

VOICING SELVES: ETHICS, MEDIATION, AND THE POLITICS OF  
RELIGION IN POST-AUTHORITARIAN BALI

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VOICING SELVES: ETHICS, MEDIATION, AND THE POLITICS OF  
RELIGION IN POST-AUTHORITARIAN BALI

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This is an ethnographic study of the voice as a resource for forming devout Hindu selves in contemporary Bali, Indonesia. Through case studies of three forms of Hindu chant, I show how vocal performance has been taken up—by the state, by religious authorities, and by vocalists themselves—as a tool of ethical reform and a technology of ethical striving. I argue that the voice has become a privileged medium for imagining and inhabiting new subjectivities in Bali.

I contextualize my study of voice within a broader investigation of religion as both a disciplining force and an enabling resource in the lives of Balinese Hindus. Bringing ethnographic attention to a variety of practices through which Balinese Hindus interact with the world they call *niskala*, the world of invisible deities, and spirits—including ritual exchange, prayer, and the study and performance of religious texts, among others—I show how human-*niskala* relationships are constituted through, and structured by, hegemonic institutions and discourses, while at the same time, they create spaces of possibility for individuals to engage in creative forms of self-making

and world-making. By examining how these relationships are imagined and manifested across different spheres of religious authority, I shed light on the ethical pluralism of religious life in contemporary Bali.

This study focuses on religious pedagogies of voice as a particularly productive site for investigating the coming-into-being of new kinds of selves. Because of its connection to language, and, by extension, to texts, the voice has been deployed as both an object and a tool in state-sponsored projects of religious reform in Bali, which emphasize interiority as the core of religious selfhood and foreground texts as the proper source of religious knowledge and moral guidance. Religious forms of vocal performance and training are also an important space in which sensory and affective dispositions are formed. Highlighting the sonic and bodily materiality of vocal expression, as well as its linguistic and textual aspects, I argue that the semiotic, sensory, and affective affordances of vocal performance and training play an important role in shaping the kinds of ethical selves that are imagined and cultivated in Bali today.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nicole Reismour was born in Minneapolis, MN but spent most of her childhood in Grand Forks, ND. She holds degrees from Bard College (B.A. Music, 2003) and Mills College (M.A. Composition, 2007), where she studied composition with Kyle Gann, Joan Tower, Annie Gosfield, and Alvin Curran, and piano performance with German Diez. She has been performing Balinese music since 2000, during which time she has had the privilege of working with many master Balinese musicians and dancers, including I Gusti Nyoman Darta, Ida Ayu Ketut Suciawani (alm.), I Putu Putrawan (alm.), I Gusti Ketut Bajra, Ida Ayu Werdhi, I Nyoman Saptanyana, I Wayan Suweca, I Made Terip, and I Nyoman Windha. As a member of Gamelan Dharma Swara (2009-2012) and Gamelan Sekar Jaya (2004-2008), she has performed on numerous concert series and festivals in the U.S. and Bali, including Wordless Music, MoMA Nights, Performa, Cal Performances, and the Festival Gong Kebyar.

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My thinking has been immeasurably enriched through my interactions with faculty members at Cornell, including, above all, the members of my dissertation committee. They have been unwavering in supporting my seemingly endless stream of fellowship and job applications, often on short

notice, and they have also been instrumental in shaping this research project (though I take full responsibility for its shortcomings). Andrew McGraw, who was a visiting fellow at Cornell in 2011, has been a longtime friend in the world of Balinese music. He was my first gamelan teacher back in 2000; he let me tag along with him to rehearsals and performances during my first trip to Bali in 2007; and he has been a partner in countless conversations about Balinese music (and so much more). His balanced critiques and praise of my ideas and writing, and his willingness to go along with some of my more far-fetched arguments, have given me the courage to pursue this unusual project. Marina Welker was the committee member who delivered the most brutal critiques of my work. She always presented these with a friendly and supportive demeanor, which meant that sometimes it wasn't until I returned home after one of our meetings that I realized how truly withering, but also how revealing and transformative, her comments were. These, of course, helped make my writing so much better. Marina's feedback and guidance were particularly crucial in helping me develop and hone my research grant applications. I would also like to mention that Marina's Proseminar on Social Organization—my first foray into anthropology—was life-changing. Alejandro Madrid joined the music faculty at Cornell when I was already embarking on my fieldwork and only joined my dissertation committee after I had finished my research. In spite of this, and despite claiming to know almost nothing about Indonesia, he has given me incisive and helpful feedback on every chapter of my

dissertation, at every stage of revision, and has probably done more than anyone else to help tame my ramblings into a coherent piece of writing. He also met with me every week during my final semester of writing, and I credit those meetings for helping me see, and eventually reach, the light at the end of the tunnel. Martin Hatch became my advisor when I first arrived at Cornell, and even after retiring he remained involved in my project. Marty has helped me in numerous big and small ways over the course of my studies, from sending me home from meetings in his basement office at the Kahin Center with piles of books, CD's, and videos from his personal collection, to refusing to write a letter of support when I wanted to spend a summer in Bali, encouraging me instead to focus on my exams and dissertation proposal, an intervention which, though frustrating at the time, ultimately paid off. If I were to mention only one thing about how Marty has influenced and continues to influence my research, it would be his role in keeping me accountable for the ethical and political implications of my work. As my research wandered into thorny terrain with respect to the ethics of representing the lives of others, I have often remembered Marty's admonition to be "simpatico" with the people about whom I write. I am not sure whether the current project has succeeded in this, but it has certainly been on my mind, and it is a commitment and goal that I will take with me into my future work.

In addition to my dissertation committee, I am also grateful to the other faculty with whom I studied during my coursework at Cornell. I would

especially like to thank Chris Miller, director of the Cornell Gamelan Ensemble; while I still derive more pleasure from playing *Balinese* gamelan, Chris's masterful teaching and musicianship opened my ears to the incredible beauty of Javanese music. Jolanda Pandin's engaging Indonesian language classes were a pleasure to attend and essential for honing my speaking and reading skills. The language faculty at SEASSI, and especially my Balinese teacher Ketut Edy Danusugita, also deserve special thanks. In addition, I would like to thank Jeanette Jouili, a visiting fellow at Cornell in 2012, whose course "Islamic Aural Cultures" opened my eyes to the fascinating possibilities of studying religion through sound and voice. Judith Peraino's course "Vocality and Embodiment" provided grounding in the vast literature on voice, and her insightful feedback on my final paper was especially helpful.

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I have presented early versions of several parts of this dissertation at the annual meetings of the Society for Ethnomusicology, MACSEM, the American Anthropological Association, and the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, as well as at conferences and workshops at Cornell University, Harvard University, the University of Hildesheim, and the Smithsonian Institution. I am grateful to my co-panelists and other participants for many thoughtful conversations. I would also like to thank the many ethnomusicologists whose interests intersect with Bali, especially Bethany Collier, Pete Steele, Ellen Lueck, Maisie Sum, Dustin Wiebe, Michael Tenzer, Pak Sumarsam, and Lisa Gold, who have been friendly and familiar faces at conferences and occasional field companions in Bali. Special thanks as well to Ritwik Banerji, Richard Fox, and Matt Rahaim for insightful responses to a recent article based on this research.

Since my interest in Balinese religion grew out of an earlier passion for Balinese gamelan, I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the many amazing people with whom I have played gamelan over the years. I have benefitted in so many ways from the friendship and wisdom of musicians and dancers who straddle the geographic, linguistic, and cultural divide between Indonesia and the United States. I would especially like to thank my gamelan teachers from Bali, in particular I Gusti Nyoman Darta, I Made Terip, I Putu Putrawan (alm.), I Nyoman Windha, I Nyoman Saptanyana, I Wayan Suweca, and I Dewa Putu Berata.

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I owe my largest debt of gratitude to all of the people I spent time with during my fieldwork in Bali, who, for reasons of confidentiality, will not be named here. The chapters that follow do not even begin to reflect the incredible artistry, knowledge, generosity, and care that my Balinese teachers and friends have extended to me over the years. I asked (*tunas*) so much of them, and the rice basket was never empty.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Abstract	iii
Biographical Sketch	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	xii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Sensing Niskala	51
Chapter 2: The Ethics of Divine Blessing	98
Chapter 3: The Puja Tri Sandhya and the Ethics of Sincerity	149
Chapter 4: Pepaosan and the Ethics of Divine Guidance	210
Chapter 5: Singing Rohani and the Ethics of Sensory Purification	254
Conclusion	293
Works Cited	305

## INTRODUCTION

This is an ethnographic study of the voice as a resource for forming devout Hindu selves in contemporary Bali, Indonesia. Through case studies of three forms of Hindu chant, I show how vocal performance has been taken up—by the state, by religious authorities, and by vocalists themselves—as a tool of ethical reform and a technology of ethical striving. I situate my study of voice within a broader inquiry into the ethical dimensions of religious life in contemporary Bali. Connecting singing to a broader set of mediatory practices that bind the lives of Balinese Hindus to the *niskala* world—the world of invisible deities and spirits—I argue that the voice has become a privileged medium for imagining and inhabiting new subjectivities in Bali.

On the broadest level, this dissertation is a critical investigation of religion as both a disciplining force and an enabling resource in the lives of Balinese Hindus. I show how human-niskala relationships are constituted through, and structured by, hegemonic institutions and discourses, while at the same time, they create spaces of possibility for individuals to engage in creative forms of self-making and world-making. Bringing ethnographic attention to a range of practices through which Balinese Hindus interact with invisible beings—including ritual exchange, prayer, and the study and performance of religious texts, among others—I argue that the semiotic, sensory, and affective affordances of these practices play an important role in shaping the kinds of ethical selves that are imagined and cultivated in Bali today. By examining how these interactions are conceptualized and practiced across different spheres of religious

authority, this study emphasizes the ethical pluralism of religious life in contemporary Bali.

More narrowly, this study focuses on religious pedagogies of voice as a particularly productive site for investigating the coming-into-being of new kinds of selves. Because of its connection to language, and, by extension, to texts, the voice has been deployed as both an object and a tool in state-sponsored projects of religious reform in Bali, which emphasize interiority as the core of religious selfhood and foreground texts as the proper source of religious knowledge and moral guidance. The voice is also a potent medium for circulating affect, and religious forms of vocal training are an important space in which sensory and affective dispositions are formed. I show how forms of vocal training being practiced in contemporary Bali enable the production of “feeling subjects” (Schwenkel 2013) who are committed to various forms of religious identification and ethical striving.

### ***Balinese Hinduism as Assemblage***

For the purposes of this dissertation I understand Balinese Hinduism to be the assemblage of discourses, institutions, technologies, and practices that organize human relationships with the world that Balinese call *niskala* (invisible, immaterial), the world of deities and spirits. What I call Balinese “religion,” then, comprises the ways people imagine and describe the invisible world, the ritual practices through which people interact with invisible beings, the moral values and commitments that guide those practices, as well as the institutions that structure religious knowledge and practice.

In characterizing Balinese Hinduism as an “assemblage” my intention is to do two things. On the one hand, I mean to emphasize the heterogeneity of Balinese religious beliefs and practices, which are drawn from a range of sources and encompass a diversity of views about god, the world, and what it means to live a good life. On the other hand, this term also aims to reflect the fact that my interlocutors, by and large, understood this heterogeneous assemblage to be a singular entity: a single religion, which all (or nearly all) Balinese people share.<sup>1</sup> While there are some Balinese Hindus who define their religion narrowly to include, for example, only those practices and beliefs that have a basis in religious texts, most of the people I spent time with had a more inclusive understanding, viewing the varied ritual traditions of individual villages, the formal doctrine taught in schools, and, in some cases, even the practices of international devotional movements all as facets of their religious identity as Balinese Hindus. Thus, while I have found it useful to distinguish between different spheres of religious discourse and practice within Balinese Hinduism, my interlocutors typically did not do so.

Over the course of this study, I focus on three primary sources of religious knowledge and authority: custom (*adat*), the state, and New Religious Movements, specifically the International Society for Krishna Consciousness or ISKCON. These three spheres of religious authority are represented in my ethnography as distinct “moral spaces” (Mattingly 2014b), discursive and social contexts wherein certain ethical projects and ideals are foregrounded while others are marginalized. These include the

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<sup>1</sup> Although there are Christians and Muslims who identify as Balinese, most of the people with whom I interacted assumed that being Balinese is synonymous with being Hindu.

domestic space of the home, the communal space of the village, the public space of schooling and the media, and the enclave-like space of the ISKCON ashram. As people move between these different moral spaces, they encounter competing visions of what it means to live a devout religious life, and they are called upon to identify with different sets of values and ideals. Following Jarrett Zigon, I call this heterogeneous and uneasily coexisting set of values and demands a “moral assemblage” (2010).<sup>2</sup> In addition to foregrounding different moral concerns, these different moral spaces also foreground different semiotic ideologies, and different embodied and sensory dispositions. It is my contention that these material factors play a key role in enabling the forms of ethical life that take shape within and across these spaces.

Taken together, the three spheres of religious authority that I examine here do not reflect the full range of Balinese religiosity,<sup>3</sup> and, since my focus is on religious values, they certainly do not reflect the full range of Balinese ethical thought and practice.<sup>4</sup> Yet each of these spheres promotes a distinct vision of how to live ethically as a Balinese Hindu, and each is also a site for distinctive forms of vocal performance through which that ideal ethical subjectivity is circulated, cultivated, and inhabited.

