier for them to use make-up, and give the audience something new every time; wearing make-up facilitates variation, while with masks it is harder-TV is a heavy load, he said (TV jadi beban berat). Juana also insisted that the main aim was to provide variation. Balinese audience are strongly in favour of this. They do not want to watch the same thing over and over.  

These assessments provide an interesting picture of the domain of entertainment: the mass media is clearly very important in both inspiring performers and shaping audience taste. In fact performers use the most popular TV programs, namely lawak performances, to get inspiration for new forms of performances, which they regularly perform for live audiences, as well as for TV audiences. Broadcasting is neither a convenient economic exercise, nor easy, because they have to produce new jokes and enormous variation in

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characterisation so as not to bore the audience of both live and broadcast performances. Although the audience appreciates the lawak style, because it is familiar, this familiarity is always at risk of becoming boring. Can we imagine the stress of the performers in trying to find new and interesting ideas to satisfy this sort of audience? In all of these contexts masks seem not to be included, because, as Juana indicated, they do not provide flexibility, and they are difficult to use. Topeng masks, as symbol of Balinese culture represented by Gajah Mada, stressed so much in the ajeg campaign, seem at risk of demise. Are masks really at risk of disappearing from the scene of Balinese performing arts? Are masks unable to serve the need for continuous and ever-changing humorous spectacle influenced by the model of pan-Indonesian TV programs? Has laughter, one of the basic ingredients of any good performance, and one of the teaching tools, taken over from the story which used to offer spiritual/philosophical guidance?

A golden rule: balancing jokes and philosophical teachings

Haven't you noticed? ... When you laugh, you open the mouth. That's the moment when I can put inside something important. [...] When a person laughs, he manifests a sense of completeness that would not come out in any other way ... and it happens even when the one who laughs is mentally retarded, an ignorant or a swami.24

These words by an Indian swami in conversation with the Italian journalist Terzani may help in understanding the function of laughter in teaching. Laughter fully opens the hearts, and makes everyone receptive. The one who laughs is totally present in her/himself, present in body and mind, open to what comes at the moment. That is why laughter is considered an important tool in topeng Sidhakarya. Clever jokes make the audience remember details of the chronicles of Balinese ancestors. Laughter makes the audience learn about the function of ceremony and the important details of Balinese philosophy. The performer as

24 Terzani (2005 [2004]:359) "Non avete notato?... Quando ridete aprite la bocca. E quello è il momento in cui io posso buttarci dentro qualcosa di importante". ... "Quando una persona ride, manifesta una completezza che non viene fuori altrimenti... E questo succede anche se chi ride è un riterdato mentale, un ignorante o uno swami".
guru loka, as embodiment of rua-bineda, attracts the audience with laughter, before introducing the philosophical elements (Catra 2005: 230-232).

The problem comes when laughter is for pure entertainment, when jokes provoke laughter without teaching anything. People often complain of a general tendency to empty laughter, and even worse, they complain about the tendency towards “porno” jokes to provoke laughter. They complain that this sort of laughter that can be tolerated for entertainment is “invading” all genres of performance, topeng and wayang kulit included.

Performers involved in the academic world have differing views on this issue. In 1995 Dibia noticed an ongoing (for three decades) shift towards humour in all Balinese performing arts without the loss of didactic and aesthetic features. Catra (2005: 231), in his PhD thesis, quotes Dibia to support the idea of the performer as guru loka, able to add humor to religious concepts. By contrast Kodi, in conversations and interviews and in his Masters’ thesis, stresses that the shift towards laughter makes sacred performances profane. He laments that this happens when laughter becomes the major part of the performance, instead of being only one of the two main weapons, the other being philosophy. Kodi also points out that often the audience wants to laugh from the beginning until the end. Furthermore, he explains that the use of stories is changing. Instead of Babad, the performer tells stories from current daily life, often about sex. Performers who are able to adapt themselves to the current times without making people think too much will have a wide audience, while those who still apply the full traditional structure do not attract large audiences. If a performer is able to talk about TV programs, and technology, he can attract a greater audience. Kodi then distinguishes seni pertunjukan tradisi tinggi, high traditional performing arts, from pertunjukan pop sekarang, current popular performance. He concludes that those who want to keep the tradition lose their audience.25

25Interview with I Ketut Kodi 20-08-2003. In light of Kodi’s thoughts it is easier to understand why Topeng Tugek Carangsari, keen to keep the traditional form with Babad story, didn’t succeed as much as Salju Group.
Kodi's point of view is reinforced by the experience of one of the most famous stars of the lawak, I Ketut Suanda, known as Chedil. The following dialogue with Suanda was based on the feedback from the performance on 17 August 2003, analysed in chapter III of this dissertation. He first explained that Kodi, whose performance immediately preceded his own, commented on ajeg Bali during the show by using *sastra topeng* while he himself did not. The term *sastra* means literature, but is used in more general terms to indicate teachings, philosophy (the literary texts drawn on in performance in fact contain philosophical teachings). Suanda pointed out, repeatedly, that people have had enough of listening to sastra topeng:

*People do not want to listen any more, because they are sick of sastra topeng, that's why they need that (laughter), (they are) surfeited.*

When I asked why people do not like sastra he replied that:

*Maybe it is because of times. Now is a time, in which people want absolutely clear things.*

He also added that puppets are in a better situation: dalang (puppeteer) such as I Wayan Wija are still able to use sastra by attracting the audience's attention with jokes first and then introducing sastra elements. In topeng it is difficult to do so except for a few bondres masks. If the performer wears the wijil or penasar mask, he cannot really make jokes, he can only be serious, Suanda continues:

*...Their faces are common, people are used to them. Now people like to watch strange things.*

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26 Orang orang tidak den gar lagi, karena orang sudah jenuh dengan sastra topeng, makanya itu yang perlu. Jenuh... Interview with I Ketut Suanda/Chedil, 07-05-2005.
When I asked why he thought people prefer what is strange, he gave a complex explanation based on some metaphysical concepts, then, concluding, he simplified the concept by saying:

*Audiences, not just performers, are crazy: they ... do not need a story, the main thing is that (the performance) is funny... the main thing is paying for laughs... they do not want any message. They say that they are already bored with guidance and more pure guidance.*

As an example of such “craziness” Suanda added that once during a performance in Ubud his host specifically told him:

*No need for any story, the main thing you come out on the stage and are funny...*

Suanda commented:

...it means it’s crazy, isn’t it? But on the other hand I’m happy about it. I do not have to worry about a story to tell, I just have to come out like this (he says this while moving his shoulders and showing his funny face) in order to earn my honorarium, isn’t it? Thank you! But I feel ashamed if an old man, a serious one, watches me; he will think that I’m just a joke. I have to bear in mind that my performance should be more than just entertainment?

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29 Penonton sudah gila, bukan pemain aja gila. Satu yang nonton tidak pingin cerita ada temannya, ada ceritanya... tidak lagi perlu cerita, yang penting lucu... yang penting sudah uangnya ke luar dan dia sudah tertawa dia tidak pikiran lagi ada pesan.... Katanya sudah jenuh, sudah bosan dengan saran saran aja. Interview with I Ketut Suanda /Chedil, 07-05-2005.
Suanda seems very well aware of the situation- and he does not feel totally comfortable with his performances being considered just empty, funny things. Since he became Chedil he is not performing topeng much. He is gifted and he is making the most (from economic point of view) of it. What is his gift? He is strange, different, daring, and funny. His face is funny. It works. Kodi in a conversation with me,\textsuperscript{31} described him as one of those performers who are particularly funny with their own faces and they lose their strength by wearing a mask. It is not just a matter of being able to characterise a mask, it is also important to consider the performer's features. Kodi points to himself as an example of a performer who does not have a funny face; he is much more effective with masks than with make-up. Chedil/Suanda is more like the late Retug whose face was enough to make the audience react. But the make-up was different in those days when Retug started to perform, according Wayan Tangguh, Kodi's father, who also participated in the conversation. Tangguh told us that for Retug it was enough to colour his forehead with the ashes from the kitchen to be funny. With the same technique he could also draw a watch on his arm or a big necklace. Kodi agreed, adding that even in more recent times Retug never really wore a very heavy make-up (he pointed out that make-up is also a topeng, a mask). Chedil's make-up is different: it resembles the clowns of Javanese wayang wong.

The resemblance of Balinese performers to Javanese comic characters is evident, especially with those who regularly broadcast on TV as I mentioned earlier. Suanda admits that TV programs are a source of jokes and material for his performances. We can imagine the work of these performers who have to continuously find new jokes, new ideas and keep being well-paid. We can imagine them watching TV, listening to radio programs, talking to people, observing people's attitudes in order to find a new expressions, a new joke, a new character that effortlessly comes out during a performance. Meanwhile at home they have their children, spouses and families with everyday troubles. In

\textsuperscript{31}Interview with I Ketut Kodi and I Wayan Tangguh, 17-11-2004.
addition, they have to deal with more global matters such as the monetary crisis and the bombs, as well as the current obligation to be more Balinese than ever.

The crazy, funny, strange Suanda/Chedil expressed this thought on the responsibility of the performers to provide laughter whatever their own current personal condition by joking during my interview:

C: Do people need to laugh nowadays?
Suanda: Yes because at the pharmacies there are no pills (kapsul)...
C: [you mean] laughter [pills]....?
Suanda: no there aren't
C: what a pity!
Suanda: Yeah! ... and as a consequence I become sad as well. I make people laugh but who makes me laugh?

A similar point of view was expressed to me after a lawak performance by Suanda/Chedil and his friend Ni Wayan Suratni, female star of lawak (lawak group Balian Sakti). When I congratulated her on her newborn baby, she described all the troubles of giving birth and all the health problems that the child still had. Then, with a big smile she said that in spite of her worries she had to perform, keeping laughing and to keep making people laugh.

Laughter pays well, even if is exhausting for performers. It is the skill in clowning which attracts sponsorship for performers. Comic skill, likewise, determines frequency of invitations to perform Sidhakarya. As described above comic skill in certain areas is one of the elements requested by the sponsor. As previously indicated, in Sidhakarya, laughter has to be combined with teachings. The importartance of comic skill in the Sidhakarya performances is perceived as new.

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32 C- Orang perlu tertawa sekarang? Suanda- Ya karena di apotek tidak [ada] kapsul...C- tertawa, Suanda- tidak C- kasihan ya?
33 As described above comic skill in certain areas is one of the elements requested by the sponsor. As previously indicated, in Sidhakarya, laughter has to be combined with teachings. The importartance of comic skill in the Sidhakarya performances is perceived as new.
audience’s hunger for a lighter entertainment, a “newness”, “craziness”. A strong attempt to guide audience’s taste towards mask performances or more serious entertainment could cost the performers dearly. What is the reason for this hunger for laughter?

Difficult times: people need laughter therapy as a break!

Nowadays, in theory, performers and audience agree that a good performer has to be able to balance jokes with teachings to succeed. In reality, though, the comical part of the performance is much larger than the teaching part, and it also makes the story disappear. This happens to topeng and bondres as well as to wayang performances. It seems that performance is losing its role as a medium for teaching religious/cultural issues. Other vehicles are taking over the teaching role of the guru loka.

Thanks to what some cultural observers call the democratization of knowledge aiming at the Hinduisation and Balinisation of culture in Bali, information on culture and religion are easily accessible in numerous publications. In the streets, markets, and during festivals and seminars, anyone can buy cheap booklets instructing Balinese on every possible aspect of “Hindu Bali” life. In recent years the number of information booklets on spiritual Hindu-Indian sects has also been increasing. These can be found with kekawin texts of Ramayana and Mahabarata, manuals on offering-making or on carrying out ceremonies or the meaning of ritual, healing books through dasaksara and the latest volume on ajeg Bali and so on.

Aspects of Balinese religion that in the past were considered sacred and secret are revealed through publications that, if people cannot effort to buy, can still comfortably be read at the “full AC” (air conditioned) book shop Gramedia in

34 I'm grateful to Pino Confessa for this observation.
Denpasar. Information that once found only in lontar manuscripts, accessible only to those who could read Balinese and old Javanese, are now transliterated into Latin script or translated in Indonesian. Places are also identified, for example, in some temples during ceremonies there are new signs indicating the names of parts of the temple and their function.

In the past a Balinese had to talk with a performer or a pedanda priest to learn. Now a Balinese does not need to dress properly, travel, and wait and speak in proper high Balinese to talk to a pedanda high priest. The pedanda comes to people's homes through TV and radio to inform Balinese how to be a proper Balinese. It is interesting to notice that the pedanda, as a good performer, informs Balinese Hindu audiences on the most up to date cultural and religious matters through laughter. When the TV program includes a live audience, the jokes are the result of the interaction with the audience, otherwise the jokes generally address the audience at home. In addition, newspapers, and all sorts of TV and radio programs contain daily discussions on philosophical and ritual matters. There is a real assault by the media on these aspects of “Balinese culture”. The TV, specifically nowadays Bali TV, takes over philosophy and broadcasts sacred dance and ceremonies, all manifestation of Bali that is ajeg.

As a consequence we should not be surprised if the general public want to have a rest between crises, bombs and pressure from the media to be “real Balinese” according to the ajeg principles. The audience needs to balance teaching and pure entertainment. If daily life is full of teachings, performance has to restore the balance with entertainment that focusses on laughter, thus curing distress and healing. If the media, in its appropriation of the teaching role, also uses laughter to attract audience attention, the audience seeks pure entertainment as an escape from teaching. People in general agree that in performances – even religious performances - the proportion of teachings regarding culture and religion is decreasing.
Is this true?

Not all performers conform to this picture, neither do all audiences. Topeng performers such as Sija, Windia, and Kodi still consider that they have something to say: media cannot cover everything. These performers believe that their personal interaction with a small group of people during a ceremony cannot be substituted by a TV show. The majority of performers and audience members I talked with said that lawak is a temporary trend, people will easily get bored. While Topeng is an important part of ritual, it is a classic form; people will never get bored with it. Windia is one of those confident voices; he believes that Balinese audiences can distinguish the quality of mask-performances from make-up entertainment. When I asked what he thought about the increased use of make-up comedy compared to masked performances, Windia replied:

*People in Bali are able to discern, maybe just in the cities (they don’t). Topeng is very meaningful for people in the villages. People in the villages consider (lawak/make-up comedy) new, they don’t want it! Maybe (they want it) just for entertainment.*

Maybe in the cities, audiences prefer lawak performances, but not in the villages! Windia makes a clear difference between audiences in the cities and in the villages. The mixed population of cities prefer this “new” sort of performances, while the villages, inhabited by a more uniform population, still linked to traditional values and aware of the importance of topeng, don’t really want lawak performances. Nevertheless, the contrast is not only between village/city; each area and village has a different taste, as we can notice from the IMC program’s performances.