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<sup>2</sup> I should note that whereas Zigon draws a distinction between morality and ethics, I use the two words interchangeably.

<sup>3</sup> It is not possible for a single ethnography to do justice to Bali’s religious diversity. I approach Balinese adat through the perspective of a single family. My study of ISKCON in Bali is likewise confined to a single community. Notably absent from my ethnography is any representation of Balinese Muslims or Christians, or highland Balinese communities (Bali Aga).

<sup>4</sup> This study of ethical life in Bali is heavily slanted toward otherworldly ethical matters concerning how people ought to interact with invisible beings. The ethical dimensions of human relationships, which are of course central to ethical life in Bali, are only explored insofar as they relate to matters of religion and divine moral judgment.

Comparing these three spheres thus allows me to explore a variety of ways in which vocal practice and ethical subjectivity intersect in contemporary Bali.

### ***A History of Religious Pluralism in Bali***

The religious and moral assemblage that I describe here developed in response to a series of changes in Bali's political and economic landscape over the course of the past century. A host of internal and external forces—including Balinese caste conflict, Dutch colonial rule, Indonesian nationalism, tourism, and political Islam, to name just a few—have all contributed to creating the heterogeneous religious assemblage that we find in Bali today. It is important to stress from the outset, however, that Balinese Hinduism has never been a monolithic entity. Indeed, scholars generally agree that it was only during the colonial period that Balinese people began to conceive of themselves as an ethnic group united by common social and religious customs (*adat*) (Picard 1999: 29-31). Furthermore, although certain basic features of *adat* are widely shared throughout the island, Balinese ritual customs vary significantly from one village to another, and this diversity is enshrined in Balinese aphorisms, such as *desa kala patra* and *desa mawacara*, both of which point to the variation in custom between different villages. Heterogeneity has thus been a part of Balinese religious life since long before the colonial encounter.

That being said, colonial rule and post-colonial nation-building did bring about important changes in Balinese religious discourse and practice. Bali was under Dutch colonial rule from 1906 until 1942. This period saw the emergence of a western-

educated elite who published journals in which they reflected upon, and debated about, Balinese religious customs. In these publications, *adat*—a term introduced to Bali by the Dutch—was adopted as an umbrella concept for Balinese traditions and customs. In this way, Bali's traditional social order was objectified as a unique and coherent sphere of activity, which could be distinguished from other spheres, such as colonial administration (Picard 1999: 30-31). One distinction that became particularly contentious during this period was that between *adat* and *agama* (religion). As Balinese elites found themselves increasingly in contact with Christians and Muslims, they felt the need to define and articulate their own religious identity. While some posited *agama* and *adat* as one and the same, others sought to separate the two by isolating a core set of fundamental unchanging beliefs and practices from the broader patchwork of varied local customs (*ibid.*: 32).

The effort to define Balinese religion became more urgent after Bali was incorporated into the Republic of Indonesia in 1949, as the Indonesian state began taking steps to limit the forms of religious identity and expression that its citizens would be permitted to engage in. Indonesia has always maintained a policy of religious pluralism. However, due to pressure from powerful Islamic political groups, only a limited number of faiths have been granted official recognition (Ramstedt 2004a:3–9). In 1952 it was decided that in order to qualify as a religion in the eyes of the Indonesian state, a belief system must possess a singular god, a prophet, and an international following, as well as a sacred scripture. This meant that only those faiths that closely aligned with the basic model of Islam were to be granted official recognition, a group

which initially included only Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism (Ramstedt 2004a: 3-9). When the newly independent government made adherence to a recognized faith a requirement for all citizens, the Balinese were placed in the residual category, *orang yang belum beragama* (people who do not yet have a religion) and slated for missionization (9–10).

This exclusion galvanized incipient religious reform efforts in Bali, and several local religious organizations began working together to construct a new version of Balinese Hinduism that would satisfy the requirements for inclusion as an official religion (Bakker 1993: 225-227). In 1958, the leaders of these organizations drafted a joint petition demanding government recognition of Balinese Hinduism. The petition argued that the many Balinese deities were all manifestations of the singular god Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, that Indian and Old Javanese sacred texts were the sacred scripture of Balinese Hinduism, that the Vedic *rsi* and Old Javanese poets who authored these texts were its prophets, and that the many Balinese rituals were local variations on five basic forms of religious worship (*panca yadnya*). The petition also introduced the *Puja Trisandhya*, a daily Hindu prayer hitherto unknown in Bali, which is reminiscent of the Muslim *salat* (Ramstedt 2004a: 11-12, Rudyansjah 1987: 72-73, 80-81). These reforms were received favorably in Jakarta, and in 1959 a Section of Hindu-Balinese Affairs (*Bagian Urusan Hindu Bali*) was established within the Indonesian Ministry of Religion (Ramstedt 2004a: 12). Balinese Hinduism received full recognition in 1963 when this body was renamed the Office of the Hindu Balinese Religion (*Biro Urusan Agama Hindu Bali*) (*ibid.*: 14).

Following state recognition, the grass roots effort to bring Balinese religiosity into line with state demands evolved into a top-down program of religious reform overseen by the state. I call this ongoing project the Hindu Reform.<sup>5</sup> In 1959 the organizations that had worked to achieve state recognition joined together to form a new organization called the Parisada Dharma Hindu Bali, which was to serve as the primary religious authority of the Balinese Hindu community (Bakker 230-231). This semi-governmental organization consisted of a council of priests (*paruman sulinggih*), a council of experts (*paruman welaka*), and an executive committee, and was to have branches at the local, regional, and provincial level. During the 1960s the Parisada oversaw a range of programs aimed at circulating and promoting a standardized, authoritative version of Hindu doctrine and practice. These included publishing texts on reformist Hindu doctrine to be circulated to the public and used in Hindu religious classes, which were made a compulsory part of the Indonesian public school curriculum in 1964 (Landmann 2012: 212).<sup>6</sup> The Parisada also began publishing a journal.<sup>7</sup> In 1961 it founded a Hindu theological institute (Institute Hindu Dharma, later renamed Institute Hindu Dharma Negeri, IHDN), which would offer courses for priests as well as training for religious teachers (*ibid.*). In addition to being active in the spheres of publishing and education, the Parisada also made modest efforts to modify Balinese religious practice,

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<sup>5</sup> This is purely an analytic term. My interlocutors in Bali typically do not differentiate the reformist discourses and practices instituted by the state from those aspects of religion that are overseen by adat institutions; instead they see both as components of a singular “Hindu” religion.

<sup>6</sup> Hindu class is only mandatory for Hindu students. Muslims, Christians, and others are required to take courses in their own faith tradition. The curricula for all religious courses are overseen by the state. For a detailed account of the development of religious education in Bali, see Landmann 2012.

<sup>7</sup> The journal, originally called *Kala Wrta Hindu Dharma*, ceased publication after a couple of years but later reemerged with the new title *Warta Hindu Dharma* (Bakker 240).

standardizing existing rituals, introducing new forms of ritual and prayer, and constructing temples that exemplified a monotheistic, delocalized approach to Hindu worship (Bakker 1993: 232-37, Geertz 1973a, Schulte Nordholt 1991).

The version of Hindu doctrine that solidified during this period represented a significant departure from the orthopraxic spirit of traditional Balinese religiosity (Geertz 1973a: 175-77). This doctrine was first codified and presented in the Parisada's 1967 publication *Upadeça Tentang Ajaran-Ajaran Agama Hindu* (Clarification Regarding the Teachings of the Hindu Religion) (Parisada Hindu Dharma [1967] 1978). Drawing much of its core content from an earlier text written by Pandit Shastri ([1955?]), an alleged member of the Arya Samaj Hindu reform movement in India, who taught religious courses in Bali in the 1950s, the *Upadeça* is written as a dialog between a religious teacher and his student. As Michel Picard has observed in a recent paper, it follows a format similar to a catechism, in which doctrine is presented through a series of questions and answers (Picard 2015: 7-9).<sup>8</sup> The first half of the text outlines the "five beliefs" (*panca sraddha*) of Hinduism, which define the moral purpose of life on earth to be the pursuit of liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth through virtuous action.<sup>9</sup> The second half of the text deals primarily with Balinese religious traditions, attempting to make sense of these within a reformist Hindu framework drawn primarily from Indian sources. According to John Bowen, religious manuals used in the Gayo highlands of

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<sup>8</sup> Picard notes that the catechism originated with the birth of Protestantism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was later adopted by leaders in the Theosophical Society as way of presenting the core beliefs of Buddhism and Hinduism (2015: 7-9).

<sup>9</sup> The Five Beliefs are belief in god, the divine soul (*atma*), the law of action and consequence (*hukum karma phala*), reincarnation (*punarbhawa*), and liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth (*moksa*).

Aceh in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century followed the same teacher-student dialog structure found in the *Upadeça*, suggesting that the Parisada's text may have been modeled on Indonesian Muslim sources (1993: 43-44).<sup>10</sup> In foregrounding belief as the defining feature of the Hindu religion, the Parisada's version of Hindu doctrine is reminiscent of the Protestant Reformation, as well as a host of subsequent religious reform movements, which—often in the wake of colonial conquest—similarly adopted a dematerialized spirituality, purified of magical and fetishistic beliefs, in an effort to reconcile religion with modernity (Keane 2007: 78).<sup>11</sup>

Although Hinduism in Indonesia was ostensibly a national and not an ethnic religion, in the early 1960s it remained mostly confined to Balinese. In the mid-1960s this began to change, due to dramatic shifts in Indonesia's political climate. In the wake of an alleged coup attempt on September 30th, 1965, conservative military and Muslim organizations joined forces to eliminate the Indonesian Communist party. They initiated a spree of violence that would claim the lives of hundreds of thousands of suspected communists across the archipelago. People lacking a clear religious affiliation were especially vulnerable to being accused of having communist sympathies. Religious identity thus became a matter of life and death. This prompted many groups with syncretistic or animistic beliefs to embrace Hinduism as their official religion (Ramstedt 2004a: 15).<sup>12</sup> As the Indonesian Hindu community became more diverse, the Parisada

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<sup>10</sup> Bowen also notes that many of these texts were not composed in Indonesia but were instead "translations or adaptations of Arabic works. . . printed in Mecca or Cairo for distribution in Southeast Asia," which suggests a broader transnational trend (1993: 43).

<sup>11</sup> Keane specifically mentions the Arya Samaj, the reform movement with which Pandit Shastri was associated, as an example of this pattern (2007: 78). For examples from Buddhism and Islam, see Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988 and Eickelman 2000, respectively.

<sup>12</sup> For more on conversion to Hinduism in 1960s Indonesia see Ramstedt 2004b and Hefner 2004.

also dropped its association with Bali, changing its name in 1964 from Parisada Dharma Hindu Bali to Parisada Hindu Dharma, and then to Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia in 1989. In 1991 its main office was moved from Denpasar to Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta (Bakker: 238).

In the decades following the killings of 1965-66 the Parisada gained increasing control over public religious discourse in Bali. In 1967 General Suharto rose to power initiating three decades of authoritarian rule, which became known as the New Order period (*Orde Baru*) (1967-1998). From the 1960s to the 1980s the Suharto regime worked to marginalize the role of religion in political life, and in public life more generally, except in limited state-managed forms.<sup>13</sup> In 1975 the government introduced what became known as the SARA doctrine, which limited media discussion of issues the regime saw as divisive, including religion (Hoesterey 2016: 38-39).<sup>14</sup> In 1978 the regime banned all international religious organizations from sponsoring religious organizations in Indonesia, and in 1983 it took the further step of requiring all social, cultural, political, and religious institutions to recognize the state ideology of *Pancasila* as their sole ideological principle (*asas tunggal*) (Ramstedt 2004a: 19).<sup>15</sup> The Parisada, which became officially affiliated with Suharto's Golkar party in 1968, played an

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<sup>13</sup> Scholars writing on this period have described how the Suharto regime favored "culture" as a non-threatening form of difference while tending to downplay religion as a basis for solidarity and affiliation. For more on the religious and cultural policy during first decades of New Order see Acciaoli 1985, Pemberton 1994, Kipp 1993.

<sup>14</sup> The acronym SARA stands for *suku, agama, ras, antar golongan* (ethnicity, religion, race, class). The associated policy served to limit public discussion of these issues.

<sup>15</sup> The Pancasila or Five Principles are the core tenets of Indonesian state philosophy, which were outlined in the Indonesian Constitution of 1945. They include belief in the Almighty God, a just and civilized society, the unity of the Indonesian nation, democratic government, and social justice for all Indonesians.

important role in implementing the state's agenda for the Indonesian Hindu community (Bakker 1993: 242, Landmann 2012: 173). New Order policies of censorship and media suppression favored the Parisada, granting it significant authority over how Hinduism was represented in local print and mass media.<sup>16</sup> This period of consolidation has had an enduring influence on religious discourse in Bali.

Political shifts during the late New Order and post-New Order periods brought increased opportunities for the public expression of religious identity. Within Indonesia's Hindu community, this created an opening for a more diverse range of religious ideas and viewpoints to circulate publicly. One example of this was the founding in 1995 of *Pustaka Hindu Raditya*, a Hindu-themed journal that openly criticized the Parisada.<sup>17</sup> Another development, which is relevant to this dissertation, is that the ISKCON movement, which had been banned during the New Order, was given legal recognition as a *sampradaya* (Hindu religious study group).

One of the most significant consequences of increasing freedom of religious expression in Indonesia was that symbols of Islamic identity gained a much larger presence in public life.<sup>18</sup> After the fall of Suharto in particular, Islamic imagery and

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<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to determine the extent to which unorthodox Hindu discourses may have circulated in the media during the New Order period. Bakker's book provides the most detailed history of modern Hindu discourse and scholarship in Bali. While the intellectuals he discusses did hold differing religious views, all of them had ties to the Parisada, thus his book does not provide evidence that there were any religious scholars without ties to the Parisada who were publishing during this period. That being said, two international devotional movements (Sai Baba and ISKCON) did manage to establish followings in Indonesia during the New Order (Howe 2001: 165, 184). One devotee told me that her father had joined ISKCON after reading a pamphlet that the group had circulated in Bali. For more on the Parisada's control over the media during the New Order period see Fox 2011.

<sup>17</sup> See for example the September-October 1996 issue of *Pustaka Hindu Raditya*, which includes several articles on the theme *Harapan dan Kritik untuk Parisada* (Hopes and Critiques for the Parisada).

<sup>18</sup> As Suharto's power began to wane in the late 1980s, he sought to broaden his base by courting the support of Islamic political groups that he had previously sought to suppress. A Muslim himself, he

voices became increasingly prominent in the national media and influential in Indonesian politics.<sup>19</sup> These shifts have caused Balinese Hindus to become more sensitive to their status as a marginal religious minority within the Indonesian nation. A variety of factors, including the Bali bombing of 2002, the economic instability of the tourism industry, and the growing numbers Indonesian Muslims migrating to the island for work, have raised public concerns about the loss of Bali's religious and cultural identity and fomented anti-Islamic sentiment in Bali (International Crisis Group 2003).<sup>20</sup> These anxieties received additional fuel from the discourse of *Ajeg Bali*, a slogan that was first popularized in 2003 and has since been used to galvanize support for a range of political projects and campaigns by claiming that Bali's unique Hindu culture is under threat and promising to protect it (Reuter 2008).<sup>21</sup> *Ajeg Bali* signaled the emergence of a politicized Hindu identity and discourse in Bali, which was not in evidence during the New Order.<sup>22</sup>

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engaged in public displays of piety and also implemented policies that increased opportunities for the public expression of Muslim identity (Ramstedt 2004: 19-20).

<sup>19</sup> One example of this were the debates around, and eventual passage of, an anti-pornography bill, *Rancangan Undang-undang Anti-pornografi dan Pornoaksi* in 2008. Another, more recent example, were the massive protests against, and conviction of, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, better known as Ahok, a Chinese Christian former governor of Jakarta, who was accused in 2016 of committing blasphemy. At their height, these protests, organized by members of the FPI (*Front Pembela Islam*, or Islamic Defenders Front) were estimated to have drawn crowds of up to 200,000 people.

<sup>20</sup> On October 12, 2002, two bombs exploded at a nightclub in the tourist center of Legian in southern Bali and another smaller bombing took place at the US Consulate in Denpasar. The attack, which killed 202 people, was attributed to members of the Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist group.

<sup>21</sup> This slogan, which can be roughly translated as 'Bali standing strong,' was first circulated by the Bali Post Media Group, which owns two newspapers, a television station, and a radio station in Bali, and which is believed to have coined the phrase. Although the Bali Post Media Group has demonstrated significant bias in favor of the PDI-P party, the slogan *Ajeg Bali* was not, at least at the time of my fieldwork, associated with one particular political party. For more on *Ajeg Bali* see Allen and Palermo 2005, and Atmadja 2010.

<sup>22</sup> One example of this that I encountered frequently during my fieldwork was politicians delivering *dharma wacana* (sermons) at religious ceremonies and events.

Although the post-authoritarian period has brought increased freedom of religious expression, much of public discourse about Balinese Hinduism still aligns with the core doctrine that was codified and promoted under Sukarno and Suharto. For example, the terminology and teachings that circulate in the school curriculum today are strikingly similar to those outlined in the *Upadeça* in 1967 (Parisada Hindu Dharma [1967] 1978). Of the several dozen religious books I purchased during my fieldwork, a handful are translations or interpretations of Indian Hindu writings, some of which diverge from the Parisada's version of Hinduism.<sup>23</sup> Most, however, closely align with the state's religious orthodoxy. Although periodicals like *Pustaka Hindu Raditya* (now known as *Majalah Raditya*), *Sarad*, and *Media Hindu* do offer critical perspectives on Balinese adat, and on the Parisada's operations and policies, their authors rarely contest the tenets of official Hindu doctrine. The period of authoritarian rule, which gave the Parisada a virtual monopoly over public religious discourse in Bali, seems to have cast a long shadow over Bali's religious public sphere.

While the Parisada has played a powerful role in shaping how Hinduism is represented in local print and mass media, its influence on Balinese religious practice has been less far-reaching. Bali was spared from the coercive policies applied to other religious minorities under the New Order (see Acciaioli 1985). Rather than being forcibly suppressed, diverse forms of customary worship were allowed to persist alongside new, state-sanctioned forms of religiosity.<sup>24</sup> This was likely due in part to the fact that Bali's

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<sup>23</sup> Indonesian translations of the Bhagavad Gita were widely available during my fieldwork. Texts about Sai Baba were also fairly common.

<sup>24</sup> Since its inception, the Parisada has pursued two somewhat contradictory aims. On the one hand, it has worked to adapt Balinese religiosity to satisfy the demands of the state, which required that religion

spectacular religious rituals were understood to be a lucrative tourist attraction (Picard 1996, Vickers 1987). Another contributing factor was that, even during the New Order, *desa adat* were recognized as autonomous governing entities, not part of the state apparatus, which meant that the state had limited ability to impose its authority in matters related to *adat* (Warren 1993). This remains true to this day, though policies implemented during the post-authoritarian period have altered the status of the *desa adat* somewhat. Following the collapse of the New Order, Bali's provincial government took advantage of regional autonomy policies to pass new laws pertaining to *adat* organizations. While these laws granted increased authority to *desa adat*, they also included moves to solidify the Hindu identity of Balinese *adat*. For example, the laws officially changed the name *desa adat* to *desa pakraman*, thereby replacing an Arabic word with a Sanskrit one. These and other efforts to officially 'Hinduize' Balinese *adat* would seem to limit the independence of *desa adat* by placing them more squarely under the authority of the *Parisada*.<sup>25</sup> The founding of a *Desa Pakraman Council* (*Majelis Desa Pakraman* or MDP) in 2004 seems to signify a further move toward centralizing authority over Balinese *adat*. These changes notwithstanding, there continues to be an unresolved tension between state, religious, and customary authority in Bali.

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be dissociated from ethnicity (Kipp 1993). On the other hand, it has sought to preserve Bali's unique sacred traditions, which are seen as the core of Balinese ethnic identity.

<sup>25</sup> One example of this process of Hinduization are the state-sponsored *Lomba Desa Pakraman* (Customary Village Competitions). The *Parisada* participates in evaluating these competitions and the criteria include such things as "implementation of the *Tri Sandhya*," suggesting that part of the purpose of the competition is to encourage the population to participate in state-sanctioned forms of religiosity. Far from being simply symbolic, these competitions involve substantial cash prizes (in the tens of millions of rupiah). For more on the *Lomba Desa Pakraman*, see Dharmayuda 2001. For more on recent efforts to define Balinese *adat* as "Hindu," see Shaublin 2013.

In recent decades, Balinese adat has been problematized in a new way. If earlier generations of religious reformers were primarily concerned with establishing the legitimacy of Balinese Hinduism as a religion, today the Parisada and other reformist Hindu institutions have also begun to emphasize the ways that religion should contribute to developing a prosperous and productive workforce.<sup>26</sup> Bali's adat institutions have long been subject to public criticism for the burden of time and resources they impose on their members, a demand which requires Balinese workers to take frequent time off from paid employment. Amidst public anxieties about Indonesia's integration into the ASEAN Economic Community (*Masyarakat Ekonomi ASEAN* or MEA) and widespread calls to improve the quality and competitiveness of Indonesia's laborers, some commentators have come to see the demands of adat as an obstacle to progress and economic prosperity, making it virtually impossible for Balinese to compete in an increasingly diversified workforce.<sup>27</sup> Many of my interlocutors expressed concern that the Balinese are becoming *penonton di pulau sendiri* (onlookers on their own island), standing by and watching as Muslims and other migrant groups seize the economic opportunities. Shifting economic realities have thus given new salience and

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<sup>26</sup> The term *Sumber Daya Manusia* (SDM), which literally means 'human resources,' and refers to labor productivity and competitiveness, has become increasingly common in reformist discourse. To give just one example, an article on the Parisada's website (originally published in the March 2010 issue of *Warta Hindu Dharma*) entitled "*Etos Kerja Hindu dan Kualitas SDM*" ("Hindu Work Ethic and the Quality of Human Resources") begins with an Indonesian translation of a passage from the *Atarvaveda*, the first line of which reads "God only loves hard-working people." <http://phdi.or.id/artikel/etos-kerja-hindu-dan-kualitas-sdm>.

<sup>27</sup> While the *desa adat* is most commonly represented in these debates as an obstacle to developing a competitive labor force, Balinese traditions are also sometimes discussed as sources of "creativity" (*kreatifitas*) or "local wisdom" (*kearifan lokal*) that might put Balinese laborers at an advantage. For an account of how religion is being taken up as a resource in producing productive laborers during a time of neoliberal reform in Indonesia, see Rudnyckyj 2010.

appeal to reformist demands that Balinese Hindus should reduce the amount of time and resources they spend on ritual. This may be a contributing factor in the growing appeal of spiritual movements like Sai Baba and ISKCON, as I discuss in Chapter 5.

### ***Navigating Moral Spaces in Bali***

As a result of these various political and economic shifts, most Balinese people now engage with at least two competing conceptions of what it means to be Balinese Hindu: one rooted in the institutions and practices of Balinese adat and another rooted in state religious doctrine. ISKCON offers yet another contrasting vision of what Balinese religion could or should be. These competing versions of Balinese Hinduism furnish a diversity of answers to the question of how, exactly, human-niskala relations are to be imagined, monitored, and maintained; they foreground different ethical values and ideals; and they are mediated and experienced through different material practices.

For these different versions of Balinese Hinduism to hold together in people's minds and be made livable as a single religion requires effort; individuals and institutions must work to coordinate the competing logics of these different religious spheres (Robbins 2004: 5). One simple but effective tool in this effort is simply the name *Agama Hindu* (the Hindu religion), which operates as a conceptual umbrella for a diversity of practices and discourses. The Parisada has been instrumental in promoting the idea that Balinese adat is “Hindu” in character, and thus that although religion and custom are conceptually distinct, they are continuous in practice. The pervasive belief in the continuity between agama and adat—promoted by the Parisada—mitigates against

the perception that Hinduism comprises multiple variants or sects. Furthermore, in promoting Sanskrit texts like the Bhagavad Gita as the proper basis for Balinese religious practice and belief, the Parisada has also (perhaps unwittingly) created an opening for movements like ISKCON to represent themselves as part of *Balinese* religion.

Another factor mitigating against the perception that Balinese religion is divided into multiple variants is the fact that both adat ritual and state religious education are mandatory, or at least virtually so, given that an individual can only avoid engaging with them at significant social cost. This means that many Balinese Hindus must move between “modern” and “traditional” religious spheres in their daily lives.<sup>28</sup> Thus, professors at the National Hindu Theological Institute must return to their home villages to participate in adat rituals; meanwhile, children and youth who live in their desa adat attend public schools where they are taught reformist Hindu doctrine, and both children and adults consume television and radio programs where this doctrine is represented as the basis for ‘their’ religion. The fact that people tend to move between these spheres, rather than confining themselves to one or the other, mitigates against the formation of two distinct sects. Moreover, since temple congregations tend to be formed on the basis of locality and kinship, Balinese Hindus have limited opportunities to form religious congregations around a shared affinity for a more modernist or traditionalist approach to

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<sup>28</sup> While Indonesian Islam has often been described as having “modernist” and “traditionalist” variants, my interlocutors in Bali did not speak of their religion as being divided in this way (Bowen 1993, Geertz 1960). Instead of a binary opposition between modernists and traditionalists, they saw a spectrum of variation in which some individuals or villages were more traditional and others more modernized. Ultimately, they saw all Balinese as united by a singular religion that allows for a diversity of approaches. That being said, while they saw *Balinese* Hinduism as unified, despite its diversity, they commonly saw it as distinct and separate from the varieties of Hinduism practiced by other Indonesian ethnic groups.

worship.<sup>29</sup> Instead, they confront, and must find a way of grappling with, the demands of both customary and state religious authorities as they move through different social and moral spaces. This applies as well to people who are adherents of New Religious Movements, who typically navigate three distinct spheres of religious authority.