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35 Nevertheless the Balinese Arts Festival keeps including in the program topeng competitions. All types of topeng have been presented but over the past few years topeng pajegan has been particularly important: is it a sign of the fear of loss of such important element of culture? If so it appears again in cyclical way since the 70s.

Windia also gave me the impression that he considers lawak an easier alternative to Topeng. For him, mask characters are easier than the make-up ones, but for others it is different: *For me, characterising masks is easier; maybe those who perform lawak are unable to use masks.*

Again, just like Juana, Windia admits the difficulties of characterising a mask. However, he also implies that lawak is an easier form compared to topeng, but currently in demand. If performers want to neglect topeng in favor of lawak he would not stop them. When Windia speaks about topeng he clearly places it at a superior level. Even if both Juana and Windia speak about the difficulty of characterising masks, their attitude is different. Juana speaks about the immobility of the wooden expression of the mask, in contrast to the possibility of changing facial expression with make-up only covering the face. Windia stresses that talking without a mask is easy, while it is difficult to find the voice for the mask, which, however, is a matter of practice:

*If you think about the difficulty (of wearing a mask) it is enormous, if you don't think about it there is no difficulty.*

Practising and learning the basic rules will make the performer effortlessly find the voice for the mask. Most performers would agree with Windia: finding the right voice is the difficulty.

Juana seems keen to explore any genre and prefers lawak, because it is in demand. Windia seems to be putting himself in a distant position from lawak, first denying its spreading popularity, and then considering it proper for performers who are unable to use masks, thus distinguishing between the serious and

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37 *C- lebih muda kalau pakai tapei!*


commercial/popular forms. Juana is a young performer, originally from the Tabanan area, but living in Denpasar with his family. He is an entertainer as well as being involved in ritual performances. He can spend a day going from shooting a TV advertisement in the morning, a topeng pajegan in midday and a Bondres-lawak (or two) in the evening. Is he part of a secular or a sacred society? Windia lives in his original house in the village of Carangsari. He is a well established teacher, a reference point for young performers, and performer much in demand for topeng pajegan as well as prembon and bondres. He is considered a symbol of traditional Bali and he clearly defends traditional values, but he is also an innovator. Do these performers represent two sides of Bali, one traditional and the other media-inspired? Is one part of a sacred domain and the other part of a secular one? Do these performers respond to the demands of a sacred/traditional society or a secular/modern one?

There is no simple answer to these questions. I believe both Juana and Windia have responded, and are still responding, to changes continuously occurring in Bali. Both are part of a society where bridging secular and sacred does not imply a change of place or state of mind. These two dimensions are there, visible, ambivalent, one part of the other; in spite of the effort to separate sacred from secular, traditional from modern. Windia started performing when the effort to separate sacred from secular was beginning. Juana and the Salju group are operating at a time when the division between sacred and profane is at its peak, where all that is sacred is truly Balinese, and the profane is "outside" and for outsiders. Nevertheless, cruising between sacred and profane has never been easier. The population seems to require "a less sacred" entertainment even during the most sacred ceremony. These performers respond to changes in different ways because they are part of different generations. In recent years, change has speeded up considerably and performers like Juana and his colleagues, based in the city, follow these frenetic developments closely.
Differences between the old and new generation of performers

In his time Windia was an innovator, fundamental in spreading information to the most remote areas of Bali, when TV sets were rare. Salju performers (when they were performing in the Arja Muani group) started to be popular in the 1990s, when TV was already a common part of the furniture of each household (before the refrigerator). Most of the time televisions were (and still are) placed outdoors and switched on in the morning and left on all day long as background noise interacting with other sounds of the compound. Salju's popularity was achieved also thanks to the television: their broadcast performances seen on TV attracted sponsors who commissioned their performances for ceremonies and public events, even in remote areas.

While thanks to Windia, certain messages could be transmitted to the most remote areas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the 1990s Arja Muani became well known even in the most remote areas, thanks to the TV. For Sugama, Lanang and Juana, TV was part of their performative life from the beginning and they learned how to deal with it. Their chameleon-like ability to see the minute changes in audience taste and transform themselves accordingly, helped them maintain their popularity over the years. With the rhythm of a television team broadcast, they know how to attract the audience, gaining as much public exposure as possible.

Considering the enormous number of performers in Bali, the Salju group is particularly successful and attracts a wide audience. Windia on the contrary, does not look for a wide audience; he waits at home for people to come to him. I think he was one of the last performers to acquire a land line telephonie in his home. Nevertheless, we cannot say that Windia is less popular. He is part of an older generation of performers.
Windia belongs to the group of most respected topeng performers, a master-guru, frequently part of juries in topeng competitions. He is so respected that during the topeng pajegan competition of the Arts Festival in 2004 he was requested to be as one of judges even though his own son was competing. The main difference, maybe, is that Windia reached his popularity in a period when performers were relatively few (as a result, it is said, of the mid 60s killings), while the Salju performers are maintaining their popularity in a period where a flourishing number of performers are all trying to satisfy the audience's hunger for laughter. This need to produce laughter is not limited to performances linked to public events or to broadcast TV programs. It includes also those performances that are closely linked to ceremonies. In these contexts, the relationship between performers and sponsors is more complex than in the case of performances at public events.

For religious ceremonies, all the audience members are directly or indirectly involved in payment of the performers, so the style of the performance does not only depend on the taste of the patron, but also on the taste of the audience. The organising committee which chooses the performances appropriate for the ceremony, takes into consideration the audience's taste, not just the ability and respectability of the performer. This also happens also when choosing the performer/s of topeng Sidhakarya.

Audience consumption: the economic relationship with performance in a ritual context

Does this shift towards laughter depend on the arbitrary decision of the new performers, or on their effort to adapt topeng and especially the bondres comic characters to the audience's demands? It is part of the nature of topeng to be in a dynamic relationship with contemporary times: it is a flexible form, able to adapt.

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40 One of the aim of the competition was to re-establish the rules of topeng pajegan including the fact of being performed by one performer only.
itself to different contexts, thus ensuring its survival. A great worry is that comical elements become increasingly predominant, even in the “sacred” performances. In certain areas it has become a competitive “trade mark” for certain performers, a requirement for survival in a competitive market.

It is necessary to keep in mind that, if the performer does not belong to the community carrying out the ceremony, he is paid fully. During difficult financial times, in general, people are keener to pay for a performance linked to the ceremony rather than for a purely entertaining performance. During all the monetary crises that Bali has been through, starting from the fall of Suharto to the recent bombings, the number of topeng Sidhakarya performances did not decrease. On the contrary, the ceremony committees have had the tendency to save money on the big, expensive entertainments such as arja performances; a full performance of which can require up to twenty or more performers and last until 3 or 4 am. Currently there are better solutions: shorter performances not necessarily requiring a story, which allow for the participation of arja performers, bondres and lawak in one context.

The audience determines the choice of topeng Sidhakarya performances. Nowadays it is not unusual to watch a topeng Sidhakarya with strong comic elements. Just because the audience does not directly pay for a ticket to watch a performance does not mean the performers can relax. The performance is, in any case, indirectly paid for by the audience, consisting mainly of the community which organised the ceremony. Thus the funding to pay for the performance comes from the same people watching/participating in the performance and these people are happy to pay a star as much as three or six times their individual monthly salary for one night. The fact that performances are commissioned does

41The performer is paid and even though the concept of ngayah is always underlined, the performer is paid for his work with money that is usually part of the offering. If the ceremony in which the performer performs is within his clan or his banjar, he will return the money offered and his work becomes a contribution to the collective work (often the performers are not requested to help the collectivity to prepare offerings, food and so on, instead they perform). If the ceremony is outside the performer’s clan, banjar, or circle of friends he will return only a little part of the money offered as a polite sign of acceptance of the full amount. In fact in any case it is not proper to refuse the whole amount, a part of it has to be accepted.
not always free the relationship of the audience and performers from the economic link. This is especially valid for temple festivals, during which a large part of the community is directly involved, through funding and labour. But it is also true of household ceremonies where most of the audience is related to the family/clan celebrating. They are members of the same banjar who donate their labour to prepare the ceremony, along with relatives and friends. In these cases performances related to the ceremonies are not always essential, but besides being an occasion to show-off wealth and publicly reinforce Bali-Hindu values, they are a sincere instrument to thank all those who helped to achieve the success of the ceremony, by providing entertainment. Because the current favourite entertainment is comedy, the patrons search for those performers who can provide humour with new jokes and skits. Usually, this sort of entertainment occurs at the end of the main rituals in a space that is not considered sacred. Nevertheless, in certain areas laughter also has become a relevant component of topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya.

Prevalence of laughter in the sacred domain: the case of topeng pajegan

Theoretically, the main quality of a strictly “sacred” performance should be its efficacy in completing the ceremony. However, because of the trends described above, the entertainment factor often seems to prevail. Performers do not always feel good if their topeng pajegan does not receive the attention of a human audience. Ketut Kantor, an old generation performer, complains if nobody is present during his performances except the pedanda. But he also complains about the excess of entertainment in a topeng pajegan.

Who are the new generation of performers? Some are expert dancers or dalang (puppeteers) who, having vocal and dance skills and philosophical knowledge, start a new career. But sometimes I have also heard about people who have never performed before and who after a few dance lessons, have gone
on to perform topeng Sidhakarya. I met a man who started to perform because, after years of successful business with his art shop, he felt the need "to give something back" to the gods who provided his wealth. Nothing is better for this purpose than to ngayah (to offer) topeng pajegan on the occasion of ceremonies. Nevertheless, he does not perform by himself. Unlike in the old days, topeng pajegan can now be performed in a group, rather than solo, and can nevertheless be called topeng Sidhakarya. Anything is possible!

This is a new trend, not always appreciated by the old generation of performers. Some of the older or more experienced topeng performers remark nostalgically about the good old days and complain about the new ones: these new performers are just too daring! They dare to perform without really knowing what they do! They do not know enough about the Babad, about philosophy! And worse... they do not link jokes to the story or to the ceremony!42

Voices complaining about these current changes are various. Topeng pajegan, as I have already mentioned in the introduction, is traditionally performed by one performer who wears all the masks. The performer in his priest-like role has the task of completing the ceremony through the mask of Sidhakarya. His actions are those of a performer/priest who represents the macrocosm and ensures balance and as such unity and completion of the ceremony. The fact that additional performers are incorporated into topeng pajegan would seem to contradict the logic of his role and threaten the efficacy of the performance. But there is a theoretical justification for everything. When I asked about the phenomenon of multiple performers of topeng Sidhakarya I was told it is true that nowadays topeng Sidhakarya is mostly performed by more than one performer, but it is always only one who takes the role of Sidhakarya, wearing the Sidhakarya mask. This is the one who actually performs, the others simply help him. However many performers participate in topeng Sidhakarya, symbolically there is still only one who has the task to achieve unity for all participants.

42 In the last two paragraphs I have drawn on an article I published in Bog-Bog magazine, ‘Tari topeng... traditional laughter therapy’ (Palermo, 2004).
Criticisms of the prevalence of laughter in topeng is very strong, but the fever for laughter does not always lead to empty jokes. There are cases in which laughter is part of the accepted elements supporting the performance without losing the focus of the role of Sidhakarya. One example is the Salju group performing topeng Sidhakarya. Another example is the topeng Dwi Mekar from the Buleleng District lead by Nyoman Durpa. These two groups are an interesting example of multiple performers doing Sidhakarya and not creating just empty laughter.

Both the Salju group and the Dwi Mekar group, in general, maintain the typical topeng Sidhakarya structure in their performances; Petegak, Pengelembar, Penasar, Patangkilan, Bondres, Sidhakarya. But Salju, instead of using the wijil, employs the Liku, the Sugama male performer wearing make up, while Dwi Mekar uses masked stock characters that never change masks: Susi, the female character based on Windia's Ratu Jegeg, the Rasta fellow, and the foreigner. The latter is actually a real foreigner, Martin Scott, who married into Durpa's family. In the Salju group the change of masks is done by Juana and in the Dwi Mekar group by Durpa. Both characterise several bondres interacting with the penasar and, in the case of Salju, also with the Liku.

A very strong element that is common between these two groups is the relationship with the audience. The audience sits very close to the performers and focuses intently on them, which is unusual in such performances. For example, at the first ceremony after the restoration of the temple Tabeng and Khayangan Desa in the village of Pekraman Padang Sambian-Denpasar when the Salju group performed topeng Sidhakarya on 13 August 2003, everybody was sitting on the ground or watching over the temple's walls. Even the people carrying out the ceremony stopped every few minutes to laugh at a joke or listen to a particular topic. The laughter was coming in waves.

The wave of laughter is even stronger, like an enormous roar, at local performances of the Dwi Mekar group. I witnessed this effect on several
occasions, but the most impressive was at of the Pande Clan cremation ceremony on 21-08-2003 in Tejakula-Buleleng. The mixed audience of children and adults was able to laugh literally every minute, even just when the topeng tua mask pretended to lose his balance suddenly, or when Durpa pointed to a foreigner in the audience and started to use English. The proximity of the audience, completely surrounding the performers, enhanced the wave effect, almost creating an echo. The ground was filled with people providing energy to the performers who continuously gave it back. This is the ideal condition for performing, according to several topeng practitioners. But there is an uncommon aspect in the practice of Dwi Mekar group: they perform topeng Sidhakarya, with the entry of the mask and the offerings and mantra at the end of the ceremony, after the priest has left, rather than while the priest is still present carrying out his ceremonial functions, which is the usual practice. Durpa explained to me that he chooses this timing so that the people can watch the topeng with full attention.

Laughter is not the only element in the Dwi Mekar and Salju performances: Historical chronicles and philosophical teachings are present as well. In the Salju group performances, the chronicles are introduced by the penasar and often referred to during jokes. The Liku is the philosopher who is able to connect deep principles to the most coarse jokes. The Dwi Mekar group pay particular attention to explaining the function of topeng Sidhakarya within a ceremony and they often stress the necessity for ethical behaviour and the preservation of Balinese traditions. They also mix Balinese with Indonesian, especially in Singaraja because, not everybody speaks fluent Balinese, they explained to me.