A third factor holding this religious assemblage together is the work people do to separate competing religious discourses, confining them to different social spaces so that they do not come into direct confrontation with one another. For example, as I discuss in Chapter 3, certain unorthodox ways of representing the *niskala* world are kept out of public discourse about Balinese Hinduism. Meanwhile, friends of mine who were sympathetic to reformist claims about the excess and wastefulness of Balinese rituals described how they refrained from expressing these views in the communal and domestic contexts where such rituals are actually carried out. Likewise, Balinese ISKCON devotees stressed the need to “tolerate” *adat* practices (i.e. to participate in them despite personal moral objections) while spending time in their home communities. Unlike the *Urapmin* described by Joel Robbins, whose efforts to negotiate the competing cultural logics of Christianity and their indigenous social system cause them to experience “moral torment,” the moral tensions that Balinese Hindus experience as they navigate these different moral spaces are of a much subtler, less painful, nature (Robbins 2004). These practices of separation, which help ensure that competing versions of Hinduism are able to coexist without coming into conflict, also help make

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<sup>29</sup> Certain *desa adat* may take a more modernized approach to ritual than others, depending on the *desa* leadership. However, this does not serve as a mechanism for attracting new, like-minded members to the *desa*’s temple congregations. The membership at large must follow what the leadership decides and cannot simply opt to worship elsewhere.

Hinduism conceivable and livable as a heterogeneous, but still unifying, religious identity.

### ***Religious Agency and Ethical Pluralism***

In studying the complex assemblage that is contemporary Balinese Hinduism, I am particularly interested in what David Kloos (2017) has called “religious agency,” the socially mediated capacity to act with, against, and in light of religious customs, discourses, and values. I tend to refer to these capacities as ‘spaces of possibility,’ rather than simply ‘agency,’ in order to emphasize the fact that agency is always situated within and mediated through specific social formations and material practices. In highlighting religious agency in Bali, I am writing both with and against two opposing tendencies in the literature on Balinese religion and culture: an earlier tendency to emphasize stasis and the socially reproductive character of Balinese cultural practices (Bateson 1981, Mead and Bateson 1942, Geertz 1973b and 1973c) and a more recent tendency to recover Balinese agency in the form of resistance to the hegemonic power of the colonial or post-colonial state (Parker 2003, Warren 1993, Wiener 1995). This study seeks to build on this work by bringing attention to the variety of forms that agency can take with respect to religious and customary authority. As members of adat communities, Balinese Hindus must dedicate substantial time and resources to fulfill ritual obligations, obligations that are increasingly represented as a *beban* (burden) that restricts individuals’ ability to participate fully in other aspects of social life, such as paid labor. In light of this, we might see adat as a structure that limits individuals’ agency. As

I seek to show, however, the adat sphere also enables particular forms of self-making and world-making and can thus be thought of as a space of possibility and freedom. Similarly, the Hindu Reform has sought to impose its version of Hinduism over various aspects of Balinese religious life and to limit the kinds of religious activities that Balinese people are able to engage in, but it has also afforded opportunities for individuals to have greater autonomy vis-à-vis religious practice. Religious agency, then, is not simply about being liberated from social constraints or oppressive structures. As Kloos writes, it is “neither isolated from, nor a form of resistance against” religious authority (2017: 6, see also Mahmood 2005). Instead, it is about individuals’ capacity to reflect upon, and make choices about, the demands that their religion makes of them, and to be morally responsible for those choices.<sup>30</sup>

Following Kloos, I locate religious agency within people’s efforts to live ethically within a particular heterogeneous and dynamic religious tradition. In doing so, I build upon a larger body of anthropological scholarship that has argued that ethnographic research into ethical practices provides an opportunity for a critical rethinking of agency and power (Faubion 2011, Laidlaw 2002, Lambek 2000, Mahmood 2001, Mattingly 2014a and 2014b). Rather than foregrounding the socially sanctioned rules and

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<sup>30</sup> While Bruno Latour equates agency with pure causality, I follow James Laidlaw (2010) in seeing agency as “an aspect of the relational processes whereby stretches, phases, or stages of people’s ongoing conduct are interpreted as acts for which distinct agents (of varying shape and size) are accountable.” Crucially, the “agent” is understood by Laidlaw to extend “both into and beyond the individual by means of mediating entities,” and thus it is not equated with individual autonomy or intentionality. However, in positing responsibility as a necessary feature of agency, Laidlaw rules out the possibility that objects may possess agency independently of accountable actors, such as individual persons, groups, or institutions. Laidlaw claims that this narrower conception of agency is better able to account for the inherently ethical nature of attributions of agency in social life.

obligations that guide and constrain action, the ethical turn in anthropology has focused attention on individual and collective efforts to live, and to cultivate oneself, in relation to particular notions of the good. Drawing on the ethical writings of Michel Foucault, this work emphasizes the importance of reflection and freedom in shaping social life while at the same time recognizing that people's self-forming activity, and the ideas of the good that motivate it, are always socially mediated, meaning that ethics is inextricably bound up with the workings of power (Foucault 1997).<sup>31</sup> Pushing beyond frameworks that define agency in terms of (what the scholar assumes to be) agents' interests, these scholars find agency within the processes by which people make and remake themselves in light of shared norms, values, and ideals.

Scholars have converged around the idea that an anthropology of ethics should focus ethnographic attention on complex processes of self-making that involve both subjectivation and the government of the self, on the one hand, and reflection and freedom vis-à-vis ethical norms and ideals, on the other. However, debates have emerged over whether the primary focus of ethnographic inquiry into ethical self-making should be the processes by which people assimilate shared norms and values that they find in their social surroundings (a pedagogical or third-person approach), or how individuals grapple with the unique moral challenges that they encounter in their lives (a narrative or first-person approach).<sup>32</sup> Since much of my own interest is in how the voice

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<sup>31</sup> For an overview of Foucault's ethics, see especially the lecture on "Technologies of the Self" and the interviews entitled "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress" and "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (Foucault 1997: 223-301).

<sup>32</sup> I am drawing here from Mattingly's framing of the debate (2014a, 2014b). A third-person approach is exemplified in the work of scholars such as James Faubion (2011), James Laidlaw (2014), Saba Mahmood (2005), and, I would add, Ben Piekut (2011: 140-176). Mattingly herself advocates a first-person approach.

is deployed as a means of producing certain kinds of ethical subjects, a significant portion of my ethnography falls into what would be called a pedagogical (or disciplinary) approach to ethics. However, I am also deeply sympathetic to Cheryl Mattingly's proposal for a first-person virtue ethics that emphasizes the moral perplexity that people encounter in everyday life as they strive to arrive at a momentary "best good" in complex situations.<sup>33</sup> Heeding Webb Keane's call for a "multi-dimensional approach to the study of ethical life in first-, second-, and third-person perspectives," in Chapter 2 I analyze a family conflict that reveals how an ethical self is constructed through negotiations and accommodations between a shared vision of the "good life" and the unique ethical challenges and dilemmas that individuals confront as they strive to live up to that ideal (Keane 2016: 37). I seek to incorporate first-person perspectives in other portions of the dissertation as well by bringing attention to moments of awareness when individuals reflect upon the moral frameworks that they are called upon to be accountable to in their religious lives. It is in these moments that the spaces of possibility afforded by religion come most clearly into view. As I seek to show, these moments of ethical reflexivity are not products of individual consciousness alone; they grow out of social interactions (Keane 2016: 26). As such, they are mediated not only by language, but also by a host of other material forms, including song and chant. My approach to ethics draws from research on mediation and voice to understand how people's first-person ethical perspective emerges through mediatory practice.

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<sup>33</sup> To be clear, Mattingly's framework acknowledges that ethics always takes shape in relation to shared codes and models while also recognizing that these models often fall short, requiring people to engage in creative forms of experimentation (Mattingly 2014a: 49, 55; 2014b: 479).

### ***Mediation in Religious and Ethical Life***

While both Kloos and Mattingly place individuals at the center of their ethnographies, as an ethnomusicologist, I am equally interested in how mediatory forms and practices—including, but not limited to, music and sound—shape religious and ethical life. Such practices are not external to the ethical projects and dilemmas that my interlocutors are involved in; as I seek to show, they create the conditions of possibility for religious and ethical subjectivities. This dissertation thus builds on the work of Kloos and Mattingly by highlighting mediatory practices—in all their material, semiotic, sensory, and affective complexity—as a site of religious and moral agency.

In highlighting mediation, I take inspiration from a wide body of scholarship that has come to be identified with the ‘material turn’ in religious studies.<sup>34</sup> I draw as well from the work of scholars who, working outside religious studies, have explored how material forms mediate the presence of ghosts and other invisible beings in social life (Schwenkel 2017, Strassler 2010, 2014). Scholars working in both of these areas have highlighted the active (even agentive) role that media play in enabling people’s interactions with otherworldly beings and the larger social formations these interactions sustain.<sup>35</sup> This efficacy extends far beyond simply circulating the ideas that form the basis for religious beliefs and practices. Media may also function to train and retrain the

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<sup>34</sup> For reviews of this body of scholarship, see Eisenlohr 2012, Engelke 2010, and Stolow 2005.

<sup>35</sup> I am broadly sympathetic to the turn to recognize the efficacy of material forms, as I believe it provides an important critique of an earlier tendency to equate agency with individual autonomy. At the same time, however, I appreciate James Laidlaw’s caution against positing the efficacy of material things as a form of agency, a framing that problematically brackets the issue of responsibility.

senses (Hirschkind 2006, Schmidt 2000), distribute agency beyond the boundaries of individual human bodies (Gell 1998), enable sensory encounters with deities or prophets (Eisenlohr 2009, Engelke 2007, Pinney 2004, Rajagopal 2001), and furnish concrete ways of inhabiting particular religious or ethical subject positions (Keane 2007).

Among the various media that I discuss here, I focus particular attention on the voice. The voice is important in a study of Balinese religion because it has been central to the ways Balinese people engage with religious texts: traditional modes of studying religious literature typically center on oral performance. As religious reformers have sought to elevate the place of scripture and doctrine in Balinese religiosity, they have adopted and adapted indigenous forms of Hindu chant and recitation as tools of religious and ethical reform, a topic I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4. Meanwhile, movements like ISKCON and Sai Baba employ globalized forms of religious song and chant to circulate their distinct religious and ethical vision, as I discuss in Chapter 5. Here, the focus is less on linguistic meaning and more on the bodily and affective experiences afforded by vocal expression, which are posited as signs of divine presence and manifestations of ethical progress.

I use the phrase “religious pedagogies of voice” to capture the ways that religious traditions employ implicit and explicit forms of training in order to mold the voice and teach people to use their voices in religiously appropriate ways.<sup>36</sup> In focusing on how

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<sup>36</sup> While I am not aware of any other scholars who use this term, there is a vast and wide-ranging body of ethnographic writing on this general topic, which includes scholarship on religious song, recitation, oratory, as well as other forms of religious language. See Engelhardt 2014, Gade 2004, Harkness 2014, Keane 2007, Nelson 1982, Rasmussen 2010, Shannon 2004, to list just a few examples.

voices are trained and shaped, I draw from and build upon a large body of ethnomusicological scholarship that has investigated vocal training—the training of the body in service of a particular vocal and musical aesthetic—as a key site in the formation of selves, subjects, and cultural identities (Desai-Stephens 2017, Gray 2013, Harkness 2014, Newland 2014, Rahaim 2012). Since my own research deals with vocal practices that are performed for religious—rather than, or in addition to—aesthetic reasons, my approach to pedagogy is somewhat different. “Pedagogy” as I use it here, is not simply about vocal production and technique; it extends to all facets of vocal expression, including language use and ordinary speech. Religious pedagogies of voice are about using the resources of vocal and linguistic expression to form religious persons. These pedagogies may engage with the aesthetic aspects of singing and other forms of vocal performance, but aesthetic values often have to be negotiated with other values, such as moral values.

The religious pedagogies of voice that I discuss in this dissertation include efforts to regulate how religious texts are set to melody, how singers engage intellectually with the texts they recite, how many times people recite a particular mantra each day, and so on. They also include demands that people take on specific participation roles with respect to the texts they sing and the messages those texts contain (Goffman 1981, Keane 2000).

Following Amanda Weidman’s call to study the voice in its multiple registers, this dissertation considers the linguistic, sonic, and bodily aspects of vocal expression in tandem (Weidman 2014). The vocal practices I analyze, and the questions I seek to

answer, draw attention to two aspects of voice in particular. First, I consider what Keane has called “the staging of voices” as a facet of moral self-formation. A key referent here is Jane Hill’s essay “The Voices of Don Gabriel,” in which she shows how a speaker narrating the death of his son uses variations in language and intonation to stage an interaction between multiple personae or “voices,” which represent different ideological and moral positions (Hill 1995).<sup>37</sup> Drawing from Bakhtin, she argues that the speaker’s self is not correlated with a singular authentic voice, but instead emerges through this interplay of multiple “voices,” or moral figures, with which he identifies to varying degrees, and between which he must choose. In a response to Hill’s essay, Keane argues that “learning. . .how to stage voices, is part of the process of distinctly *moral* self-formation” (Keane 2011).<sup>38</sup> Building on these claims, I would like to suggest that religious pedagogies of voice contribute these processes by making certain voices available and accessible and investing them with value. However, simply learning to replicate particular words, sounds, and bodily gestures does not guarantee a particular self as its inevitable result. I argue, rather, that for training in styles of vocal expression to play a meaningful role in the formation of ethical subjectivities, the raw materials of bodily, linguistic, and sonic form (together with the values invested in them) must be taken up as affordances in the practical activity of ethical life.<sup>39</sup> This leaves open the

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the staging of personae through musical performance, see Auslander 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Hill’s essay suggests that the everyday practice of staging voices—of using recognizable vocal personae to . . . can have important political implications, as a form of identification with, or resistance to, dominant ideologies.

<sup>39</sup> When Don Gabriel stages voices, he is mobilizing vocal personae that are familiar to his community. However, the process of self-formation that Hill describes is not simply a passive process of adopting a form of vocal expression and the moral norms that go along with it. What’s important is how he operationalizes these voices in the practical activity of constituting himself as a moral person.

possibility that styles of vocal expression that are made available through religious pedagogies of voice may be incorporated into ethical projects other than those for which they were originally intended, an issue I discuss in Chapter 4.

While the Bakhtinian conception of voice elaborated by Hill and Keane highlights the linguistic aspects of vocal expression, I also draw attention to the sonic and bodily materiality of the voice. Of particular interest to me in this regard are instances of “auratic indexicality” in vocal performance and sonic experience. Auratic indexicality (Strassler 2014) describes a way of experiencing photographic images as points of contact and commingling with an otherwise invisible presence. Extending this concept to the realm of sound, I highlight instances in which sound functions as “a means for putting [participants] into the presence of things” (e.g. deities, spirits) such that “representation is subsumed by presence” (*ibid.*: 124-125). I argue that while auratic indexicality runs counter to dominant sensory regimes in Bali, the affective power of auratic sounds are also being harnessed to produce “feeling subjects” committed to state-sanctioned forms of religiosity and ethics. By tracing out the shifting relationships between mediation and presence in auratic experiences of vocal sound, I illustrate that the voice’s multiple “modalities of meaning” (Eisenlohr 2018) confound clear distinctions between affect and signification.

### ***Semiotic Mediation and the Social Analysis of Music***

Given my disciplinary identity as an ethnomusicologist, an explanation is in order as to why I have chosen to focus this dissertation on *mediation*. Why not place music or

sound at the center of my ethnography? My answer to this question is that musical and sonic practices *are* central to this study, but in order to address the question of how they contribute to the formation of ethical subjectivities, I need to consider other media as well. Explaining why this is so requires a digression into the semiotic theories of Charles Sanders Peirce, particularly as they have been developed by semiotic anthropologists like Webb Keane and Alfred Gell. One of the central aims of this study—one of the contributions it seeks to make to the field of ethnomusicology—is to show how theories and frameworks developed by linguistic and semiotic anthropologists offer valuable resources for analyzing the social significance of music, including music’s sensory, bodily, and affective dimensions. To briefly summarize the argument I develop below, building on Keane’s work, I aim to demonstrate the value of studying music from within a “representational economy,” which includes other (non-musical) signifying practices. The concept of representational economy, as Keane develops it, is meant to highlight “the dynamic interconnections among different modes of signification at play within a particular historical and social formation” (Keane 2003: 410). If one of the goals of ethnomusicology is to understand how music contributes to the processes by which such historical and social formations are created, reproduced, and transformed, then I suggest that we need to attend to the broader representational economies within which music operates.

To study music as part of a representational economy requires moving beyond some of the ways that Peircian semiotics has been applied within ethnomusicology.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Here I am primarily thinking about the work of Thomas Turino. See, for example, Turino 1999 and 2014.

While semiotic analyses of music have focused on decoding musical meaning, highlighting the ways that musical sounds can represent and evoke extra-musical ideas and images in the minds of individual listeners, semiotic anthropologists have used Pierce's theories to bring attention to the ways that signs mediate social relationships (Gell 1998, Mertz 2007, Mertz and Parmentier 1985). Here, the focus is not only on how signs are perceived and interpreted by individuals, but also how signifying practices form the basis for particular "modalities of action and subjectivity" and thus also, for social orders (Keane 2003: 413).

Pierce's work provides two contributions to semiotic theory that are particularly relevant to this dissertation. First, his framework encompasses meaning and materiality within a single unified model.<sup>41</sup> Signs, in the Piercian view, don't merely *represent* the socio-material worlds in which they circulate, they are *embedded in them* in varied and complex ways. Piercian semiotics thus contrasts sharply with Saussurean semiology, which assumes a radical separation between the world of signification and the world of material things. Within Saussure's structuralist framework, signs are simply bearers of

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<sup>41</sup> Saussure proposes a binary conception of the sign, conceived as a relation between a *signifier* (e.g. an abstract "sound pattern," which exists independently of its occurrence in actual speech or writing) and a *signified* (a mental representation of the thing being signified). Pierce proposed a tripartite concept consisting of an *object* (the thing being signified), a *representamen* (the sign vehicle), and an *interpretant* (the representation of the object received by a perceiver) (Mertz 1985: 2-3, Saussure 1983: 66-67). We can illustrate this difference using the example of the linguistic sign "bird." Within Saussure's binary conception, this sign consists of a relation linking a signifier (the sound pattern "bird," independent of its concrete materialization in writing or speech) to a signified (a shared mental concept of what a bird is). Within Pierce's tripartite model however, the relation links an object (an actual bird) to a sign vehicle (a specific materialization of the word "bird," e.g. in writing), and an interpretant (a mental image of a bird received by a specific perceiver, e.g. a person reading the word "bird"). As we can see, the Saussurean model is only concerned with relations between abstract types, which are to be analyzed in isolation from the concrete tokens in which they are embodied and which they represent (i.e. actually occurring speech or writing and the things in the world represented by it). Saussurean structuralism thus assumes a radical separation between the world as represented and the world in itself, and it places signification entirely within the former (Keane 2003: 410-412).

meaning. Their materiality is thus merely the passive medium through which meaning is circulated, and it can therefore be bracketed from the analysis. In the Peircian model, by contrast, sign vehicles and the objects they signify (both of which are potentially material entities) are included as part of the semiotic process (Keane 2003: 413). For Pierce then, signs are points of articulation between two realms—the world *as represented* and the world *in itself*—realms which, in Saussurean structuralism, are kept in isolation from one another (Parmentier 1985: 24-25). Recognizing materiality as a formative component of semiotic practices, Peircian semiotics considers the ways in which signs are both representative of the world and materially located within it.

Following from the recognition that signs are part of the material world, Pierce also recognized that signs can stand in different kinds of relations with the objects they signify (Mertz 1985: 3). Saussure's model focuses narrowly on what Pierce calls "symbolic" relations: those where the sign is linked to its object purely by convention, as in the arbitrary relations between words and the objects and concepts they represent. Saussure thus conceived of all semiosis as functioning essentially like language. Pierce, by contrast, recognizes three types of sign relations: symbols, icons, and indexes. Of these three, it is the index that features most prominently in this dissertation. Indexes are signs that relate to their objects by virtue of a real (often causal) connection (Keane 2007: 22).<sup>42</sup> Indexicality is at play when smoke indicates the presence of fire, when

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<sup>42</sup> Icons, Pierce's third sign type, are signs that relate to their objects by virtue of resemblance or shared traits. Iconicity thus includes the ways in which a map or a portrait is able to represent a place or a person by virtue of having a similar shape. Many signs are both iconic and indexical, such as footprints or photographs, which share both a visual resemblance and a causal relationship with the objects they represent.

tears indicate a person's emotional state, and when the use of a particular speech register represents the unequal relationship between a speaker and his addressee.<sup>43</sup> More germane to the topic of this dissertation, the expressive features of a singer's voice may index her sincere identification with the text she's singing, her musical ability and training, or divine inspiration.

This last example points to one of the defining features of indexicality, namely, that the meanings of indexes are not given, but rather, inferred through a process called *abduction*.<sup>44</sup> As used by Alfred Gell, this term denotes a particular type of inference made in relation to indexical signs, in which a presumed causal relationship produces

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<sup>43</sup> The distinction between symbols, icons, and indexes can be illustrated with reference to Balinese offerings. Much of Balinese Hindu religious practice revolves around the presentation of offerings— intricate and varied constructions of palm leaves, flowers, rice, fruit, meat, coins, and other items—to deities and spirits. The material forms of Balinese Hindu offerings are complex signs that represent, in various ways, the natural, spiritual, social, and ethical worlds that Balinese Hindus inhabit. The various shapes and colors of offerings are *iconic* and/or *symbolic* representations of specific elements of Balinese Hindu cosmology. For example, some of the offerings presented during the holiday honoring the goddess Saraswati include what look like tiny geckos made of rice flour dough. These are *iconic* representations of actual geckos, complete with eyes, mouths, and tails; and because geckos are conventionally used to represent Saraswati in Balinese iconography, the geckos in the offerings can also be understood as *symbolic* representations of Saraswati herself. Offerings can also function as indexes. For example, insofar as offerings for a particular ceremony may vary in terms of the size, quantity, and quality of their components, they may serve as indexes of the economic status of the ceremony's hosts. The inclusion of costly red imported apples in place of the yellow local variety is an *indexical* sign of lavish expenditure, and therefore also, of wealth. With regard to the iconic or symbolic significance of offerings, the relationship between the material form of the offering and the object it represents is understood to be based on resemblance or convention, respectively. With regard to indexicality however, a causal relationship between the offering and the people responsible for it is inferred.

<sup>44</sup> In *Art and Agency*, Gell explores how material artifacts mediate social relations by functioning as indexes of the agents responsible for their existence and circulation. An art work, for example, may index the artist who created it, the patron who sponsored its creation, the public whose demands and expectations informed its production, the collector or curator who selected it for display, and so on (Gell 1998: 28-34). All of these agents, in one way or another, *caused* the art work to exist in a particular form, at a particular time and place, and the art work is a kind of imprint or trace of their agency, which works by stimulating inferences (abductions) about the agents that produced it. As an index of these agents, which is separable from their physical bodies, the art work is also an extension of their personhood (*ibid.*: 20-21). Many of the signs I discuss in this dissertation function in a similar way: they 'stand for' the agents— human, divine, or otherwise—that are believed to be responsible for their existence in a particular time and place. Gell's theory of art works as indexes of social agency can thus be usefully applied to the objects, events, and practices I analyze here.

an inference from the index back to some likely cause (Gell 1998: 13-15). For example, if singing a particular text is believed to require some form of divine guidance, then a successful performance may prompt the singer to infer (through a process of abduction) that she was aided by a divine being. Her performance, then, is an index of divine agency. To give another example, if imported red apples are known to be more expensive than the local yellow variety, then the presence of red apples in a person's religious offering may prompt others to infer (through a process of abduction) that that person's family is wealthy; this in spite of the fact that the apples may have been purchased at a discount or with a loan. Abduction, then, is an uncertain business having to do with the formation of ad hoc hypotheses about the likely causes that lie behind particular observable effects. Uncertain though it may be, it is also a ubiquitous strategy of human thought as it provides an effective means of reducing the number of possible explanations for a given state of affairs (*ibid.*: 14).

This raises a crucial point about indexicality: the kinds of abductions that present themselves to a person will depend on basic assumptions that person holds about the world. That is to say, the meanings of indexes derive in part from shared beliefs about the chains of causality that bring such things into being, including beliefs about the kinds of beings and objects that inhabit the world, as well as the various capacities those beings and objects possess. For my interlocutors in Bali, these include beliefs about the existence of deities, ghosts and spirits, beliefs about how those beings intervene in and communicate with the human world, and so on. These beliefs form part of what Webb Keane has called a "semiotic ideology." Semiotic ideologies are sets of shared

assumptions about signs and signification that shape semiotic practice.<sup>45</sup> As Keane explains, semiotic ideologies determine such things as “what people will consider the role that intentions play in signification to be, what kind of possible agent (humans only? Animals? Spirits?) exist to which acts of signification might be imputed, whether signs are arbitrarily or necessarily linked to their objects, and so forth” (Keane 2003: 419). Since signification, in the Peircian sense, includes all relations in which one thing stands for another, semiotic ideology encompasses beliefs about the relative plausibility of the different abductions that present themselves as possible explanations for the existence of any observable artifact or circumstance, including natural phenomena. For example, semiotic ideology will play a role in determining whether a rain shower is interpreted as an omen or merely a consequence of particular atmospheric conditions. Semiotic ideologies thus help stabilize the inherently unstable meanings of indexes: by presenting certain causal relations as more plausible than others, semiotic ideology in effect narrows the range of meanings that are likely to be inferred from an index, thereby giving the material world a certain degree of coherence among people who share the ideology (Keane 2003: 419). According to Keane, it is this stabilizing effect of semiotic ideology that allows indexes to gain social and moral force (2003: 418-419, 2007: 17).<sup>46</sup> To return to the topic of music, this dissertation seeks to show that semiotic

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<sup>45</sup> The concept of semiotic ideology builds on the earlier concept of language ideology, which Judith Irvine defines as a “cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine 1989: 255). Semiotic ideology is simply an extension of this concept to include the full range of semiotic practices. In using the term “ideology” authors do not mean to cast these representations as false, but to highlight their performative aspect. Like all ideology, semiotic ideology “creates and acts in a social world while it masquerades as a description of that world” (Schieffelin 1998: 11).