This sort of format of topeng Sidhakarya is not spread all over the Island. During an interview, Sugama\(^43\) (the Liku of Salju Group) affirmed that the Salju format with Liku could be accepted throughout Bali, but in reality they have been performing mostly in the Badung regency. Sugama added that in some places where people are “fanatic” like in Gianyar district, they will accept only traditional topeng pajegan, with one performer only on stage. This means that even when

\(^{43}\)Interview with I Wayan Sugama, 11-11-2004.
there is a group performing topeng pajegan/Sidhakarya, each performer has to be on stage alone. In Badung it is not like that, he explained, maybe because being wealthier, they wish for more entertainment.

The sacred and the humorous – competition or fusion?

Being “fanatic” about the traditional format of topeng pajegan in contemporary practice means being conservative, extremely conservative. Because of the increased number of topeng performers, performers of topeng Sidhakarya have to provide entertainment features, not just spiritual preparation for a ceremony, in order to overcome the competition. I Ketut Wirtawan, grandson of a very well known topeng performer, I Nyoman Kakul and son of I Ketut Kantor, guarantees a religious/philosophical preparation which can satisfy anyone undertaking a ceremony. But he is conscious of his lack of comic ability. He often presents the Sidhakarya with other performers whose comic ability counterbalances his lack of entertainment skills, providing the necessary balance of spirituality and entertainment required for a successful performance.44

Nevertheless, I attended several topeng pajegan even in the Badung area where the performer clearly did not make any effort to stimulate laughter. For example, when I Ngurah Sweca, during a temple festival in Batubulan (12-08-2003), introduced the Babad connecting the Gegel kingdom to Batubulan, he talked about the function of the ceremony-odalan and made comments on the local a temple priest, but never tried to directly interact with the audience through laughter. He also interrupted the performance to give space to a rejang dance after which he wore the Sidhakarya mask.

Few performers can be highly entertaining by themselves. A notable exception is I Ketut Kodi who is very strong in both philosophical knowledge and comicality.

44Interview with I Ketut Wirtawan, 10-05-2005.
He is so sought-after that he often performs up to four times a day. But it is true that nowadays that even in Gianyar, most topeng Sidhakarya are performed by two or three people. It is easier to build up jokes during a dialogue than solo. Gianyar appears relatively flexible if we note that the topeng performer I Made Jimat often performs with a female arja performer in the role of Mantri Manis. Stricter rules prevail in Karangasem. In this district it is the common belief that a topeng performer should belong to the Triwangsa class/cast (Brahmana Ksatrya or Wesia). The performers are very much focused on the religious task of Topeng Sidhakarya and on their own philosophical knowledge. However, they are aware of the necessity of adapting their style to different audiences. Ida Wayan Jelantik Oka from Bebandem explained to me all the different tastes of the audience around his village. There are some who prefer songs, some prefer philosophy, some prefer jokes, but he also distinguished the sort of songs, philosophy and jokes because each village is different.\textsuperscript{45} In general it seems that the entertaining aspect of topeng pajegan is not considered especially important.

The most extreme example of the absence of a human audience I ever observed was when I Gusti Lanang Sideman performed in Budekling at the ceremony on the cremation of the wife of the pedanda high priest. The ceremony was carried out in the house while the topeng pajegan was performed outside in the middle of a street where cars were passing by. The human audience consisted of the musicians and very few other people (mostly not paying attention to the performance), and my videocamera. The gamelan was positioned so far from the performers that they played the incorrect music for one of the masks. Sideman was inaudible when he spoke about the role of the performer in a ceremony, without a microphone and under the hot midday sun. He had to compete with the electronically amplified sounds of the ceremony coming from the house at the same time as trying to avoid the cars. After a couple of bondres with the Sidhakarya mask he entered the house to make the proper offerings and finish his task. Over 70 years old, I GL Sideman told me that he felt tired and

\textsuperscript{45}Interview with Ida Wayan Jelantik Oka, 13-11-2004.
uncomfortable, especially in trying to connect with the gamelan, but he was more
proud of being part of that event than anything else.

* * * *

Bondres is not a separate phenomenon from Balinese society. It is part of that
Balineseness that is lived, rather than discussed or theorised. Seemingly born
from the separation from sacred and profane, from the "influence" of modern life,
it is nurtured by the contemporary audience who requires it also in the sacred
domain.

On the one hand the previous chapter has analysed contemporary works (tari
kontemporer) inspired by the highest religious principles that have to search for
an audience- a liminoid performance based on liminal experience. On the other
hand this chapter has explored the genre, bondres, a liminoid performance, born
out of separation from a ceremony-linked performance, which, without any
religious aim, attracts audiences and influences the sacred form of performance
itself. The connection between the audience and bondres is different in nature
from that of tari kontemporer: the bondres audience has a collective
consciousness linking everyone to the performance.

Some contemporary works want to sound liminal or sacred, or aim for a
reinterpretation of the sacred. But in a world where the discourse of sacred
permeates daily life activity and cultural discourse, most recently in the Ajeg Bali
campaign, most of the audience seek liminoid performance, the light
entertainment enabling them to explode in laughter. So do most of the audience
want to escape the sacredness that permeates their whole life? Is that why the
serious kontemperor performance is not popular? The entertainment
performances are offshoots of the religious ones, but the entertaining elements
developed in those comical performances seem to increasingly become part of
religious performances too. We cannot theorise performances in Bali by making dichotomies between traditional and contemporary, sacred and secular. One is part of the other, with flexible boundaries. Maybe ordinary Balinese perceive the sense of sacredness as a daily life duty that has nothing to do with any discussion created by intellectuals inside or outside Bali, and maybe laughter is simply a part of that sense of sacredness.
Chapter VI

Anak mula keto - It was always thus. Women making progress, encountering limits in characterising the mask.

At the beginning of this journey, exploring the domains of masked dance performance, women were absent. Until few years ago my research on Balinese topeng was based on interaction with male performers only. I was learning, performing, and discussing issues regarding the life of the mask and the role of performance exclusively with men. Women do not traditionally perform topeng pajegan, and when they have participated in other types of topeng, such as topeng bondres and prembon, they usually performed in the roles of the dance-drama arja, wearing make-up rather than masks (see previous chapter).

From 1995-97 things changed. Some women, mainly arja performers, encouraged by all women gamelan groups and the presence of foreigner performers, started to perform topeng wearing masks.¹ My learning process was enriched by the observation of skilled female performers engaging with new techniques. For the first time I could see groups rehearsing topeng and dealing with the same difficulties that I was facing. I started to learn some vocal techniques with them, which gave me the opportunity to understand their learning process at a closer distance. With time, more women started to learn topeng and perform on different occasions- ceremonies, overseas tours, the annual Bali Arts Festival.

¹ I will discuss in more detail the dynamics of all women-topeng groups later in this chapter.
These developments started from about 1995-98 and flourished after the year 2000. These are systematised efforts by groups of women who more or less successfully have constituted themselves into performance groups. There have also been some sporadic attempts at constituting female groups in other performance genres such as kecak, but they have not lasted long. Even if some of these attempts have not had very lasting results, it cannot be denied that something is happening. Some groups use all masks, others use mixed masks and make up, and others persist thanks to the involvement of western women performing. In addition to this phenomenon of all women groups, there are single women who have been performing as dalang/puppeteers and a few women performing the pengelembar (danced roles in topeng-see chapter V) with male performers. These same women have contributed to the foundation of the new groups. What do both male and female performers say about it? Why is this happening in this period? Is this a novelty in the context of performance in Bali? How does the audience react? Is this a temporary novelty or an important new "tradition"?

The increasing involvement of women in the performing arts is not a phenomenon limited to Bali: it has been traced in other parts of Indonesia and it is surely connected to the role of women in society generally. Previous researchers document the absence of women from Indonesia's public life, or the struggle of women to be part of it, but they also describe the process through which state policies have created space for them for the sake of "modernity". Some aspects of this process have been criticised as imposing an artificial and sanitised framework of ideology on women's experience (Suryakusuma 1996). But it is also true that, over time, it does open up a space relatively free from deep-seated traditional values, and thereby provides opportunity for crossing old boundaries.

The connection between state policies and gender in Indonesia has been the focus of many studies such as Tiwon (1996), Sunindyo (1996), Robinson (2000) and more recently Blackburn (2004) whose comprehensive analysis covers the
activities of the women's movement from early last century to the most recent changes. These studies document, on the one hand, the gradual involvement of women in Indonesian public life, on the other hand, their marginalisation. In other words, the authors point out that the presence of women as structured by state policies is at the image level and not much in substance, in spite of all the efforts of women's organisations. State intervention is the main factor, along with media and global capitalism, shaping gender imagery. (Sen and Stivens 1998, Brenner 1999).

In the domain of performance a similar picture is revealed by scholars analysing both traditional and contemporary theatre, particularly in Java. They document the marginalisation of women, yet their presence in spite of difficulties. Studies of Central Javanese wayang kulit and women by Pausacker (1981) show the engagement of women in the practice of shadow puppet theatre, as well as the impossibility for them to be considered as good as men. The strength and endurance required is a major challenge, and the fact that most wayang characters are male, creates problems of voice production (there are only a few female characters). Studies of tayuban dance (Hughes-Freeland 1993 and 1995, Widodo 1995) demonstrate the appropriation of this popular dance by the State, increasing its frequency of performance, but curtailing the agency of women performers. Hatley who covers both traditional, popular and contemporary theatre, looking at the strategies used by women to overcome marginalisation. In "Women in Contemporary Indonesia Theatre-Issues of Representation and Participation" (Hatley 1995) she explores the role of the women behind the scenes, those married to theatre directors (and their theatres!) and their progress towards an autonomous use of their creativity. Hatley focuses on individual women involved in theatre, providing a close analysis of specific theatre realities from women's point of view in a semi-biographical style. Other works by Hatley (2005) cover the post Suharto era, which seems to provide more space to voice women's issues or at least for women to display a renewed presence. These works investigate women in popular and contemporary theatre not only in Java but also in Bali and Sulawesi. Similarly, Bain (2005) shows the domination of
male directors in contemporary theatre and the effort by some women actors and
directors to contest male control in the contemporary post-New Order period.

There are very few specific works on traditional Balinese dance-drama and
women in Bali, but they are significant for the present study. Emigh and Hunt’s
(1992) article “Gender Bending in Balinese Performance” analyses the play of
gender in different genres of Balinese performance. The authors differentiate two
sorts of performance: one linked to the magical and sacred, generally a
fundamental part of ceremonies; the other aiming to provide entertainment and
aesthetic pleasure. While in the first type the cross-dressing factor (such as
characterisation of the female personage Rangda by a male), seems to entrust
the strong female power to male control, in the second type instances of gender
switching (women characterising men and vice-versa) “use such a play with
gender to make satirical comments on activities in the social sphere” (Emigh and
Hunt 1992: 218). In conclusion, the authors attribute to performance the
possibility of re-valuating traditional gender roles in society. Kellar’s (2000) thesis
on arja dance drama draws upon this article to contextualise the role of female
performers in Balinese society. Through individual stories she documents the
constraints of domestic responsibilities on women performers and their strategies
to overcome these.

Cok Sawitri (2001) challenges the notion of women’s place in Balinese dance as
tourist objects; Ballinger (2005) briefly describes the activities of an all women
music and dance-drama group; Wiratini has completed a PhD on the role of
women in Balinese performance. There are some works on all-women gamelan
groups, one of which is written by Emiko Susilo (2003) who illustrates the
development of gamelan wanita in relation to the state policy. Other works
analyse women as dalang-puppeteer (Wicaksana 2002; Suratini 2003) who show
the increased involvement of women in newspapers and other media in Bali,
beginning in late colonial times, with intensified attention to their social roles since
the fall of the New Order.
The above-mentioned research material informs my own work in ways which will become evident later in this chapter. My major focus, meanwhile, as throughout this thesis, will be on the performers' own voices and their performance practice. What do women say about what they are doing? What do others say? Where do these attitudes come from? I will document the voices of women performing, of audience members, and of cultural commentators, together with written discourse, the contribution of previous scholarly works and my personal experience. A review of the history of the involvement of women in performance illuminates the current situation, and gives rise to questions concerning what women are aiming for today as topeng performers and what they are achieving.

**Interviewing female performers**

When I decided to formally interview women I realised there were some differences between interacting with men and interacting with women. Chatting with these women about masks has never been a problem during rehearsals, performances and casual visits. Nevertheless, between 2003 and 2004, when I decided to make recorded interviews, I discovered how difficult it is to interview women. Most of them expressed a sense of inadequacy to discuss the topic. In spite of the fact that I have always made it clear that I was interested in their personal experience, they felt they did not have enough knowledge to talk about topeng. A bigger problem was time: it was difficult for the women I wanted to interview to find time for me. In addition to spending most of the nights performing, many of them also work during day time and take care of the household. Things get worse during the season of big ceremonies when, on top of their usual activities they receive more requests to perform and have to prepare an enormous quantity of offerings. Eventually, some of them managed to dedicate some time to me, giving me the opportunity to collect their voices and, on some occasions, images with a video-camera.
A common issue raised by these women is that they cannot characterise masked roles, they cannot be as good as men. Being as good as a man, as strong as a man, seems to be the main challenge for women involved in mask performance. This is one of the first issues brought up by the women I interviewed. To the question whether women are able to characterise a mask, some performers involved in topeng practice reacted in a pessimistic way: Cok Agung Istri, who is a famous arja performer from the village of Singapadu, seemed to be the most negative. After interrupting her work preparing of offerings she explained:

*It's difficult... being exactly like a man is the difficulty... I am pessimistic about the possibility of performing topeng like a man...*

This pessimism is striking, considering that she regularly performs with masks. Other women agree with her view. Ni Wayan Candri, an arja performer from Keramas, explained that:

*...a woman's movements appear weak; even if she tries her best she cannot be like a man...*

Jro Ratna from Denpasar does not consider weakness of movement the only problem:

*By definition when a woman wears a topeng mask -no matter how strong she is- her femininity will still be visible.*

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2 *susah... persis seperti laki-laki itu yang susahnya, itu kalau untuk tenar di Bali, untuk menyiapkan Topeng laki kayanya saya pesimis. Interview with Cokorda Agung Isteri, 11-08-2004.*

3 *kalau perempuan itu geraknya sukar, lerias, biar semangatnya berapi-api tidak bisa untuk menyiapkan lelaki itu. Interview with Ni Wayan Candri, 06-08-2004.*

4 *Istilahnya di sini kalau sudah cewek memerankan tapel Topeng itu memang biar bagaimanapun kuatnya masih kelihatan ceweknya. Interview with Jro Ratna, 19-07-2004.*
Some other performers also see the need to overcome feminine characteristics while expressing a more positive approach. Ni Nyoman Candri, who is not only an arja performer but also a puppeteer, considers "being like a man" fundamental in characterising the mask. This quality can be reached through practice.

"I cannot be as good as a man"

Ni Nyoman Candri and Cokorda Istri are members of the first group of all-women topeng. In spite of their experience in performing topeng, both lack self confidence about their skills as topeng performers. Both consider their performing a sort of continuation of the tradition of their fathers who used to perform topeng together. But this link sometimes produces a negative effect: Candri compares herself to her father saying that she is not as good as he was. Cok Istri would never accept money to perform topeng in Bali at this stage (overseas is a different story) because she does not believe herself to be good enough. Lack of strength and the impossibility of eliminating feminine characteristics are the main reasons for the self-criticism of these two performers who are generally considered quite strong by their peers. Being like a man is for both the main difficulty and both of them believe that this is the main aim: topeng is a male form with mainly male characters/masks. Cok Istri says explicitly that being like a man is a must in topeng. While physically this seems feasible for her, it is nearly impossible with regard to the voice. For Candri the problem lies more in her physicality. In spite of the fact that the first dance she learned was male, the baris dance, she never dared to learn topeng with her father because she was ashamed that her body was too small for topeng. Above all, she believes that it is necessary to be able to feel like a man, to learn men's character, before being able to characterise male masks.

5This first group split in two after its first tour in Europe in 2003. Both groups maintained the same name, Topeng Shakti, although they have different styles. More details later in this chapter.

6These remarks are based on informal conversations with Ni Nyoman Candri and Cok Agung Isteri between 2001 and 2003.
Reasons for NOT performing topeng

The well known dancer and choreographer Ni Made Wiratini, confirmed this picture while raising an additional issue, citing the term etika. We were talking about differences between men and women in characterisation: Wiratini underlined the fact that not only are skills important to enable a woman to perform topeng, but so are the opportunities, and women have fewer opportunities than men. This is caused by several factors: for example, a woman is expected to behave following a certain etika, she has to be polite, gentle, refined, and those who do not follow these unspoken rules are considered not normal. In brief, according to Wiratini, the limitations of these rules hinders women from freely characterising male characters. Etika is about feelings, and this attitude, Wiratini says, is common to “Oriental” women. She speaks about kodrat, the predefined behaviour proper to a woman, which defines womanliness.

Wiratini gave her own case as an example of the restriction of etika. In spite of the fact that she had the opportunity and skills to join a women’s topeng group she declined. Her justifications increased in number every time I asked her reasons. She does not drive, so she would have to depend on someone else to take her to rehearsals; her voice is not strong anymore; her husband (I Wayan Dibia) would not approve: in spite of the fact she performed topeng with him overseas; performing in Bali would expose her weak skills because she is not ready yet. The belief in the concept of “natural womanly behaviour”, ineradicably fixed in women’s emotional constitution is an impediment which prevents women characterising the mask. Wiratini also mentioned another reason why there are fewer opportunities for women to acquire skills to perform topeng. It is not always just a matter of feelings but rather it is practical: time. Women are busier than men and as consequence have less time to practice. They might be able to practice by themselves, but it is hard for them to attend to group practices.

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7Interview with Ni Made Wiratini, 07-03-2003.
8During several conversations and two main formal interviews with Ni Made Wiratini, 07-03-2003 to 28-08-2003.
9Interview with Ni Made Wiratini, 07-03-2003.
Time pressure

When I was performing with an all-women gamelan group at a ceremony, Ni Wayan Suriadi\textsuperscript{10} was in the audience, and she approached me afterwards with enthusiasm and curiosity about a foreign woman performing topeng. I soon became interested in her views about women and topeng, informed by her education and experience as a dance teacher at a high school. Suriadi had learned topeng as part of her teacher training, and she spoke confidently about women's abilities to characterise refined male masks like the dalem (the king).\textsuperscript{11} She also mentioned that a few of her female students were interested in learning topeng and one of them was very good. But when I asked if Suriadi herself ever thought about performing topeng, she stated emphatically that she did not have time to learn again, she was too busy.

\textit{Balinese are very busy there is no way that I can learn to dance (topeng). Because once you have a family, not to say once you have a grandson or a child and then you have your duty at the banjar, that's all complex. I'm part of the village organisation, without considering the work with the family there is the work related to custom. For example when do we have the possibility to get ready? At least a month before I have to start sewing (offerings). It takes a long time, and from that I learn that because of my age now custom rules me and I have to learn to make offerings, to make this and that. As a consequence let the younger ones dance, so that I'm free from that.}\textsuperscript{12}

Then she mentioned that her husband still has time to play gamelan, and I pressed again why she would not try to learn and perform topeng. She replied:

\textsuperscript{10}Interview with Ni Wayan Suriadi, 08-08-03.
\textsuperscript{11}This is an aspect relevant for any sort of dance. In fact not all women are suitable for all female dances; neither are all men suitable for all male characters. Their body features determine the sort of character they can be good at.
\textsuperscript{12}Kesibukan banyak kalau orang Bali, saya belajar nari saja tidak mungkin sebab kalau sudah namanya berkeluarga, apalagi punya cucu, punya anak, itu pekerjaan, tugas di Banjar itu sudah bermacam-macam. Saya ini termasuk di Desa, belum saya dengan family ada bekerja adat begini misalnya, mana kita dapat persiapan, paling tidak satu bulan sebelumnya sudah mulai "mejejahitan" ini, itu. Mengisi kesibukan banyak, di sana saya belajar, sebab umur seperti saya sekarang, adatnya memegang, seperti belajar mebanten, belajar membuat ini, membuat itu. Jadi yang menari itu biarlah yang muda, artinya lepas sudah saya. Interview with Ni Wayan Suriadi, 08-08-2003.
Because (my energies) are focussed on my children and grandchildren. The environment is not supportive. Because women in Bali are busy with custom and culture in Bali. If men take on another activity there is tolerance, we support them. But if I dance, at my age, it's a shame, who is going to do the work to the banjar? If someone dies we have to be there. And that's in addition to this ceremony, that ceremony, the community and taking care of the grandchildren when the daughter in law works and leaves the grandchildren at home. There is no way.

Tidak mungkin, no way, no possibility because she is so busy. Women in the villages are busy, they do not have time to do anything else than take care of their family and their banjar. Once they are married religious and custom duties engage their energy, all their energy. I have always heard all women complaining about it, especially when they arrive late to a rehearsal or worse when they cannot join at all. All women do it, except those in official positions, working for government offices.

Approval from a woman civil servant

The image of women too busy to learn new skills does not come from women in official positions. This was illustrated when I interviewed Luh Putu Haryani, responsible of the Arts Section of the Department of Culture (Dinas Kebudayaan Bali) in Denpasar in 2003. Her support of topeng wanita was full of hope for the further development and spread of the participation of women in topeng and appreciation from the audience. This development has been possible because, as she affirmed, in Bali there has never been any differentiation between men and women in the arts. When I asked if within the household there is any difference between the two genders she spoke in terms of “modern” contemporary time in which women and men share tasks and help each other,


14 Interview with Luh Putu Haryani, 08-08-2003.
especially during the ceremonies. She admits that women carry the heavier workload in the preparation of ceremonies, but she justifies this by saying that women are more able to take care of details. Furthermore, she opposes the presumption that Balinese men are lazy and women do all the work. Men work in the rice field from early morning and need to rest when the day becomes too hot. Her conclusion was that in any case Balinese women love working, cannot stop.

Perhaps because of her official position and because she was interviewed in her office, Haryani had to give a positive and "modern" description of the condition of women in Bali. Equality between women and men in the modern era, proved by the fact that women perform topeng, was her main point. Her attitude as a woman civil servant is shared with male counterparts and with those male performers who, like civil servants, are conscious of the necessity of being "modern".

**Men’s discussion of issues**

Supporting women is also a signifier of being “modern”, the modernity that creates that special sort of Balinese emansipasi which leads to the display of women in order to demonstrate that they are skilled enough to be as good as men. Civil servants, both men and women, have this attitude, but it is not uncommon in others. Some are sincerely open to women performing topeng, and in criticising them they keep in mind that women are beginners in this field and they express great hope for the future. There are those who, in spite of the fact that they approve of the general idea, actually disapprove of the current form.

One of the latter type of reaction comes from I Wayan Dibia who rejects the viability of women performing topeng in the way they are doing now. While the majority of performers complain about the fact that women cannot be like men, or as good as men, by contrast, Dibia criticises that fact that women in topeng have
tried to imitate what men do without searching for a more personal approach: there is lack of adaptation. He believes that women should choose stories with female characters by modifying the characters of topeng or by creating new characters and new masks.\textsuperscript{15} He is particularly intense about the penasar characterised by a woman. In order to characterise that mask a woman has to force herself to move, walk like a man and wear trousers; this is considered by Dibia as not following the "etika", it is not proper.\textsuperscript{16} In order to avoid this abuse and succeed in the characterisation, it is necessary to suit the mask to the woman’s natural character. Dibia also often said that women have only just started and they need time to develop their own form of topeng.\textsuperscript{17}

Some suggest a different interpretation of the masks to overcome difficulties of characterisation. For example, the performer I Ketut Rina did not agree with the impossibility of a woman being as good as a man. Rather, he said that there are many men that perform like women. When I asked him to be more precise about what makes women unable to characterise masks, he insisted that the difference does not lie in the gender, but in truly mastering the technique that give life to the mask, give spirit to it through the right distribution of energy, which is the breath within the body. The only real limitation is the voice: it is nearly impossible for a woman to reproduce a strong basso male voice. In those cases it would be proper, he said, to interpret those characters in a less strong way.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15}Interview with Wayan Dibia, 27-02-03 Dibia during the interview was speaking specifically about the first group of all-women topeng, Topeng Shakti (more details on this group later in the chapter).

\textsuperscript{16}This concern about things done by women that have to be “etika” has been raised on several occasions when women performed in public. For example on the occasion of gamelan wanita competitions it is an issue whether the drummers have to hold the drum on the legs or put it on the ground: it seems not proper for a woman to position a drum on her crossed legs while for a man the same fact does not cause any dilemma. As we have seen previously in this chapter Wiratini mentions ethics as an impediment for women to perform topeng. This fact might be linked to the perception of woman’s body and it is going to be considered at the end of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{17}During several conversations and attendances at conferences Dibia underlined the fact that it is necessary to remember that these are just the first steps of women engaging with a great challenge. Dibia also emphasised the danger of looking at this phenomenon from western based feminist theory. I thank him for his support in my choice in focusing on women’s voices, and for the idea of creating a mask performance with female masks only.

\textsuperscript{18}Interview with I Ketut Rina, 05-08-03.
Another example of constructive criticism comes from I Wayan Madra Aryasa. According to Aryasa, the preconception of women being weak and men strong is rooted in Balinese culture, but now this idea has changed. In his view the clear physical difference between women and men, especially regarding strength, can be compensated by training. Aware that women's skills are being accepted overseas, he hopes that those women will work hard at being truly accepted in Bali too.¹⁹

I Nyoman Durpa, topeng performer and civil servant based in Singaraja, expressed a sincere positive reaction about women performing topeng. He said that those women who complain about the fact that they cannot be as good as men simply do not have self confidence. This is the consequence of the fact that they are not used to performing with masks yet (belum biasa). Just as now there are female soccer players, one day it will be common to have female topeng performers. The problem lies in the opportunity to perform and show what they can do. From here Durpa changed the tone of the discussion; I could see the civil servant in him. He started to speak about the recent female emansipasi thanks to which women have acquired the same rights as men. When it truly happens, then women will demonstrate the same potentiality as men.

When we discussed technical aspects of the life of the mask in women and their lack of strength, Durpa gave me an explanation that no one else provided. Their perceived lack of strength reflects the expectations of audiences used to watching male performers, who find women performing with masks unusual. If women perform often, the audience will get used to it and it will become normal. Just as in the western countries people now consider women driving very normal, whereas in the past that was not the case.²⁰

¹⁹Interview with I Wayan Madra Aryasa, 07-08-2003.
²⁰Interview with I Nyoman Durpa, 23-08-03.
Durpa’s last point is the most interesting: the success of women performing topeng depends on the change of the aesthetic values of the audience which can be brought about by the frequency of performances, changing the audience’s taste over time. Durpa’s earlier point was that women are not as good as men because they do not have enough opportunity to perform and become accustomed to the use of the masks. On the one hand he says the problem lies in female performers’ attitude, and on the other, the problem lies in the audience’s predisposition. These two assessments do not contradict each other and have the same solution: frequency of performances. In the Balinese ritual context this is a “natural” solution. It is part of the learning process, but also part of the process through which new forms are accepted.

Performing with or without mask

There are some women who realise that it is not a matter of women’s basic nature which limits women’s skills in performing male roles, but it is a matter of practicing. Made Pujawati, who lives in London, says women can characterise male dances:

*In my view it’s not because women are not as strong as a man. (The mask) needs to be studied until the character is achieved, until the movements are mastered, and one understands how much strength is needed. Because women can also dance baris, can’t they?*\(^{21}\)

Baris is a strong male dance generally defined as “the warrior dance”. It is the first dance learned by young boys, but often nowadays young girls receive baris

\(^{21}\) Kalau menurut saya, itu bukan karena perempuan tidak sekuat pria, itu perlu dipelajari sampai mendapatkan karakternya, sampai mendapatkan geraknya, kerasnya seberapa karena perempuanpun juga bisa menari baris kan? Interview with Ni Made Pujawati, 12-07-2004.
training. This training is quite common for women characterising male roles in arja or in other form of dance-drama in Bali without masks. Female physical features are generally considered more suitable than male ones in characterising refined male characters such as kings and heroes. If asked, women performers are able to discuss and demonstrate the difference between male and female characters. Actually, some women perform male roles only, and find it uncomfortable to demonstrate female movements.

There is an additional issue specifically concerned with wearing the mask. The quality of movement in performing with and without masks is different and it takes time and practice to learn. Some women express awareness of the differences between performing with and without masks. Ida Dayu Made Diastini, a well known dancer and dance teacher, did not have time at home in Singapadu to be interviewed. I had better luck at her work place, the Arts Center in Denpasar. During the interview she demonstrated the technical difference between dance movements with and without masks, from the neck position to eyes and eyebrows movements. She explained the necessity of locking (kunci) certain movements while wearing a mask and making them smaller. The main thing is:

... using the feeling (rasa)... it's harder, but if we practice it's possible... it takes a lot of practice... and in practice we have to use the mask; we can't not wear the mask.