<sup>46</sup> Keane writes that “since the power effects of language (and of semiotic form more generally) are not fully determinate—the ‘same’ forms can, for example, have quite different implications in different

ideologies play an important role in enabling certain ways of understanding and experiencing music to circulate and become widespread—and thus to gain social force—while others do not.<sup>47</sup> As we will see with respect to the practices I discuss in this dissertation, however, semiotic ideologies do not eliminate the ambiguity of indexical signs. Both the meanings of indexes, and the underlying semiotic ideologies that shape how indexes are interpreted, can, and frequently do, become sites of contestation.<sup>48</sup>

The concept of semiotic ideology captures how people’s underlying beliefs about the world and the beings that inhabit it may inform different domains of semiotic practice, thus creating a sense of coherence across those different domains such that varieties of semiotic forms “enter into a larger economy of mutual, often unexpected consequences,” what Keane calls a *representational economy* (2003: 411, 2007: 19-20). The term “semiotic form” here refers to the material forms in which meanings are embodied, which “can include such things as the sounds of words, the constraints of speech genres, the perishability of books, the replicable shapes of money, the

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contexts—ideological mediation is a necessary component of any political consequences that might follow from form” (2007: 17).

<sup>47</sup> In my view, one of the shortcomings of Turino’s Piercian semiotics of music is that it does not explain the social processes by which certain musical meanings become stabilized and gain widespread currency while others will have only personal relevance. The same could perhaps be said for Tia DeNora’s *Music in Everyday Life*, which focuses significant attention on the deeply personal meanings that music has for individuals, but it does not explain how individuals’ musical experiences draw from, and contribute to, broader shared meanings (DeNora 2000). This limitation is especially apparent in DeNora’s discussion of music as a technology of the self, for although she indicates that “the constitution and maintenance of the self” is a “fundamentally social process,” her analysis falls short of showing how individual engagements with music structure, or are structured by, social processes and formations that extend beyond the sphere of private musical experiences (DeNora 2000: 47). I would argue that the concept of semiotic ideology provides one way of addressing these shortcomings. For another critique of the microsocial focus of DeNora’s work, see Born 2005.

<sup>48</sup> Encounters between competing semiotic ideologies have been a central focus of Keane’s work. See especially, Keane 2007.

meatiness of animals, the feel of cloth, the shape of houses, musical tones, the fleshiness of human bodies, and the habits of physical gestures” (2007: 5-6). Applied to music, semiotic ideology brings attention to the ways that people’s musical experiences are shaped not only by their beliefs about music, but also by their assumptions about a whole range of other material practices and forms. In Bali, for example, music is one among many semiotic forms that serves to make divine agents present and active in human lives. Musical practices thus enter into a broader representational economy with other signifying practices that mediate human-divine relations. This means that a musical performance may get its meaning as much from its relationship to other musical events as from its relationships to a host of other non-musical signifying practices. To study music as part of a representational economy is to recognize this dynamic interconnectedness of music with other semiotic forms.

One of Keane’s stated aims in elaborating the concept of semiotic ideology is “to show why moral arguments may focus on semiotic forms” (2007: 21). His answer is that semiotic ideology links “apparently minor matters” of material form to serious questions concerning “the preconditions for and consequences of moral action” (20-21). The moral questions that I explore in this dissertation pertain to people’s relationships with invisible beings. How should humans interact with the divine? How are deities likely to respond? What moral significance do their responses have? As we can see, these questions are not only about morality; they also have to do with signification. Since music is one among many semiotic forms that serves to make invisible beings present in human lives, it can have important moral implications. This is why understanding how musical

and sonic practices contribute to the formation of ethical subjectivities requires that they be studied in relation to the broader representational economies that mediate Balinese Hindu relationships with the divine.

In thinking about the ways that semiotic ideology imbues music with moral significance, I draw on Keane's concept of "ethical affordances." Ethical affordances are properties that people "might draw on in the process of making ethical evaluations and decisions, whether consciously or not" (Keane 2016: 27). The concept of affordance is meant to draw attention to the fact that material forms can have certain innate potentials—they make certain kinds of activity possible—while also stressing that these potentials do not determine that people will respond to them in any particular way. Affordances are properties that are available for being taken up in some way within some form of practical activity (Keane 2016: 28). Many of the ethical affordances that I discuss here serve a semiotic function. They are material objects and sensations that are understood to be *indexes* of some circumstance that has ethical significance, and as such, they afford opportunities for ethical evaluation. For example, as I show in Chapter 4, the expressive aspects of a musical performance may be taken to afford insight into the performer's moral character. The affordances of music (or any other mediatory practice) are made possible by, and depend upon, particular semiotic ideologies, which put music into relation with other semiotic forms; they also grow out of the specific material qualities of music, which carry particular associations and also enable particular kinds of bodily, sensory, and affective experiences. In characterizing these affordances as "semiotic," my intention is simply to indicate that they make

something present that would not otherwise be apparent, such as an inner quality or sentiment, or a divine being. It is not my intention to reduce music's material complexity to a dematerialized meaning or to draw attention away from the capacity of semiotic forms to produce other kinds of effects. Building on Keane's thoroughly material semiotic framework, this dissertation seeks to develop an approach to semiotic analysis that can account for the interplay between semiotic, sensory, and affective registers.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Fieldwork***

The research on which this dissertation is based took place during two extended periods of fieldwork in Bali conducted in 2013-2014 and lasting a total of 18 months. I also draw to a limited extent on several earlier trips to Bali, which took place between 2008 and 2011. Over the course of my fieldwork I studied three forms of Hindu chant. Each of these took me to multiple field sites. The art form that I studied most extensively was a Balinese form of literary performance called *pepaosan*. I took private lessons in *pepaosan* performance with three practitioners, each of whom brought a different religious perspective to their artistic practice. I also performed and studied with three *sekaa santi* (*pepaosan* clubs). Since Balinese *pepaosan* performers typically do not take private lessons, participating in these groups was crucial to get a sense of how *pepaosan* is typically studied in Bali. By spending time singing alongside and conversing with these groups' members, I was also able to gain crucial insights into the

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<sup>49</sup> As Karen Strassler notes, "sensorial, experiential encounters between people and things. . .are not excluded from Piercian semiotics" (2014: 124 n88). For more on the relationship between semiotic and affective registers, see Dutta 2015, Mazzarella 2009, and Navaro-Yashin 2012.

beliefs and values that motivate pepaosan activity. To better understand the role of the state in shaping pepaosan practice, I attended state-sponsored pepaosan competitions (*Utsawa Dharma Gita* or UDG) throughout various regions of Bali, as well as the national competition in 2014, which was held in Jakarta. I also attended the *Parade Pesantian* competitions that take place at the annual Bali Arts Festival. In addition to observing the performances that took place at these competitions, I also observed and recorded the numerous speeches that preceded UDG events, which revealed much about the aims of the figures and institutions responsible for organizing the competitions. For comparison I also attended state-sponsored Quranic recitation competitions (Musabaqah Tilawatil Quran or MTQ) in Denpasar and Singaraja.

To learn more about the Hindu Reform, I observed classes at the Bangli and Denpasar campuses of the National Hindu Theological Institute (IHDN). I hoped that by observing classes and interacting with faculty and students at the institute I would gain insight into a wider variety of strategies by which the state is working to transform Balinese religiosity. After working my way up the chain of command to acquire official permission to conduct research at the Institute, I was put in touch with a young faculty member and preacher, who agreed to let me observe his course on dharma wacana (Hindu sermons) and promised to invite me to attend his public sermons as well. Despite this promising start, I was only able to observe a small handful of class meetings—over the course of a 13-week semester this instructor cancelled class 10 times—and one public presentation. These challenges were revealing in themselves: many of the instructors are expected to travel between campuses in south, central, and

north Bali on a weekly basis; meanwhile, the administration often makes scheduling errors and is unable to effectively hold faculty accountable for missing work, and on top of this, the low-ranking faculty are quite poorly remunerated. Furthermore, as one faculty member complained to me, “the students don’t show up to class, so why should we?” While my research at the Institute did not go as planned, I was nonetheless able to gain some valuable insights through my interactions with IHDN faculty members and students.

It was through my difficulties at IHDN that I came into contact with the world of New Religious Movement’s in Bali. On one of the many occasions when I made the 1.5-hour motorbike ride to the IHDN Bangli campus only to find that the class I had hoped to attend was cancelled, I got to chatting with a couple of students who had also been left in the lurch by the instructor’s absence. Through our conversation, I discovered that the disfunction of this particular class was typical of their experience at the Institute as a whole. Seeing my predicament, one of the students suggested that I might instead pursue research at an “ashram” where she herself was a regular participant. When I discovered that the ashram in question was affiliated with ISKCON, my initial reaction was to think that it was outside the scope of my research, which was, after all, about *Balinese* Hinduism. However, subsequent conversations with this student revealed that she saw her activities at the ashram as a (much needed) supplement to her studies at IHDN, and complementary to the religious practices of her parents (who were not affiliated with ISKCON). Over time I discovered that many Balinese devotees saw their involvement with ISKCON as continuous with their identities as *Balinese* Hindus. This

convinced me that the practices I was observing at the ashram were not irrelevant to my broader research project, so I became a regular participant at ISKCON services and celebrations. The frequency and regularity of the activities at the ashram proved to be a welcome contrast with the dysfunctionality of IHDN, and with the intermittent nature of much traditional Balinese religious life.

For the duration of my fieldwork I lived with a family in the greater Ubud area, in a village I call Tegal.<sup>50</sup> This family, whom I call the Dangin family, consisted of an elderly grandmother, her five adult children, and one young adult grandchild. While I spent time with all family members, I interacted most closely with two individuals: Kompiang, the eldest of the five siblings, and her younger brother Wayan, the de facto head of the household, both of whom appear frequently in what follows. The family lived in a traditional Balinese compound consisting of a north, east, and west house (*bale daja*, *bale dangin*, *bale dauh*), a kitchen (*paon*), a house temple (*mrajan*), which they shared with their extended family, and an extra building (not part of the traditional compound structure) that the family hoped to turn into a guest house for tourists, but which remained unfinished at the time of my fieldwork. I stayed in one of the rooms in the extra building; the other rooms were occupied by the grandmother and two of her adult children.

Studying the Dangin family was not part of my original research plan. However, I ended up learning a lot from the time I spent with them, and these insights informed my thinking about many aspects of my research. I therefore decided to incorporate the

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<sup>50</sup> The name of this village, as well as all personal names, have been replaced with pseudonyms.

family into my ethnography. Because some of my ethnography deals with interpersonal conflicts and other contentious matters, I have chosen to keep the identity of this family confidential, replacing all personal names with pseudonyms. I have used pseudonyms for all personal names in this dissertation, with the exception of instances in which I cite language that was presented in a public forum (e.g. the speeches at UDG competitions, televised sermons, etc). In such cases, I have included the speaker's real name.

While living in the Dangin household I participated in a range of domestic activities, from casual socializing, often in front of the television in the *bale dauh*, to helping the women with cooking and offering preparation. I also participated in some of the communal activities of the family's *desa adat*. I accompanied Kompiang when she went to temple to *maturan* (present offerings and pray), when she attended neighbors' life-cycle rituals, and when she joined the members of Tegal's women's organization (PKK) to sweep the public cemetery and temple grounds. On a few occasions Kompiang asked me to substitute for her when the women of the village gathered to *ngayah* (contribute ritual labor), making offerings for an upcoming temple ceremony. (Typically, however, this was a job she kept for herself, as she was somewhat of an expert in offering preparation and took great pride in this role.) I also participated in another form of *ngayah*, joining Wayan and his brother Kadek to perform *wayang lemah* (ceremonial shadow puppet theater) at local religious ceremonies.

### ***Talking about "Religion" in Bali***

When I told a new acquaintance that I was doing research on Balinese religion he or she would typically react in one of two ways. Most commonly, my interlocutor would claim to be ignorant about religious matters, saying things like “I’m Balinese and I don’t understand my own religion” or “most Balinese people don’t really understand religion.” They might then recommend a priest or other religious expert who would be better able to assist me with my research. Less often, a person would react in an almost directly opposite manner, proceeding to lecture me on the meaning of various rituals and offerings, about core religious beliefs, about common misconceptions about Balinese religion, and so on. More often than not, I would come to find out that the person delivering this ‘lecture’ had studied religion at the college level. Neither of these responses was particularly satisfying to me as a researcher, but my efforts to elicit different kinds of information through further questioning were not particularly successful either. Over time, I became frustrated with my attempts to learn about religious life in Bali by asking people questions, as these questions, and my position as a *peneliti* (researcher) seemed to direct my addressees away from what I most wanted to understand.

It was only after completing my fieldwork that I began to see the problem in a clearer light. I realized that the picture that emerged when my interactions with people were defined as “research” about “religion” was a third-person perspective on Balinese Hinduism; people assumed that what I, as a researcher, was hoping to get from them was an authoritative representation of Balinese Hinduism, and that this was something only an expert could provide. Even more problematic was the fact that this third-person

perspective that my interlocutors furnished for me aligned closely with official state-sanctioned representations of Balinese religiosity: both the content of the experts' 'lectures' and the claim that non-experts "don't understand" their own religion echoed reformist representations of Balinese Hinduism. What was missing from these conversations—and what I was, in fact, most interested in learning about—was people's first-person relationship to their religion. If I had come to this clear understanding earlier perhaps I could have developed a workable, systematic approach to studying first-person religious ethics in Bali. Instead, my imperfect solution was, in many cases, to avoid asking too many questions, allowing my interlocutors to direct our conversations, and generally going with the flow of whatever was happening around me. The resulting ethnography is a patchwork of observations and conclusions that leaves many questions unanswered. Nevertheless, through the close relationships that I was able to cultivate with a limited number of interlocutors, I was able to gain some valuable insights into how religious values and ideals are lived on a first-person basis.

The distinction between first-person and third-person religious discourse is represented in my ethnography through two different kinds of characters: ordinary Hindus and religious authorities. These figures should be understood not as two different segments of Balinese society, but as two different discursive roles that any individual can potentially occupy. All of the people who appear in my ethnography are "ordinary" Hindus when acting in their capacity as individual practitioners of their religion, and, at least in theory, all are capable of speaking authoritatively about religious matters, though in practice, some felt more qualified to do so than others.

Some of my interlocutors moved fluidly between these two roles. My *pepaosan* teachers, for example, would sometimes lecture me about Balinese religious beliefs, while at more informal moments, their personal relationship to religion would come into view, as when, at the start of one of my lessons, my teacher asked me to wait while she finished her daily round of offerings. Similarly, ISKCON devotees would shift back and forth between the role of teacher and friend, sometimes pontificating about the tenets of ISKCON doctrine, other times discussing their own personal experiences navigating the different religious spheres in which they move. Other people tended to interact with me primarily in one role or the other. For example, when members of the Dangin family spoke to me about religion they generally did so from a first-person point of view, focusing on their own religious practices, beliefs, and obligations. Rarely did they claim to speak for Balinese Hindus as a whole, and when they did, they would often qualify their claims by stating that they represented how things were done in *their* village, or by acknowledging that others may disagree with the view they were expressing.

Conversely, when I interviewed state employees (school teachers, Theological Institute professors, state radio presenters) they almost invariably adopted a third-person perspective. In discussing religion with me, they did so as spokespersons for the state version of Hindu doctrine, which they represented as the correct basis for Balinese religious belief and practice. Their first-person relationship to their religion was not something that they revealed to me, or rather, they revealed just enough to suggest that their professional and personal relationship to Hinduism may not be one and the same. For example, when a professor at IHDN complained of being exhausted due to having

to make the long drive, day after day, between the institute in Denpasar and his home village in Klungkung so that he could help with preparations for an upcoming temple ceremony, I knew that I should not assume that the religious views he expressed to me in the privacy of his air conditioned office would necessarily correspond to how he spoke about and practiced his religion in his *desa adat*.

In discussing religious and moral agency in this dissertation, I focus on individuals who spoke to me about their religion from a first-person point of view. Following Mattingly (2014a, 2014b), I locate moral agency in this first-person perspective. To be clear, this is not because I see agency as existing only as “resistance” to religious authority (whether held by the state, by *adat* institutions, or by leaders within the ISKCON movement). On the contrary, I show that agency can take the form of resisting, reshaping, *or adopting* authoritative practices and values (Mahmood 2001, 2005). In this sense, the religious discourses of state employees are a form of agency even when they are merely acting as (to use an apt Indonesian phrase) *perpanjangan tangan pemerintah* (“hand extensions” of the government). However, they are not examples of the kind of religious and moral agency that most interests me here.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> This claim may seem counterintuitive. My purpose in making it is to avoid conflating state employees’ expert representations of Hinduism with their personal religiosity. An experience I had at while observing courses at IHDN may serve as an illustration of why this distinction is warranted. During a course on *dharma wacana* (sermon) the instructor ended his lecture by telling his students about the benefits of being a *pedharma wacana* (preacher). In closing, he told the students that delivering sermons could make you a “famous person” (he used the English phrase). He then asked me to turn off my audio recorder before telling the students and I about the large sums of money he earned delivering sermons at religious ceremonies throughout Bali. He added a humorous note by pantomiming the contentious process of accepting payment. First, he adopted the role of the person making the payment, who bowed slightly while respectfully presenting an imaginary *amplop* (envelope of money). Then, switching to the role of the *pedharma wacana*, he raised a hand in a polite gesture of refusal, saying *jangan pak* (no sir) while at the

## ***Outline of Chapters***

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In Part 1 (Chapter 1-2) I discuss the representational economy that underpins religious practice in the adat sphere and the distinctive forms of ethical life that this representational economy sustains. While Balinese adat has often been associated with stasis, I use the case study of the Dangin family to illustrate how the moral and semiotic frameworks embedded in the religious practices of the adat sphere can create spaces of possibility for creative forms of self-making and world-making. In Part 2 (Chapter 3-5) I turn my attention to three religious pedagogies of voice, each of which seeks to reshape the ethical subjectivity of Balinese Hindus in specific ways.

Chapter 1 investigates the sensuous presence of invisible beings in everyday life. Focusing on the everyday religious practices of the Dangin family, I show how people's relationships with invisible beings draw from, and feed into, a particular semiotic ideology, which treats a variety of semiotic forms—from mysterious noises to misfortunate events—as indexes of these beings' agency. Since human-niskala

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same time, with his other hand, he accepted the imaginary envelope and placed it in his breast pocket. We all laughed, but I was struck by his blatant violation of the delicate norms surrounding payment (especially payment for religious services) in Bali. Accepting payment was a source of intense discomfort and even shame for many of my Balinese acquaintances, forcing me to devise clever ways of paying my teachers for lessons. I believe this instructor's performance illustrates that, within this professional context, he feels called upon to be a religious expert, not a moral role model. The religion he presents in the classroom seems to be abstracted from his own moral selfhood. Since moral accountability is what most interests me here, I focus most of my attention on people who are not state employees, as these were the people who were most willing to discuss their personal relationship to their religion with me. In discussing the views expressed by employees of state religious institutions, I treat their statements as representations of state religious ideology, which may or may not correspond to their own deeply held beliefs.

relationships are understood to be dynamic, and to have important consequences in human lives, people must take care to monitor and manage these relationships. The indexes that make these relationships legible—that mediate the relational entanglement of the visible and invisible realms—thus become invested with sensory and affective potency. This case reveals how a representational economy can produce and circulate embodied dispositions, and in turn, how subjectivity and agency are materially situated. In addition, looking at how this representational economy operates reveals that the semiotic and affective registers are interrelated in complex ways.

In Chapter 2 I continue my discussion of the relational entanglement of human and invisible worlds as mediated through semiotic practices. However, I shift focus away from the sensory dimensions of these relationships to more closely consider their ethical dimensions. I discuss how the semiotic forms that index human-niskala relationships are taken up as ethical affordances—as criteria for making moral judgments and decisions. This chapter reveals how ethical subjectivity is deeply entangled with the semiotic forms that mediate ethical practice.

Chapters 3 and 4 investigate how the voice and vocal performance are being employed by the state as tools of religious and ethical reform. In Chapter 3 my focus is the Puja Tri Sandhya, a chanted prayer introduced to Balinese Hinduism in the 1950s. I begin by looking at the Tri Sandhya's circulation as an audio recording, then in the second half of the chapter, I turn to consider embodied practices of performing the Tri Sandhya. By furnishing Balinese Hindus with a model for interacting with the divine that does not require the mediation of material offerings, but instead depends on the

cultivation of proper intentions, the Tri Sandhya functions as a pedagogy of religious reform that promotes the normative ideal of sincerity and provides Balinese Hindus with a concrete means of inhabiting that norm in daily life. While such models play a crucial role in the formation of ethical subjectivities, their social effects are not guaranteed. This chapter suggests that in order to be effective as a means of reshaping ethical subjectivity, forms of vocal expression must be taken up as ethical affordances and thus become embedded in people's day-to-day efforts to live a good life.

In Chapter 4 I discuss the art of *pepaosan*, a Balinese tradition of singing and orally interpreting religious texts. I begin by discussing state-sponsored *pepaosan* competitions then turn to the practices of *sekaa santi*, *pepaosan* clubs that perform at religious ceremonies. By comparing these two facets of the contemporary *pepaosan* scene, I am able to show how *pepaosan* operates within two distinct representational economies, one linked to the Hindu Reform and another more closely affiliated with the *adat* sphere. Within each of these representational economies, *pepaosan*'s material properties are treated as indexes of the performer's moral status, but with very different results. The case of *pepaosan* thus shows how a single musical practice can enable multiple paths of ethical striving.

In the final chapter I discuss the Balinese ISKCON community and the religious pedagogies of voice that circulate within it. Focusing on the ethico-musical practice that Balinese ISKCON devotees call singing *rohani* (spiritual singing), I show how the distinction between ordinary singing and singing *rohani* is marked by subtle affective sensations, which devotees understand as indicators of ethical progress. I argue that

the act of singing rohani allows devotees to sensuously inhabit (however fleetingly) an alternate social and cosmic order, an experience that strengthens their attachment to the movement and its rigorously ascetic ethical project. The case of singing rohani reveals in a particularly vivid way what several other chapters also showed: that music's social efficacy is dependent on its embedding within a broader economy of signifying practices that mutually reinforce one another.

CHAPTER 1  
SENSING *NISKALA*

***Listening***

One night I was in my room writing field notes when I heard a voice coming through my window. It was Kompiang, the eldest daughter of the family I lived with during my fieldwork. She was a woman in her mid-forties with a voice that had become hoarse and deep from years of cooking over a wood fire. “Do you hear water coming up?” she asked. I walked to the back of the room and leaned my ear toward the spot on the rear wall where the motor of the water pump was located. If the pump had been running, I would have heard a high-pitched electrical hum and the gentle swoosh of water flowing through the pipe. I listened quietly for a few seconds and heard nothing.

The sounds of the household plumbing system had become a frequent topic of conversation around the house in recent weeks, garnering what seemed to me to be an inordinate amount of interest. Earlier that day Kompiang told the rest of the family that she had heard the main water pump start up six times that day. While I recognized that this was unusual (the pump should start automatically when the water in the main tank gets low—at most once per day), I was nonetheless surprised that she was keeping such close track of this activity. I myself hardly noticed when the various water pumps started and stopped. Among the sounds of chickens, dogs, birds, televisions, radios, motorbikes, and human voices, the water pump was one of the quieter features of the household soundscape.

I stepped out the front door of my room and told Kompiang that the water was off. She said she thought she could hear the toilet running in the empty room next door to mine and asked me to come have a listen. The building I lived in had been under construction for over a decade, but the family had only recently managed to acquire enough funds to finish the floors and install plumbing. The room beside mine would eventually house the elderly grandmother and two of Kompiang's siblings, but at the time of this encounter it was still unoccupied and without electricity. I followed Kompiang into the dark interior of the empty room. As we stood listening I could hear the sound of the toilet tank filling. She said she thought there might be a leak somewhere, but as we continued chatting in the dark bathroom, it became clear that her interest in these sounds did not stem from concern about wasted water. The family believed there was a *wong samar* (hazy person) living on the patch of land where the new building now stood. They would often hear the sound of footsteps coming from the area, but when they looked, no one was there. Before the land was cleared, Kompiang said, people were "too scared" (*tak berani*) to pass through it, because in the past, if someone did so, a death or illness would result. For instance, many years prior, her younger brother Made had dug a large pit for a septic tank on that land. By the time he completed the project he had become, in Kompiang's words, *seperti orang gila* (like a crazy person).<sup>52</sup> Coming as they did from the same patch of land, the plumbing abnormalities in the new building were also signs of this invisible presence. Kompiang suspected that these disturbances were an effort on the part of the *wong samar* to communicate something to

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<sup>52</sup> At the time of my research Made was taking medication for a mental illness that caused hallucinations

the family. The wong samar was not a straightforwardly menacing presence. “He guards this household,” she reassured me. “But now that everyone can eat,” she reasoned, he may wish to “ask for something” (*mintu sesuatu*).

Invisible agents like the wong samar are a common feature of everyday life in contemporary Bali. Balinese collectively characterize these invisible agents and forces as *niskala*: immaterial or invisible. Though immaterial, the *niskala* world makes its presence known through mysterious noises, unusual sightings, strange sensations, and unexpected occurrences. At the same time, *niskala* beings are partially responsible for everything that happens or exists, and they are therefore part of even the most ordinary aspects of life (Wiener 1995: 49-50).

Because of possible connections with *niskala*, seemingly mundane sounds and sensations can take on a powerful affective charge. About a week later, Kompiang came out of the room next to mine and asked her brother if he’d turned the pump on. “Yeah,” he answered. “*Kesiab!*” she exclaimed, with a relieved laugh. Like the English word “startled,” *kesiab* refers to a powerful affective and bodily response to a sudden, unexpected, or frightening sensory perception. Although the pump outside the two rooms would start and stop without warning, the sound was quiet enough that its coming and going never struck me as particularly startling. Kompiang’s experience of *kesiab* registers her attunement to the sound of the pump as a sign of a potentially threatening invisible agent.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Kompiang may have been in a particularly anxious mood at this time because earlier in the day we had heard dogs howling, a sound which is rarely heard during daylight, and which is associated with the presence of ghosts.