It seems that acquiring the ability to perform with masks is a matter of technique and time to practice. But many women, we have seen, report that they are too busy with their children and ceremonies or too old to try. Some performers recognise that this attitude in itself is a real obstacle to mask characterisation.

\footnote{Ketut Kantor often proudly tells how his father, I Nyoman Kakul, trained girls for baris dance in the 50s. (see also Daniel 1981) Nowadays a good female baris dancer still causes surprise but it is not considered strange or improper.}

\footnote{...pakai rasa, jadi lebih berat rasanya bergerak tapi dengan latihan tidak perlu khawatir, harus banyak latihan dan dalam latihan itu harus pakai topeng... tidak boleh tidak pakai topeng. Interview with Ida Dayu Made Diastini, 04-08-2004.}
Ni Wayan Sekariani, a multitalented performer from Batuan, explained that many women, because they are women, still think that their place is in the kitchen, being a housewife:

…it is as if before the war starts they already feel defeated.24

Women seem not to be enthusiastic about using masks, it seems that they are pushed into it by opportunities, festivals or the presence of foreigners. What is the source of such negative attitudes? This pessimistic outlook has deep roots which are related to the feeling of the unchangeable roles dictated by tradition: there is a long standing discourse to keep women in their place Anak mula keto. Most are pulled along but some fight against it. The workings of this discourse are illuminated by the example of two women who refused to accept it. These are two women who also play key roles in women’s topeng practice, whom we will meet again during the discussion of all-women’s topeng.

Anak mula keto

Anak mula keto, it has been like that, it is now and always will be like that. This is the standard answer of adults to children when they ask the reasons behind certain rules. Women I interviewed in Bali explained that this was the answer when they wanted to know why they could not play outside, why they could not go to school, why they could not play gamelan, or why they could not dance in certain contexts. Other prohibitions consist of simple behavioural rules: how and where to sit or what to wear.

24Jadi dia seperti istilahnya belum berperang sudah merasa kalah. Interview with Ni Wayan Sekariani, 03-08-2004.
Ni Wayan Mudiari, the drummer of the first female topeng group, Topeng Shakti, thinks that her mother did not know the answer, that's why she could not explain. Desak Nyoman Suarti, founder of the Sanggar Seni Wanita Luh Luwih, which Topeng Shakti was part of, often asked to her family why a girl had to be in the kitchen rather than at school, the only answer she could receive was: *mula keto*. Now children are different, and mothers are different too. Children want to know more and, mothers have learned how to rationally explain rules.

Things change. When Mudiari was about five years old, she had to hide herself from her family in order to be able to practice gamelan. Now she has recently graduated from ISI and supports herself and her two daughters through several activities as a gamelan trainer. When Suarti was ten years old, she was not allowed to paint, and she had to fight to dance. Now, after starting as a jewellery designer, she owns a chain of silver shops between Indonesia and the USA whose economic success permits her to support womens' dance and music.

Suarti has always been rebellious, different. In 1968 she won the first prize, she said, for Teruna Jaya, a dance, she said, usually performed by young men. She wanted to perform it at any cost, even if her family did not support her because the dance was not proper for a woman. Her family also refused to support her when she decided to paint, or when she expressed her desire to go to school: women do not paint; women do not need to go to university: it has been like that and always will be: *mula keto*. In the early 70s she went on a tour to Australia and Japan with a dance group from her village, Pengosekan. When she performed at some Australian universities she observed that women there were freer than in Bali: in Australia there were more women going to university than in Bali. Why did women in Bali have fewer chances than foreigners to learn? She insisted on this point repeatedly.

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25The following account on Desak Nyoman Suarti is based on several personal communications over time and above all on an interview on 09-02-2003.
She married an American, lived in Singapore and in the USA, established her business and had children. She divorced, re-married, and then came back from the USA in 1990, when, she told me, she decided she wanted to change things. From this came her commitment to found the Sanggar Seni Wanita Luh Luwih (All-Women Arts Group Luh Luwih - Womanly Women) in 1995. Beginning with a group of musicians, performers were added: first topeng wanita and later on the dance-dramas wayang wong, then has recently performed also calonarang (on various occasions) and kecak (also on the occasion of the Arts Festival in 2004) (Ballinguer 2005). When I asked if her inspiration came from her contacts with foreign countries she answered that that aspect only partially influenced her. Her inspiration came from her own family not letting her do what she wanted to do because of being a woman. She wanted to find the answer that her family could not give: her family’s answer to her question of why a woman has to be in the kitchen and not at school was *mula keto*; why she could not go to university, *mula keto*. Her enthusiasm came from this search for answers to why women cannot do certain things, why women are never respected.

Another thing she added to the story was that her father had two wives but she was determined never to become a co-wife. She remembers the times she used to stop her father being physically violent to her mother. She describes herself as “naughty” that time because she was also able to defend her mother using a knife against her father and forcing him to talk about problems instead of being physically violent.26

Suarti does not agree with those who say that Balinese women are equal to men: that is a superficial way of seeing things. The culture of *mula keto* is still very much alive and women do not have the same rights as men. She believes that the performing arts, especially the topeng wanita performers, can contribute towards changing this culture. The Sanggar Seni Wanita Luh Luwih also train children to play gamelan with a teacher sponsored, like the other activities, by Suarti herself. The future of the new generation is an important focus of Suarti:

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26 Interview with Desak Nyoman Suarti, 09-02-2003.
she is also organising a little museum of musical instruments in order to preserve Balinese culture. Her passionate account of memories and projects for the future changed rhythm when she wanted to underline that now she is a mother. She is not a "naughty" teenager anymore:

Want to support our husbands and families in order to provide to the Indonesian children the opportunity to gain knowledge like foreigners have. That's only my motivation.²⁷

Ni Wayan Mudiari has a very different background; she is a well-recognised gamelan teacher who travels on her old motorbike from one village to another to train female gamelan groups. She also teaches gamelan at the elementary school in order to have a basic fixed income. I met her for the first time in 1995 at the kost (accommodation) where I lived when I was studying at the STSI. She had moved into busy student accommodation from Bangli to enroll at the STSI department of music, supporting herself by working as cleaner at the school. She left Bangli because she was di-madukan: her husband had a child and married another woman who is her relative. Her husband being a civil servant, Mudiari could have denounced him: civil servants need special permission to have a second wife. She did nothing, she did not make him lose his job and she finalised her divorce only very recently because now she can support her two children who live with her. When she talks about her life with her husband, I try to console her by pointing out the positive aspect of this terrible story: if she still were with her husband she would not have achieved graduation at the STSI and become a gamelan teacher. She agrees and once she said:

I would have had no way to improve myself, I would have remained a backward woman, also because my husband doesn't play gamelan. He belongs to the gamelan group with the task of transporting the instruments.²⁸

²⁷ Kita mau support suami dan keluarga kita supaya anak anak kita yang di Indonesia menpunyai chance mendapat ilmu seperti orang yang diluar. Hanya bigitu motivasi saya Interview with Desak Nyoman Suarti, 09-02-2003
Her husband would never support her just like no one from her family supported her. She was already able to play gamelan when she was five years old. She used to watch gamelan practice and wait until one of the players had to leave, and then she would play. As a girl she should not have even tried to play gamelan, girls never play gamelan, anak mula keto. But she was better than her older brother and eventually one of the gamelan players helped her to learn. She could play only when someone else was missing. With pride she remembered that in spite of everything in her village, when she still was a little girl, she was recognised as a good kul-kul player, the bamboo bell announcing specific activities within the village. She can now be proud of herself because what she achieved is the result of her own work: still she regrets she did not have any support, unlike her two daughters, who, as young teen-agers are already able to help their mother play and teach gamelan.

Mudiari said that her whole childhood was unhappy. Without a father, as the last of numerous children, her mother could not financially support her. Soon she had to leave her house, like her brother, to live with an older brother. When she was still at the elementary school she had to work in the rice field before going to school. As she grew older things became even worse. When she was twelve she had to work before going to school helping the family with the small business, then in the afternoon she had a job as a builder, and in the evening back home, she had again to help in the shop. She still considers herself blessed because she is the only one of brothers and sister who completed school and graduated at the university. In 1995-1997 she was one of the few women playing the drum at the gamelan of Topeng Shakti when Suarti asked her to join the group.

These are two examples of strong women who "left" home in search of freedom, who left home in order to be able to control their own lives. Both of them were not satisfied with the mula keto culture and the control of a father and a husband, and

28Tidak mungkin berkembang, tetap jadi perempuan yang terbelakang, karena suami sendiri juga tidak bisa main gamelan. Dia ikut dengan seka gong, jadi crew gamelan tapi dia tugasnya megang saja. Interview with Ni Wayan Mudiari, 06-08-2003.
proved they could do more than was expected from a woman. There are some women who get ahead with the support of their fathers or husbands. But these two women strongly reacted against controlling males, one her father and the other against her husband's behaviour. Suarti did not want to end up like her mother who accepted being a co-wife. Mudiari herself was forced to be a co-wife, so she left. It is interesting to notice that in spite of the fact that both national and customary law regulate polygamy (the first wife has officially to accept the second one) the solution was to accept or to leave. Suarti's story goes back to the 60s and 70s, but Mudiari's story dates from the 90s.

The strength of Suarti and Mudiari who through performing arts developed their own identity is extraordinary. These two women stand out as remarkably powerful, rebellious exceptions to *mulo keto culture*. But there has also been a broader movement of women taking on non traditional roles in a smoother, more socially sanctioned way. Let us look briefly at how this happened historically, first in social political terms then in the specific domain of the performing arts.

The history of Balinese women's "emancipation"

The so-called emancipation of Balinese women has been investigated by Darma Putra who, identifies its roots in the search for "modernity" starting in Bali in the early 20s. Discourses on modernity and progress for women were focused on issues such as the rights of women to education, and to marry a man of a higher caste, the equality between man and woman in case of divorce. During the colonial period these ideas were spread in articles whose main message was that women had to be able to read and write in order to have a role in the society and within the family. A woman without education is not able to educate her children who are the future of the society. A modern woman has to correctly look after the future generation; has to be aware of domestic science (Darma Putra 2003: 41-44) and also has to take care of her own body doing physical exercise.
Such women were "progressive" (maju) and "modern" (moderen) because they could receive their education in Dutch schools. They spread the word about the necessity of education, not only through the publication of articles, but also by opening schools to educate other women. The concept of the importance of education for women and the necessity of being modern came from the north of Bali, from the Singaraja area, where the Dutch colonisation started earlier than in the rest of the island. The encounter with the Dutch inspired a group of intellectuals and artists to promote modernity, but the modality of modernity in Bali (and Indonesia generally) is different from what we might expect. As Vickers (1996) points out, modernity refers to changes, but changes that have to be controlled (Vickers 1996: 1). It results in a modernity that cohabits with tradition. As a consequence, women had to be emancipated and at the same time remember their true feminine nature.

This was the dominant discourse during the 1950s when Balinese women movement started to create links with the outside world. Influence from the international women’s movement gave rise to a discourse on “feminism”. According to this kind of feminism, the woman is above all a mother and cannot forget her true feminine nature (kodrat). It is interesting to note that during this period this special nature of women was recognised in cultural policy as a strength and wisdom that “corrects” corrupt behaviour and attitudes, and because of that women were encouraged to undertake political careers. As a consequence, they were able to become actively involved in political life. Darma Putra (2003: 103-106) notices that in 1953 there were three women in the DPRD, the provincial parliament, in Bali. In 2003, however, there was only one. He points out that the new laws for the 2003 elections mandated 30% of legislative seats for female candidates, but expressed his scepticism about the the realisation of such number.

Darma Putra’s scepticism is based on the fact that women’s autonomous participation in political life has declined significantly in recent decades. While during the 1950s and 1960s women were organised in associations and actively
worked for the progress of the women, all this almost completely disappeared with the beginning of the New Order. The only women's organisations strongly present in Bali from the 1970s onwards are Dharma Wanita, an organisation for civil servants' wives and PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga), a family welfare movement. Both were founded and run by the government. Dharma Wanita, in particular, has been often described as an instrument of control of the government that constructed women as wives, depending on their husbands, helpful and decorative (Suryakusuma 1996). Women's progress and emancipation, as an expression of modernity in the global era, became carefully programmed by the state within its agenda of control.

After the Reformasi

The post Suharto era or Reformasi created expectations of increased democracy and freedom. But the reality is more complex. As Creese (2004) notes, the process of decentralization creating otonomi daerah (regional autonomy) is causing a reinforcement of conservative values. Creese quotes Budianta (2002 in Creese 2004: 2) who noted the danger of a double threat for women: a culture of violence (militarism, intergroup conflict) with the violence of culture (conservatism, religious fanaticism). We have already seen the prevalence of conservatism in the public discourse on culture in Bali. Even if it is not the only discourse it is the one that prevails in the media.

Women talking in everyday life complain about their life to friends, and to curious researchers who become friends. Husbands' behaviour; parents who refuse to see their grandchild because their daughter married a lower-caste man; the work overload between home and outside home: these are the topics they talk about. But these topics are rarely part of the contemporary media discussions about women. Newspapers, magazines and local TV boast of the Balinese woman, who, with her hard work, has in her hands the destiny of Balinese culture which is based on religious principles.
There are some exceptions in the area of literature in English and Indonesian publications. Otherwise, the most widely read newspapers and magazines in Bali carry the idea of women as already equal to males thanks to Hindu principles, but having different tasks on the simple principle of subdivision of work. The main task of a woman is being a mother, the mother of the future generation. Representative of this view is one of the most prominent commentators on culture and women, the psychiatrist Luh Ketut Suryani. She collected her articles on women in the book *Perempuan Bali Kini* (Contemporary Balinese Women) (2003). In the book, after a gloomy description of the disastrous state of contemporary Bali, with a young generation dedicated to alcohol, drugs, smoking, free sex, and worship of Western culture, Suryani instructs Balinese women on how to save Bali. They have to bear in mind their main role, which is to be mother, a mother able to raise a great new generation of Hindu Balinese who will save Balinese culture from all the outside destructive influences: to ajeg Bali. A woman is certainly allowed to have a career, but this has to be in harmony with family life.

Suryani's attitude exhibits a sort of continuity with the colonial period discourse on women, with the only difference being that nowadays women are educated and go to university. She herself attained a PhD. Suryani's view does not represent all Balinese women, but certainly indicates a trend which relegates women to household life. This may appear a step backwards, especially if we consider the kind of progress made in the 50s when women were involved in political activities, even if this was because they were supported by men.

The promotion of women in the modern world has always been a balancing act with tradition-kodrat. Women were and are encouraged to be educated and professionally active in fulfilling the discourse on modernity as long as their actions remain within the frame of Balinese culture. In the current period, where the ajeg discourse is strong, there seems to be a strengthened valorisation of the traditional role of women. In reality, nothing is new; modernity and tradition co-exist as a tool of self definition of regional identity. Women are caught up in a
discourse that promotes modernity as well celebrating the continuity of Balinese culture. Women seem to have the responsibility of maintaining the tradition linked to Balinese identity, but this seals them back into the anak mulo keto culture. Nevertheless the public space for women is there, and individuals can use it in unforeseen ways. We have seen how this dynamic occurs in general terms, now we shall look specifically at what has happened in the domain of performance.

**Celebrating the decorative feminine**

Already in colonial times interaction with the outside world, with Dutch government institutions and the practice of tourism, provided new space for women as performers. While originally female performance seems to have been limited to temple dances by prepubescent girls and old women, during the Dutch colonial period women's dance flourished. The image of the beautiful woman dancer was promoted and feted. This process was facilitated not only by the presence of the first tourists, but also by the new musical and dancing style, kebyar created in 1915 in north Bali (Buleleng Regency) and spread all over the island by 1930s. The creation of kebyar music and dance was an important contribution to the employment of women in dance. Kebyar style was a real expression of modernity. Created outside the temple or the courts, its dances were the result of a combination of female and male movements free from the link with a narrated story, tari lepas. The vibrant new style provided a new space for women whose beauty attracted foreign audiences both in Bali and overseas.

Cok Sawitri (2001), who speaks in terms of “womanisation” of the performing arts, is particularly critical of this process that lead to the current image of women as totally manipulated by the tourist industry. It results in a superficial beauty without real aesthetic value. Sawitri accuses tourism of anaesthetizing women: they are just decoration “of the big party called tourism, and not to be considered as "artists" (Sawitri 2001: 130). According to Sawitri this image overshadows and obscures the actuality of women’s roles in the performing arts and their use of
performance as a tool to resist men's patriarchal power. She tells a different story about the initial entry of women into the domain of the performing arts - women started to perform arja in order to resist the ideological control conveyed through arja performances by male groups. She reports that the first male arja was created by men to warn women not to follow the example of a princess who was so disloyal to her husband that she refused to do sati by following him into the cremation fire. Women then created their own groups to tell different stories. Sawitri also suggests that the success of women performing outside the temple disproved the thesis that taksu, supernaturally-charged performing talent, was the sole preserve of men.

Aside from Sawitri's version of the first steps of Balinese women in performing, there is little data on women's performing activities before the 1960s. Between 1960s and 1970s, however, there are clear signs of the acceptance of women in the domain of performance. It happened thanks to the establishment of dance training institutes, the tourism boom and the division of dance into sacred/profane categories: these all increased space for women in performance.

Tourism and education

If early tourism opened the possibility for women to perform, tourism administered during the New Order created a real domain for women. During the New Order Balinese dance was promoted to the outside world as one of the peaks of Indonesian culture and identity. There was a systematic effort to create the image

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29 Sawitri explains her point of view telling the story of the first arja performance representing the story of Kasayang Limbur that was about "a disloyal wife" in reference to Gusti Ayu Karangasem who refused to do sati at the cremation of her husband, the prince of Gelgel (Klungkung) Dewa Gde Kusamba. In the 17th and 18th century, Sawitri argues that the stories performed were about the marginalisation of women. Those who were against the pre-constituted social order were exposed and criticised through arja, which was thus an instrument of social control. This is a theory of the origin of arja with which not everybody would agree. Kellar (2000) provides a panorama of the several interpretations of the origin of arja. All seem to agree though that women were excluded from dance drama such gambuh and legong. When women started to perform is not clear.
of a modern-traditional woman having a clear role in the process of building a national identity.

There was a twofold process in the development of space for women to perform. One effort was directed to a regional and national audience, the other was to a non-Indonesian audience, but they cannot be considered really separated. On the one hand it is possible to observe the development of kebyar style into kreasi baru (new creation) and sendratari in which women also played male characters. This new form became a truly Balinese representative of the Indonesian state (Hough 2000). On the other hand, as we have seen, the 1970s heralded the formal categorisation of dance in order to defend sacred Balinese dances from tourism (see chapter II). This activity reinforced and expanded the domain of non-sacred dances where women had free access.

Schools of performing arts such as KOKAR, Conservatory of Music (now SMKI High School of Performing Arts) and ASTI, Academy of Indonesian Dance (now ISI Institute of Indonesian Arts) greatly contributed to this process of creation of space for women. In the dance domain the schools developed the kebyar style with kreasi baru (new creation) and sendratari which became the predominant form of dance drama. As is very common in Bali, any new artistic creation born outside the temple easily becomes part of temple ceremonies. The schools also had a relevant role in creating learning opportunities for women in the field of music and puppet theatre. This attention to women is another step in the process in which women were pushed to the fore by the state, and by the men, as sign of modernity and novelty.

State policies: “emancipation” through arts institutions

The presence of all-women gamelan groups has particularly contributed to the life of all-women topeng. In the 1960s there were already women learning gamelan
in Java, as part of the program of women’s “emancipation”. In Bali there was a similar process; Emiko Susilo (2003) in her study of all-women gamelan demonstrates that the Indonesian government’s national agenda has played a fundamental role in the development of gamelan wanita. That was one of the ways to show that Bali, as part of the Republic of Indonesia, was modern and democratic, creating space for women. A first concrete step was the introduction of gamelan training in the curriculum of the KOKAR.

A group of women started regular training at the KOKAR under I Wayan Suweca. Stimulated by his experience of teaching women in the USA, he created the opportunity for women in Bali. This became part of the same process that encouraged women to practice forms of arts that hitherto had been considered exclusively male. In 1980 Suweca’s sister, Ni Ketut Suryatini, founded the first all-women gamelan group (Dibia and Ballinger 2005: 36-37). In 1985 the first women’s Gong Kebyar Contest took place (Bakan 1999: 255 referring to Yasa et al 1993:89, Susilo E. 2003, Dibia and Ballinger 2004). Bakan emphasizes that female performances of “typical” male genres are more “representative” of emansipasi. Women’s “emancipation” was one value of the New Order representing (or presenting) Indonesia as modern nation (Bakan 1999: 243).

The reality of all-women gamelan, which started within the secondary school KOKAR inspired by foreign experience, developed also at the ASTI/ISI where female students were encouraged to study not only music but later on also puppetry. Women who studied music at these schools brought their experience back to the community. Thanks to the support of the annual Bali Arts Festival all-women gamelan competition from 1985 to 2001 women’s participation in performances spread all over the island. The strong spirit of competition encouraged the spontaneous formation of all-women groups supported both by

30The symbolic value of this mechanism can be seen in the beleganjur performed by women on the occasion of the opening parade of the 1995 Bali Arts Festival. Belaganjur, a street parade with musical performances where walking musicians create extremely energetic rhythms is truly considered a man only type of gamelan (Bakan 1999: 243).

31Other forms of competitions took place such as mixed (male and female) gamelan groups.
individuals and by village organizations. The birth of the first all-women gamelan activities, like topeng, has been stimulated also by the presence of foreign women performing.

Nevertheless we cannot really compare the life of all-women gamelan with topeng at this point in time. Balinese women started to play gamelan in the 1960s and it took nearly thirty years to see their gamelan activities flourish. Organized all-women topeng started in the mid 1990s; it has not had sufficient time to spread and develop as has the all-women gamelan. Furthermore, the two forms are not equally accessible. While gamelan groups have many players, a topeng performance requires only a few dancers. As a consequence, we should not be surprised if only a few women engage in performing topeng. Although relations between groups are very complex, I will attempt to outline the dynamics of formation of all-women topeng groups highlighting the role of some key individuals.

**All-women topeng groups: dynamics of formation**

The first all-women's topeng group grew out of an all-women gamelan group, founded in Pengosekan (Ubud) in 1993 by Desak Nyoman Suarti (whose story I detailed earlier) and Ni Gusti Putu Astiti. Around 1995 Desak Suarti with some members of this all-women's gamelan group, founded a new group, Sanggar Luh Luwih (Womanly Women) group, with the intention of extending the musical repertoire and including all women dance-dramas. Desak Suarti bought the instruments and paid the teachers who led the rehearsals, which soon moved to Ketewel (her residence). The first dance-drama they engaged with was topeng. They started to practice with two arja performers from the village of Singapadu, Ni Nyoman Candri and Cok Agung Isteri, as well as the Italian gambuh and topeng performer, Cristina Wistari Formaggia, and for a brief period, the North American Rucina Ballinger. The group constituted themselves as Topeng Shakti (Dibia and Ballinger 2005: 36-37). They performed topeng at the Arts Festival in
the year 2000 with some other performers. In 2002 Luh Luwih presented at the Bali Arts Festival the first all-women's wayang wong.

In 2003 they went on tour in Europe (Denmark and France) organized by Cristina Formaggia Wistari. Because they were considered an official cultural mission their performance received endorsement by the Department of Culture and Listibya with a generous coverage by the *Bali Post* and other newspapers and magazines. The preparation for the tour included regular rehearsals mostly conducted in Singapadu where the performers live, performances at ceremonies, and for group of foreigners who were mostly interested in learning mask performance.

After the European tour, Desak Suarti left this group. Topeng Shakti remained in Singapadu, while Suarti took some of the musicians who originally played for Topeng Shakti and recruited more musicians and dancers through radio advertisements to increase the size of the Luh Luwih Group. Because many of the new performers were from Batuan, rehearsals were held both in Ketewel and Batuan in preparation for performances such as kecak at the Bali Arts Festival in 2004, and calonarang and topeng for regular performances on the occasion of ceremonies and potential overseas tours.

Looking only at topeng, the two groups, Topeng Shakti and Topeng Luh-Luwih, display some differences. While the Topeng Shakti performs mainly topeng panca by wearing masks only, Topeng Luh-Luwih performs more prembon or bondres, mixing masked characters with make-up characters. Make-up characters are especially employed for the penasar and wijil. This is an interesting solution which overcomes the difficulty for a woman to characterize masks with very strong and low voices such the penasar. But the groups also present characters like the *Liku* (Ni Wayan Sekariani) wearing make up, while Rucina Ballinger uses bondres. At the beginning Topeng Shakti, as the first group, had to open the way and deal with resistance, but with time and work and
thanks to the presence of Cristina Wistari Formaggia who created a certain prestige for the group because of the overseas tours, things improved. Its activities on the island include performances both for ceremonies and for foreigners. The Topeng Luh Luwih seems more active at ceremonies and tends to travel more within Bali and to broadcast performances. Luh Luwih recently performed kecak in Singapore on the occasion of the 2006 Magdalena Festival.

The drummer Mudiari, whom we already know from the earlier account of her life, performs in and trains both groups, but her role goes beyond the activities of these groups. Because she is very active in teaching music to women, especially in Denpasar, she transmits the passion for topeng to a great number of her students. The basic cycles of most of the pieces for topeng are relatively easy to learn, but playing for topeng performers is more complex than for tari lepas. In topeng the music depends entirely on the relation between dancer and musicians. While for tari lepas the music is fixed and the dancer has mainly to follow the music, the topeng performer gives clues to indicate tempo and changes in rhythm to the drummers. Thus, the new all-women gamelan groups are stimulated to form a relation with the dancers. Once a group learns topeng pieces it needs a dancer to really practice them. If the group is invited to perform for an odalan, temple festival, it is very possible that topeng music is included in the pieces chosen, and of course the members want to work with a female performer.

This happened with a group in Denpasar trained by Mudiari, the all-women gamelan group, Lestari. Mudiari facilitated the contact with female topeng performers coming from other groups she works with. As a consequence there are more women that try to perform, but it is not easy to form themselves into a group and maintain activities like Topeng Shakti and Luh Luwih.

The activities of the main groups, especially Topeng Shakti, have inspired the birth of other all-women topeng groups. The topeng activity of the arja performers
of Singapadu have motivated the arja performers of the village of Keramas\textsuperscript{32} to form two new groups. These two groups were formed in different ways. The first one was coordinated and trained by the male arja-topeng performer I Wayan Suarta (callet Rawit), who presented the group at the 2003 Bali Arts Festival. A second group, formed about a year later, was coordinated by the arja performer (and dalang), Ni Wayan Latri, assisted in the training process by the gambuh-topeng performer I Made Jimat, from Batuan. Latri is not only an arja performer, but also a dalang whose ability at characterization and philosophical-historical knowledge make her a perfect candidate as a topeng performer. But, in spite of her efforts and the high standard of work of her group, its life was short.

To summarise, we have seen the group Topeng Shakti, coordinated by the Italian performer Cristina Wistari Formaggia whose work exposes the group to foreign audiences within and outside the Island. Then we have seen the group Luh Luwih coordinated and sponsored by the business woman and artist Desak Suarti. Rucina Ballinger is also active in this group performing in all its productions. Again, very significant is Mudiari whose teaching and drum-playing role in both groups and in several villages facilitate women performing topeng. Then we see a man, Rawit, coordinating a group in Keramas on the occasion of the 2003 Bali Arts Festival, and again a strong woman, Wayan Latri, leading a second group in Keramas. The two groups in Keramas had short lives. They sometimes regroup and perform (especially Rawit’s group), but their activities are not as regular as Topeng Shakti and Luh Luwih. The birth of the group coordinated by Rawit is particularly interesting because it is linked to the Bali Arts Festival. An examination of attitudes of the performers and the public to the all-women group’s preparation for the festival will reveal the dynamics of women in Bali crossing male boundaries in the context of the politics of the performing arts. I was personally involved in these events, which are described below in some detail.

\textsuperscript{32}Singapadu and Keramas are traditionally in competition in arja.
Topeng Wanita and Competition within the Bali Arts Festival

In 2003 the all-women topeng competition was planned as part of the Bali Arts Festival, but it turned out to be a single performance by an all-women topeng group from the village of Keramas. Reasons for this are complex and contested, but a key factor seems to be that the coordinator of the Keramas group, Rawit (I Wayan Suarta), is not only a performer but also a civil servant of the Department of Culture of Gianyar district, where decisions about the festival program are made. Rawit's role in the organisation of performances and training of dancers, plus other aspects of the preparation of the festival program, illustrate key issues in women's topeng practice. I will describe these processes in some detail.

Rawit's all-women group, topeng wanita Keramas, consisted of the following performers: Ni Wayan Sukerni as penasar and bondres (arja: Galuh Gila, Liku); Ni Wayan Sukerti as wijil and bondres (arja: Made Rai); Ni Wayan Candri as bondres (arja: Desak); Ni Wayan Pariamini, called Happy, as patih/topeng keras and dalem; Gung Herna as topeng tua and patih; (honorary member Carmencita Palermo as bondres). Coordinator: I Wayan Suarta (Rawit), founder of the dance school and group "Mumbul Sari" to which his topeng wanita Keramas is affiliated.

Topeng Wanita Mumbul Sari group could never have come to life without Rawit's determination: he is the one who organised and trained this group of already well-known female performers. Rawit always had a sincere and enthusiastic attitude of a man working hard for "female emancipation", as he often said. As a civil servant in the field of culture and art in Gianyar, he espouses the New Order derived ideology of the progressive and modern nation that at regional level, now autonomous from Jakarta-centred control, promotes traditional culture. At first this attitude could be considered too artificial and aiming to control women by assisting them in doing something for which they do not have, and will never have, the skills. But this attitude can be seen as part of the training modality, it involves the community and it is related to the traditional conceptualisation of the
learning process: the concept of “assisted mistakes” that the learners have to make before a critical audience in order to improve.

Ngayah, offering his/her own work, is a way to participate to one's life community, but also a way for a beginner to practice. Because “learning by doing” is the key word of the learning process, the teacher exposes her/his pupil to “a friendly audience” (preferably the pupil’s or master’s own community) in order to receive useful feedback. Topeng Wanita Mumbul Sari performers were put through the same process in spite of the fact they are already well-known performers. Before the actual performance at the Bali Arts Festival the group performed on the occasion of three odalan at the village of Keramas: on the 19 June at the Pura Dalem, on the 8 July at the Pura Desa and on 11 July at the Pura Puseh. While the first two performances occurred within the temple walls, during day time, during the religious ceremony, the third was outside the temple in the pavilion and at the end of the ceremony for the purposes of entertainment. The latter was considered general rehearsal for the performance at the Bali Arts Festival scheduled for the following day.

Performance - 9 June 2003. As it often happens the group invited me to join the performance because I had participated in the rehearsals with them. Seeing a topeng group practising with a written script was surely a novelty for me, but they explained that many performers started learning with a script. Not only was the story rehearsed, but also the jokes. We performed during the temple festivals hoping to have memorised the whole script. The atmosphere for each performance in the temples was different. During the first one, as soon as I entered the temple I noticed something very unusual: there were no women behind the trays of coffee and sweets, but rather men. When I asked about this unusual occurrence, I discovered that the women who usually carried out this task were busy playing the gamelan. Then I realised that there were no women in the kitchen except for a couple of old ladies who were taking care of the offerings, the rest were men. Most of the women were playing gamelan; others were waiting to play (there was more than one gamelan wanita group), some others
were already starting the chanting and others (our group) were getting dressed for a topeng performance. A great shift for women: from behind the scenes of a ceremony being active on the stage of the ceremony. However, the shift produced some anomalies.

The women performers of topeng did not sit and relax eating sweets and coffee as male performers usually do. Instead, they let their children eat the food while they started to get dressed. Then I understood why they were so anxious to start: they had no idea of how to put on the costumes: it was a hilarious scene and everyone ended laughing. After a while some of their husbands came and tried to help, but still I had to help to correct some details. Rawit finally came to save the situation. He also assisted everyone at every change of mask, in spite of the fact that he was also assisting the young boys dancing baris. The performance went as planned, much to Rawit’s relief, as his broad smiles indicated. In the gamelan there was a frequent change of players, especially the drummers, whose lack of ability in interacting with the dance through improvisation aroused some complaints amongst the performers. Finally, to conclude the topeng and complete the ceremony, the Sidhakarya was performed not by a woman but by a male performer, who made the necessary offerings.

Performance - 8 July 2003. Again, on 8 July 2003, the second time the group had the chance to ngayah on the occasion of the odalan at the Pura Desa of Keramas, the Sidhakarya was required and a man performed it. When I asked if one of the female performers could perform the Sidhakarya, the male who performed Sidhakarya said yes. He added that in order to perform Sidhakarya a woman has to learn the necessary mantra and of course she has to undergo the initiation ceremony (mewintan), but none of the performers of Topeng Wanita Mumbul Sari had done it yet. His tone was very gentle, clearly not wanting to disappoint me. It sounded like: yes, of course, it is possible, but not now and maybe not for a long while. Further discussion was in vain.
There were some practical differences between the first and second performances. At the second performance on July 8 the gamelan wanita for the topeng was busy somewhere else so men played for the group. Furthermore, to accommodate the need of the ceremony the group had to change the story from the one regularly rehearsed. The combination of the highly experienced male gamelan and the improvisation skills of the performers of Topeng Wanita Mumbul Sari resulted in a very dynamic and entertaining performance.

**Performance - 11 July 2003.** The performance of the 11 July was like a real rehearsal. Because it was in the evening and not closely related to the ceremony, the group could perform as planned for the Bali Arts Festival. A crowd of children and adults from the village gathered at the communal pavilion (*balai banjar*). The dance, the story and the jokes were performed as planned and repeated with some improvisation the day after, in front of the crowd at the Bali Arts Festival.

The mixed audience at the Bali Arts Festival in Denpasar watched the performance with curiosity. There were some people there from ISI. Over the following days I asked them what they thought about the performance. In general the reaction was positive; after pointing out a few technical aspects that could have been corrected, they generally said that as a first performance it was good and they hoped for future activities. This was an encouraging reaction for a group of performers at their first experience. The performers themselves, during the dialogues stressed how brave they were and how important it was to perform as women in men's roles. The fact that they were women came out several times during the dialogues, for example, as one reminded the other that they had to address each other with male names, or as they complained about the difficulty of the male standing dance position. But at the same time they improvised jokes with sexual references as if they were men:
Penasar: Hey you small man, just go in that direction

Wijil: From small it becomes bigger and bigger, the bigger it becomes the smarter it is, when it is small it is like a little finger, then it becomes big.

Penasar: What makes it big?

Wijil: Because it is massaged

Penasar: Don’t go there, (saying) if it is small it will become big if massaged.33

It seems that even though the women performers had the opportunity to speak about themselves through the impersonation of the male roles, they mostly tried to be as much like men as possible, while continually reminding the audience that they were women impersonating men.

The fact that Balinese women don’t express their voices through performance was one of the main concerns of Cristina Wistari Formaggia, but she did not want to impose her point of view on her colleagues. Rucina Ballinger is more positive about all-women topeng as a space where women can express their voices: “In Luh Luwih’s performances, women talk about women’s issues. This is not to say it is a feminist message, but at least it is beginning to embrace the concerns of women’s lives.” (Ballinger 2005: 8). The effectiveness of these women’s voices may depend on the frequency of the performances; in fact the Luh Luwih seems to be the most requested group for ceremonies. But it also depends on the personality of the performer. It is not necessary to be part of an all-women performance group to talk about women’s issues. An example is the female star of pelawak Ni Wayan Suratni. She often speaks about women’s concerns, especially the husband-wife relationship, and because she makes fun of it her audiences surely listen to her. Performers of the all man arja group arja muani characterising female roles often refer to women’s issues in their dialogues.

33 Penasar: Ci jelema cenik jeg kemu gen jurusan ci.

Wijil: Uling cenik ba ngeden-ngeden ya, ba ya ngeden-ngeden nueg-nueg ya, cenik ya lamun kacing, ngeden-ngeden ya.

Penasar: Apa ya ngeranayang ngedenang?

Wijil: Karena peting-peting.

Penasar: Da nak kemu lakuang, yen cenik ngedenang peting-peting.
Furthermore, as Kodi reports, men topeng performers, in male dress, also speak about gender issues during performances (Kodi 2006: 136-137).

At this early stage the main factor, the revolutionary aspect, is to survive and, to perform at ceremonies, rather than to communicate a specific message. The existence of women performing topeng is in itself a message that is spreading, even if slowly and with uncertain results. In general women do not perform for the purpose of voicing women's issues; rather it seems that they want to show that they can do it. But there is a big boundary they come up against.

Uncrossable boundaries

Women are performing topeng with overall community acceptance and some pockets of resistance, but when it comes to the sacred role of Sidhakarya, men take their place. This seems the limit that women should not pass. Women themselves report an enormous impediment. Ni Wayan Latri explained the problem:

Latri: Don't even think of performing with it (the Sidhakarya mask), we're not even allowed to touch it during the menstruation!

C: Why is it like that?

Latri: Because we are still leteh — impure — Balinese consider women during their period leteh and they are not allowed to do anything sacred, especially regarding the ceremonies... do not ask... it is like that. That, because it is already decided ... during menstruation we are not allowed to worship.

C: ... Is there any explanation from philosophical point of view?

Latri: Physically we are still dirty, because it (menstruation) we are considered impure, it is clear that it influences us. We already have that feeling, we think to be too dirty, to join worship. If we pray, we have to bathe first, don't we? The feeling is unsettled if we pray. Don't pray if you are not calm... Even more if you dance this one (the Sidhakarya
mask) ... This (the mask) doesn’t actively affect us, it is our feeling more than anything else. Feeling, it’s a matter of feeling... 34

Latri explains that the main impediment is women’s menstruation, but she does not explain why the menstruation is a source of impurity. It is more a tradition, it is a *mula keto* prohibition and more what a woman feels than what actually happens in reality. It is a forbidden boundary.

These boundaries do not apply to topeng only. They include all kinds of performances classified as essential to complete the ceremony (wali) where the performer, having about the same role as the priest, contributes to the success of the ceremony. Wayang kulit is another example. There are a few active women puppeteers, but as reported by Suratni (2003), the status of sebel during menstruation, along with the pressures of their household tasks, constitutes a great impediment for their activities.

Such impediments arise also in other fields of activity. Kellar (2000: 23-24) referring to Connor (1996) and Ruddick (1989) describes the marginal status of women in the healing domain, due mainly to lack of access to sacred medical texts, in turn related to their polluted status because of menstruation. Women are also believed to have the power to turn healing abilities into black magic. Parker

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34Latri: Jangankan menari, pegang saja kalau datang bulan jangan.

C: Kenapa seperti itu?

Latri: Ya, ... kita masih "leteh", kalau orang Bali kalau datang bulan itu kita dianggap "leteh" tidak boleh mengambil sesuatu yang suci apalagi untuk melakukan prosesi yadnya, ya jangan bertanya mengapa begitu, karena memang sudah ditentukan di sana kalau datang bulan tidak boleh sembahyang.

C: ... Ibu punya penjelasan secara filsafat ....?

Latri: Secara lahiriah kita masih kotor, dianggap leteh, jelas saja ini berpengaruh, orang sudah dari perasaan, pikiran kita merasakan diri kotor buat apa sembahyang, sedangkan kalau sembahyang harus mandi dulu kan, kita masih kotor, 3 hari kita masih kotor, perasaan jadi tidak menentu kalau sembahyang jangan sembahyang kalau kita tidak tenang. Kalau menarik ini kita leteh, ini memang tidak mengapa-apakan kita tapi kita duluan sudah punya perasaan yang tidak enak, jadi perasaan. Interview with Ni Wayan Latri, 06-08-2004.
(1993) speaks in terms of danger coming from women having access to high culture such as wayang kulit.

Yet women have the capacity to become high priestesses-pedanda and from some perspectives are regarded as spiritually superior to men. According to Balinese philosophy, an unmarried man cannot become pedanda because males are not complete by themselves: they do not have male and female elements necessary for an individual to be balanced. By contrast, an unmarried woman can become a pedanda because she has within herself, as woman, both male and female elements. Acc 35 36
garding to the tantric tradition, the female energy, Shakti, is inseparable from the male, spirit. Because Shakti is the life force of the male element, the life force of Siva, the male cannot exist without Shakti. From the philosophical point of view the woman is a spiritually superior creature, the energy through which life is possible.

The situation is somewhat complicated with regard to topeng Sidhakarya since the Sidhakarya is more closely related to Buddhist traditions than to Sivaist ones. But the overall contradictions in women's religious status are highly relevant to our investigation of the reasons why women are excluded from Sidhakarya, the performance that completes the ceremony.

In an effort to find the answer to this question we listen once again to different voices and different points of view. The topic of women performing Sidhakarya brings out direct expressions of opposition, but not universally. Some people are very much in favour for the same reasons that others are opposed. I have already mentioned Luh Putu Haryani from the Department of Culture in Denpasar, who both doubts that women would really wish to perform Sidhakarya, and is not sure that people would support it. Given the fact that because all the tasks for

35 Personal communication by IBM D Palguna (August 2000) also confirmed by Laura Bellows (October 2003).
36 This has been emphasised on several occasion during informal conversations with IBM Dharma Palguna 2004-2005.
conducting a ceremony are divided up, Haryani argues, would women, who have to take care of arranging the offerings for Sidhakarya, also want to perform it? For the same reason, however, I Ketut Rina supported the idea of women performing Sidhakarya. He admitted that actually women are more appropriate for performing Sidhakarya because of their extensive knowledge about offerings. Of course, he warns, the performer has to be skilled enough to characterise such a strong mask.

Mudiari confirms the view that women are regarded as weak and unclean. Indeed, she finds that this idea has been made more binding because it has become a written prohibition. For example, at temple gates signs for tourists have appeared saying “do not enter if menstruating”. In spite of the fact that these signs are for tourists, they have also in a certain way changed the perception of “menstruating” for Hindu Balinese people. As a result, they have come to perceive a customary practice as a “prohibition by law”. This prohibition does not have any explanation: it comes from parents as a *mula keto* rule but it is fixed through signs for tourists. For the same reason Mudiari could not explain why a woman working on the construction of a temple cannot climb up if she does not have a bath first, while a man is not requested to do so.

Recognition of women’s greater involvement in the preparation of ceremonies compared to men came also from I Dewa Wicaksana. Women carry out the most complicated tasks and they are the ones aware of all the functions of the offerings. On the issue of women performing Sidhakarya, Wicaksana referred to a dialogue which had occurred between the female pedalangan/puppeteer student and comic performer, Ni Wayan Suratni, and the pemangku (priest) of the Pura

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37 Interview with Luh Putu Haryani, 08-08-03.
38 Interview with I Ketut Rina, 05-08-2004
39 Kaitannya kenapa tidak perempuan yang menarikan Sidhakarya, mungkin karena dari segi kesuciannya, apalagi perempuan itu sudah mens, istilahnya akil balig. Interview with Ni Wayan Mudiari, 06-08-03.
40 Interview with I Dewa Wicaksana, 19-08-03.
41 Lately in order to avoid wasting time asking information what the offering is for often the tukang banten the woman taking care of the preparation of the offerings, writes on the offerings their purpose/use.
Sidhakarya temple. Suratni asked the pemangku if she, as woman, would be allowed to use topeng Sidhakarya. The pemangku responded that there is no written text indicating that Sidhakarya’s mask wearer has to be a man, but he hoped that a woman would not use the mask in order to respect “the purity/sacredness” of Sidhakarya himself, an answer Wicaksana defined as “very diplomatic”. When I went to interview the pemangku I found he had already died, and his son and successor had a very different attitude. His son, Mangku Ketut Yadnya, did not oppose the possibility of a woman performing Sidhakarya. Did he have a different response because he was from the younger generation, or because he was talking to me, a foreigner who, he believed, would never cross those boundaries?

Opposition to the use of Sidhakarya by women seems to be another confirmation of the spread of idea that the Sidhakarya is so pure or holy that it is better not to take the risk to contaminate Him by an impure element such a woman. The peak of the manifestation of women’s impurity is again the menstrual period. Some think that women following their feeling would never “make dirty” a pure place. It is interesting that Wicaksana, in article published on the STSI/ISI magazine Mudra (Wicaksana 2002) on female puppeteers in Bali, points out that most of the woman interviewed respect the restriction and avoid performances at ceremonies when they have their period: otherwise they would feel bad. Surely there are women who carefully observe this prescription, but I know female performers who have frankly admitted that because of their fundamental role in the performances they could not avoid performing even during their period. These women do not feel leteh or sebel.

This sort of attitude does not surprise I Nyoman Durpa. Open to the possibility of having women perform Sidhakarya (just as there are female pedanda, pemangku and president), he considers the “sebel” status an inner status, a sort of sad

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42 Ni Wayan Suratni confirmed the dialogue reported by Wicaksana during conversation with me in October 2004.
43 Interview with Mangku Ketut Yadnya, 05-11-2004. I am grateful to Ulf Gadd who introduced me to him.
mood. If a woman does not have this mood during her period there is no problem for her to perform. Madra Aryasa had a similar interpretation: he stressed the fact that menstruating and thus being in leteh condition creates the feeling of making dirty a temple or the masks used in the topeng. But there are no written rules prohibiting access to sacred places and items during menstruation and people do not speak about it. Because the leteh status depends on personal feelings, it is individual. He also believes that in the past it was more controlled than now. For example now it is not possible to be sure that none of thousands of women going to the mother temple Besakih every day during festive seasons is not in leteh condition.

In spite of the fact that some support women performing topeng Sidhakarya there is a general feeling that the high holiness of the mask constitutes a precise boundary for women. There is something in women's bodies that makes them impure, dirty (polluted), and unable to control danger. Nevertheless at a higher spiritual level, some knowledgeable people admit that actually women are more complete than men, have a potentially higher spiritual power than men. Women's pollution seems to come from their sexual organs which, when they bleed, give birth, or meet male organs, become leteh.

Crossing into "pure" domains by a contaminated being - a woman and especially a woman during the menstruation - would cause imbalance and destroy the universe's harmony. Pure domains are not only buildings such as temples, but also include performance tools that contribute to the success of a ceremony. These can be musical instruments, puppets, costumes and masks. Women's impurity and danger for the general well-being is cosmologically justified and framed in a traditional context linked to the discourse of Balinese culture in a national and global context.

44Interview with I Nyoman Durpa, 23-08-03.
... throughout Asia ... [the] control of women's sexualities and fertilities is crucial to the formation of nation and the continuity of culture... women and tradition are wedded categories within preservationist discourses because only through control of women's sexualities can a gender and caste hierarchy be maintained and with it the religious/political power structure, expressed as a natural order (Bellows 2003:43).

This order was uncontested when only pre-menstrual girls or old women performed in temples. From a sacred space women began performing in a profane space when they started to perform arja. As Sawitri (2001) shows, they proved to have access to taksu, which is linked to the highest philosophical/religious concepts that link the human body to the universe. Women themselves could not freely develop this revelation. Rather new performative domains were created for women, safe domains, far from spirituality and cosmology. But as they move within the allowed domains, women are able to expand them. Eventually perhaps they will cross the boundaries. It is not impossible that this current process of religious and cultural rationalisation that is manifesting itself as ajeg Bali will open to women more sacred domains for performance

In fact there are women so keen to cross the boundaries that once a woman did perform Sidhakarya, but in silence. It was Nyoman Candri, in September 2004 during the temple festival of her clan, but she nearly did not tell me about it. I was not in Bali at the time, but when I visited her some weeks later, she told me right at the end of our conversation about her performance, that she finally did it, she performed Sidhakarya. Like any performer she was initiated in the safe context of her own clan. I was so surprised! I asked the rest of the family about the event. They said that her performance was good for a first time, but it seemed that I was the only one considering the fact so special. As a female foreign researcher I was giving importance to something that may have been considered just one of the everyday events that happen in Bali.
Ni Wayan Sekariani: *Why are women considered dirty? Because of what is down below... I often wonder why women are considered dirty, maybe as women we have to find the answer together.*

With video-interviews I collected the voices of women involved in the first all-women topeng groups, I followed their rehearsals and their performances, witnessing the first steps of something that could constitute a great change in Balinese performance. Further investigation is needed to follow its development and pursue certain aspects that I could not cover in the context of this thesis. An important issue is the relation between women performing and the current discourse on Balinese culture based on ajeg Bali, wanting Bali to stand erect on its traditional values. To what extend is this discourse influencing performance practice? Is it contributing to the lack of self confidence expressed by women performing with masks? Or, on the contrary, is it stimulating the wish to contribute in their own terms, to the preservation of a performance which represents Balinese culture? As Hatley observes, the current ideological emphasis on democratic participation arguably allows women more opportunity to speak with their own voices and control representation of their own bodies (Hatley 2005: 6).

The feeling, expressed by women, of not being adequate to perform with masks leads to questions on the embodiment of the mask from the female point of view. Is it possible for a woman to become one with the mask? How can she train the body and voice? Why do Balinese women fear learning how to use the mask while it is the main attraction for western women performers? My investigation suggests that the presence of western women performing topeng has contributed significantly to the formation of all-women topeng. Further investigation is needed to comprehend the dynamics of interaction between Balinese female performers and those western performers during both local and overseas performances (in Europe and Asia).

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46 Kenapa dianggap kotor, apa karena orang melihat dari segi bawahnya itu, saya sering berpikir kenapa wanita itu dianggap kotor, mungkin kita sebagai wanita harus cari jawabannya itu sama-sama. Interview with Ni Wayan Sekariani, 03-08-2004.
With the exception of some efforts by Suarti’s group, women seem not to use topeng performances to voice specifically female concerns. Rather, they are still trying to find their own way to characterize masks that have been always worn by men only. Story telling, dialogues and jokes imitate what men usually do. Without necessarily expecting the development of a western feminist perspective, it will be very interesting to trace shifts in the structure and content of performances as well as in the choice of the masks in the near future, when these women have mastered the technique and reached the freedom to be originally creative.

A final aspect that needs to be monitored is, as we have seen, the ultimate boundary that women encounter in performing topeng; performing with the mask of Sidhakarya. Between uncertainty, support and lack of self-confidence one woman has indeed already performed the Sidhakarya at a ceremony, but it did not provoke a great reaction. Will this eventually become a common, daily practice, or will everybody simply forget about it? We can continue to observe and explore the changes, aware that our questioning in itself may contribute to their decision making.
Final Words

Ordering the chaos that constitutes the daily life of a practice is an impossible task. My preference has been to preserve the reality as I see it without packaging to make it more understandable to the reader. The logic of direct experience is different from articulated logic of writing and reading. Direct experience involves layers of reality that continuously interact.

Certainly I perceive only some of these layers; my attention is necessarily selective. The process of research has the aim of knowing what is not known and discovering it through questions, while pretending not to know the answer. The little daily discoveries, the illuminating and exciting findings are all part of a track that I have tried to establish. This is the nature of academic knowledge; the narrative has to follow this pre-established track.

What is my track? The notion of "unity"; unity as one of the basic performative principles embedded in the discourse and practice of mask-performers. I can recognise the concept due to its prominence in trans-cultural performance discourse and because it is even clearer when the performer works with masks. Unity of body and mask has been a pedagogical instrument in theatre training to reach the "natural" unity of the body-mind of an actor on stage. Daily life activities are "naturally" (effortlessly) embedded in this unity. Recreating the truth of unity in a non-daily life activity, such as the one that is staged, is the ultimate goal of the actor: it is the act of creating life in the audience’s perception.

Understanding the performer in Bali can allow us to grasp this creation. The practical knowledge of mask characterisation in Bali is very often explained using metaphysical concepts. The life of the mask comes from the ability of the
performer to reach the unity of the self of the mask-character with the self of the performer through the breath — which is life. This is the act of creation which attracts the audience. Staging this unity is staging life. It is staging the ultimate aim of Balinese philosophy: unity in which the self coincides with the highest manifestation, call it God, Shiva or Sanghyang Tunggal/Widhi. It is a self considered as part of the universe’s cycle and balance. The unity in the self is the ultimate encounter between two elements or energies, purusha and pradana, male energy —and female energy, positive and negative. Life emerges from this coincidence of opposite forces. Each force is and is not the other. This binary opposition, source of unity, and then life, is called rwa-bhineda. Catra (2005: 4) translates this concept as the “joining together of contradictory principles” and also specifies that “one could not exist without the other” (ibid: 73). Excellent characterisation is the result of the performer’s reaching this unity between the self and the mask. In performative terms, we call it presence. In Bali, they call it taksu — the ultimate unity which contributes to the balance of the universe.

Not all performers express themselves in these terms when they talk of their mask-work, but most of them do. Importantly, topeng performers verbally transmit these concepts in the course of the performances: their main role is being a guru loka, a teacher of the world (Catra 2005). These same metaphysical concepts that were once transmitted mainly by performers are nowadays at the centre of the discourse on Balineseness spread through all sorts of media: books and booklets, newspapers, radio and TV. Yet in recent times this discourse which explicitly uses metaphysical concepts such rwa-bhineda, celebrating oneness, seems to be expressing division instead of unity.

The Balinese discourse increasingly employs the language of the early anthropologists who worried about the loss of the last paradise, which needed to be saved from external influences. These early explorers of the Paradise-Bali explained the tension between the opposite forces as a fight between good and evil. The adoption of non-Balinese terms in explaining their own culture to foreigners slowly but surely is becoming part of Balinese vocabulary in explaining
their own culture to themselves. Terms become concepts, embodied knowledge. The necessary opposition of forces aiming to unity expressed by the concept of rwa bhineda tends to become separation. Good is good, and must be protected; bad needs to be defeated. The concept of rwa-bhineda indicates coexistence between opposite forces, directions places. Inside coincides with outside, at least in principle. However, recent expressions of the discourse valorising the new concept of “ajeg” tend to separate insiders, people of the Bali Hindu religion, from those who are outsiders, non-Hindu. The proof is in the bombs. Outsiders put the bombs in Bali. Javanese, who are frequently worshipped in the temples as ancestors, are nowadays seen as a source of danger.

In this thesis I have sought to demonstrate how Balinese, first in order to define their Balineseness, then to protect it, have used western scholars’ concepts and frameworks. Sometimes consciously, sometimes not, Bali has been constructed as a special island with a different, unique culture to be protected. The necessity of subscribing to one god in order to be part of the Indonesian nation has also contributed to this process. A religion without a clear name, embedded in daily life, aiming at the unity of the individual with the universe and the self has become a codified religion centred on the concept of one main god. As a territorial religion it excludes those not linked to its land, even demonising them as enemies, from whom the land has to be protected (Ramstedt 2004).

If I compare interviews and informal conversations from 1997-98 with those in 2003-2005 there are some clear differences in people’s attitudes. On the one hand, in more recent times some people in the culture-making scene are critical and open — for example, admitting the reinvention of performances; opposing the role of topeng Sidhakarya as equivalent to that of the priest in completing the ceremony. On the other hand, more people use without question the terminology spread by innumerable cultural projects, booklets and the media. The separation between sacred and profane dance seems to have become an accepted reality to most. In the face of terrorism threats, Balinese really are thinking that their
problems come from outside. What belongs to the island is sacred and untouchable, while those aspects brought from outside are "contaminations".

The effort to create a profane domain as a defence against modernisation, represented by the presence of tourists, has strengthened fundamentalist thought. At the same time, the intellectual separation between the sacred and profane influences performance by creating new domains and roles, challenging traditions, and inventing new ones. New works and new audiences are continuously created in response to the needs of a society that changes in spite of the efforts towards crystallisation or "museumification" (Hobart 2000) by both local policy and foreign romantic rescuers of "Balinese Culture". We have seen how "contemporary" works, popular entertainment and the effort of women to become part of the domain of topeng all reflect and contribute to the complex, changing dynamic of everyday life. I have suggested that escape into laughter in performances balances a daily life overloaded with teachings on the sacredness of being Balinese. Often entertainment mixes with sacred elements in balanced way. In the case of topeng Sidhakarya invaded by comic stock characters, people believe that the job is still done by the main performer. The Unity of the task is still perceived.

It seems that there are two parallel dimensions in topeng and performance in general: one belongs to the performers learning, performing and carrying within their bodies principles which are alive and flexible. The other dimension belongs to the discourse, where principles and practices are self-consciously formulated and fixed. But these in turn are resisted and problematised. These two dimensions often clash. The discourse aims at the democratisation of culture, at the full disclosure of symbols and secrets, at the equal involvement of the sexes. The discourse seems to aim towards unity via a rational mind, wanting to achieve quick results. It forgets that a performer or a priest needs long years of training to reach that so much aimed unity body-mind, unity within all the elements of the universe. Yet at the same time I have the sense that this rush to Unity Balance Harmony as it addresses a new external enemy, is creating a new polarity proper
to contemporary times. This new polarity creates an equal and opposite tension between Balinese and the external other that serves the "endangered sacred".

And again here is no contradiction between all these realities. The tensions both within discourses and practices and between discourse and practice are another expression of the basic duality which governs the unity of day to day living. Taking a step backwards and looking at the whole picture from a distance, I hope this thesis — despite the separation into topics and the structuring of an academic work — offers an insight into the unity of some aspects of the day-to-day life of Balinese people observed by another researcher in Bali.
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