Anxiety was not the only affective tone associated with encounters with *niskala*. At other times mysterious *niskala* events could create an atmosphere of sociable effervescence within the household. For example, one evening I was sitting in my room and heard a loud sound overhead, as though a heavy stone had fallen through the roof and onto the ceiling above me. I expected to hear the elderly grandmother of the household ask *apa ulung?* (what fell?), as she usually did when a cat jumped onto the roof, but on this occasion, she said nothing. A moment later I could hear several people laughing and banging on the walls in the room next to mine, then Kompiang's younger brother Wayan came and asked if I had heard the sound. He said they had investigated the ceiling and roof and could not see any evidence that something had fallen. He then recounted some other mysterious events that had been happening around the house: earlier that day a water pipe that had been clogged for months suddenly began to flow again, and his younger brother Kadek had reported seeing water spray upward *seperti kencing* (like urine) from the drain while he was showering. He also noted that he had been experiencing a mysterious sense of fatigue each time he used the bathroom in the building I lived in, causing him to yawn continuously. "I need to do something about this," he said before leaving. Following this conversation, I could hear the family talking and laughing boisterously until late into the night.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This boisterous talk might be a result of an easing of tension that occurs when people feel united by their shared responsibility toward, and fascination with, invisible beings. However, it may also be a way of dealing with underlying fear. It's possible that fear prompts a need to come together and be *ramé* (noisy, sociable). I also witnessed this (and heard people talk about it) with regard to exhuming corpses. People talk and laugh loudly, making jokes, during this process, in order to avoid feeling afraid.

A similar burst of socializing had happened a couple months earlier, when I awoke to hear Kompiang talking and laughing excitedly with some men whose voices I didn't recognize. When I spoke to her the next morning she was in an unusually good mood. She told me she'd been up talking to friends until 2 am because a pair of dancers had gone into trance and caused a scene during a ceremony at one of the village temples. Following events in which the *niskala* world makes its presence known, a momentary rupture occurs in the flow of ordinary life. At such moments, the tensions and boundaries that usually separated people were temporarily suspended, and conversation became easy.

A similar, but more subdued form of sociable effervescence accompanied the stories about *peristiwa niskala* (*niskala* events) that sometimes appeared in the local newspaper. Often appearing on the front page, and sometimes unfolding over multiple days, coverage of *peristiwa niskala* was the news topic most likely to spark conversation in the household. The prominence of this coverage suggests that the family's interest in these matters was broadly shared. While *niskala* events within the home serve to bring family members together, newspaper coverage of *peristiwa niskala* enacts a broader Balinese public united by a shared interest in and concern for invisible beings and forces. This is worth noting because, as we will see in Chapter 3, *niskala* matters are conspicuously absent or excluded from other Balinese publics.

The presence of invisible beings can also be linked to moments of intense emotion. Among members of the Dangin family, conflicts were usually expressed indirectly, through weighty silences. Occasionally, however, family members would get

into heated arguments. On at least two such occasions, the youngest brother Kadek went into trance. These moments of trance seemed to mark a kind of climax, creating a break in the tension which allowed interaction to eventually return to normal.

Not all Balinese Hindus' thinking is equally rooted in spirit ontology. Even within the Dangin household, family members expressed different degrees of commitment to *niskala* explanations of events. The two youngest members of the household, Kadek and Putu, were both fascinated with 'paranormal' activity. During my fieldwork, the two became regular attendees at *Calonarang*, theatrical performances that often feature outbreaks of trance and other mysterious occurrences. Kadek was believed to be the reincarnation of a renowned Rangda dancer, and he often danced the part of Rangda in local *Calonarang* performances. While most of the family believed that Kadek had a special connection to the spirit world, Kadek's older brother Wayan would sometimes express skepticism about the authenticity of his younger brother's trance episodes. Kompiang often told me that Wayan *tak percaya* (didn't believe). Wayan, for his part, often described the women in his family as being *lebih tradisional otaknya* (more traditionally minded). Sometimes he attributed this difference to the fact that they had limited schooling: while Wayan, Kadek, and Putu had all finished high school and Wayan attended a few years of college, Kompiang and her sister Komang both left school before completing junior high. Kompiang was deeply religious and spent much of her time assisting people in her community with preparing offerings for religious rituals. Wayan would occasionally question whether all of these offerings were really necessary. Sometimes he maintained his own explanations of events, which relied less

heavily on invisible agency. For example, he did not see his older brother's mental illness as a harm inflicted by ghosts. He said his brother experienced constant frustration and disappointment in his life, never managing to get the things he wanted. Wayan believed that the process of digging the large septic pit was a kind of embodied symbol of his brother's unending frustration, which unraveled his mind. Nevertheless, even Wayan, the most skeptical member of the household, was sensitive to potential signs from the invisible world. After hearing the loud noise on the roof, while the others were chatting and laughing he pulled his nephew aside and the two had a "serious talk" about the sound and what should be done about it.

In this chapter I describe the lifeworld inhabited by my interlocutors in Bali, focusing on *niskala* as a commonplace yet mysterious and fascinating aspect of daily life. Within this lifeworld, people's actions in the material realm can impact their relationships with invisible beings, and this in turn can have significant material consequences. Managing these relationships is therefore of critical importance. As I show in this chapter and the next, people's efforts to monitor, evaluate, maintain, and repair these relationships were a central feature of daily life in the Dangin household. Moreover, these efforts sustained a unique set of sensory and ethical dispositions among the household's members.

Previous scholarship on Balinese Hindu ritual has emphasized the cyclical patterns of ritual exchanges. A line of thought running through the early work of Mead and Bateson through Geertz's famous writings claims that the regular, cyclical patterns of ritual operate alongside other aspects of Balinese culture to sustain a

“detemporalized” conception of time and a “depersonalizing” concept of personhood (Geertz 1973: 390, 398). While it is true that much of Balinese Hindu ritual activity is organized as a web of repeating cycles, the outcomes of these practices are not always predictable, and indeed, the rituals themselves are subject to variation. This means that managing relationships with invisible beings requires much more than rote repetition. The ever-lurking possibility of a breakdown in the smooth functioning of ordinary life, may in fact play a more important role in shaping how people experience ritual, and conceive of themselves in relation to it, than does the cyclicity highlighted in Geertz’s work.

This chapter investigates the ways in which people integrate invisible agents into the stories they tell about the world and how the mediated presence of these invisible actors shapes the actions people take. I show that people’s relationships with the *niskala* world are dynamic and interactive, and I argue that this dynamic quality (enacted both through the communicative and myth-making practices that mediate these relationships) sustains a set of sensory and affective sensibilities, which in turn undergird a particular configuration of social institutions and practices, most centrally, the institutions and practices of Balinese *adat*.

In exploring the role of *niskala* in contemporary Bali I take inspiration from anthropologists who have explored the role of ghosts, spirits, and other immaterial beings in the modern world (and especially in modern Southeast Asia). Arguing against the notion that ghost and spirit ontologies are somehow antithetical to modernity, these authors have shown how enchantment is in fact integral to many people’s experience of

the material and social transformations associated with modernization. Across urban and rural spaces in many national settings, typical features of modernity (such as technology, infrastructure, development projects, and other forms of rapid change) are deeply entangled with divine or spectral agents and forces (Johnson 2014, McEwan 2008, Schwenkel 2017).

Within this body of work, I take particular inspiration from scholars who highlight the politics of people's engagements with invisible beings. For example, Christina Schwenkel has shown how the haunting of infrastructure through practices of "urban myth-making" has obstructed development projects and visions of the Vietnamese state (2017). Sharing her interest in the "productive capacities" of spirits, this chapter looks at the haunting of domestic and public spaces in contemporary Bali. However, rather than focusing on the conflict between Balinese spirituality and state development, I suggest that the intimate presence of *niskala* beings in the everyday lives of contemporary Balinese Hindus fosters a set of embodied dispositions that conflict with the kind of sensory order aimed at in state projects of religious reform. In this chapter, I lay the groundwork for this larger argument by describing the semiotic linkages, as well as the forms of sensory attunement and affective attachment, that sustain, and are sustained through, people's relationships with invisible beings. My argument about how these sensory dispositions relate to the Hindu Reform will be fully developed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Since *niskala* beings cannot be directly perceived by ordinary humans, their reality in people's lives depends on forms of mediation. Anthropologists and historians

have explored how a variety of different material forms have served as evidence of divine or ghostly presence in the modern world (Engelke 2007, Schmidt 2000, Strassler 2010 and 2014). While I do not limit myself to any single medium, I focus much of my attention on the role of sound. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, moments of listening are a key site for talking about and responding to the invisible world in Bali. Both the ephemeral quality of sound, and its ability to radiate and be perceived independently of its source, make it particularly likely to become a sign of an unseen presence.<sup>55</sup> Paying attention to sound—to how people experience and talk about sounds, how they construct meanings for sounds, how they themselves create and structure sound for particular ends—provides important insights into Balinese relationships with invisible beings. However, my interlocutors do not approach sounds separately from other kinds of sensory experience. Rather, the sounds I discuss here form part of a broader representational economy, which includes other non-sonic media. Underlying this representational economy is a semiotic ideology which holds that invisible beings actively communicate with humans through unusual sounds, as well as many other sorts of signs. Therefore, although I will have plenty to say about the role of sound in Balinese Hindu ritual and in Balinese religious and social life more broadly, I have chosen not to organize this chapter (or this dissertation) around sound in any exclusive sense.

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<sup>55</sup> This is certainly not unique to Bali. For example, Karen Strassler has noted that sound was traditionally one of the primary means by which practitioners of Javanese mysticism would sense the presence of the spirit queen Ratu Kidul (2014: 107). In a different vein, Eric Leigh Schmidt has argued that listening was an important medium of contact with angels and the divine among early American Christians, and that disciplining the ear was crucial to the formation of modern subjects (2002).

In the next section I describe the overarching pattern of ritual exchanges that bind the lives of Balinese Hindus to the invisible world. This seems to me to be a necessary starting point because these practices are so consuming of the time, energy, resources, and concern of the people I spent time with in Bali. However, since these formalized ritual practices are not my main concern, and since they have been described in detail elsewhere, this discussion will be brief and, in many ways, incomplete. My purpose is to give the unfamiliar reader a general picture of religious life in Bali without overwhelming them with the details of the complex network of institutions and practices that organize it. For the reader who would like more detail, I have included suggestions for further reading where relevant.

Following this overview, I turn my attention to the stories people tell about the invisible world. These stories draw from, and feed into, a widespread set of beliefs about how, when, and where this world is likely to reveal itself to humans. These beliefs place the sounds of the Dangin family's plumbing system in a dynamic relationship with a variety of other signs that mediate the presence of invisible beings, which together make up a representational economy that mediates between the *sekala* and *niskala* realms. In emphasizing the dynamic character of human-*niskala* relations, stories about *niskala* encounters sustain the sense that deities and spirits are a consequential force in human lives that requires vigilant attention. The representational economy embedded in these stories encourages people to become attuned to particular kinds of sensations and perceptions.

In the final section of the chapter, I shift focus to examine how people monitor and manage their relationships with invisible beings. I show that indexical communication is central to both of these processes. Balinese Hindus employ an array of indexes to convey their respect toward invisible beings, and they treat circumstances in the material world as indexical signs emanating from those beings. These circuits of indexical communication between visible and invisible realms parallel the use of indexical communication in ordinary social interaction; just as people are attuned to the many subtle cues that serve to define their relationships with other people, they experience a similar sense of entanglement in their relationships with the invisible world. This analysis reveals that Balinese traditions of ritual exchange are not merely a matter of repeating what people did in the past (*nak mula keto*), but about maintaining relationships, a process which sometimes requires spontaneity, adaptation, and the initiation of new ritual practices.

### ***Patterns of Ritual Exchange***

Balinese Hindu religious practice revolves around a complex system of rituals in which people present offerings to invisible deities and spirits. These rituals range in size from the daily placement of tiny offerings in various locations within and around the home to elaborate festivals that require months of preparation and attract tens of thousands of worshippers. The overarching purpose of Balinese Hindu ritual is to ensure the wellbeing of humans by maintaining proper relations with invisible beings.

Balinese Hindus hold rituals for a variety of reasons. Babies are given rituals at birth, three months, and six months of age, most young adults undergo tooth-filing and marriage ceremonies, and there are also elaborate death rituals. In addition to these life cycle rituals, there are also communal rituals of various kinds, including rituals for the deities of particular temples, as well as island-wide religious holidays. Families, villages, and larger groups of people also hold periodic purification rituals during spiritually dangerous times, or in response to adverse events.

Maintaining proper relations with invisible beings is, for the most part, not an individual matter. Ritual responsibilities are almost always shared. These responsibilities thus bind people into social collectivities of various types and sizes. The exact structure of the institutions that organize ritual life can vary greatly from one village to another. My discussion here will focus on the situation in Tegal. The reader should understand that the picture may diverge significantly from how things are organized in other places. At the same time, the broad strokes of my description are widely shared, across many, but by no means all, villages in Bali.<sup>56</sup>

The most basic unit of social organization in Bali is the nuclear family (*kuren*), centering on a husband-wife pair.<sup>57</sup> Each *kuren* is responsible for carrying out the many rituals that take place within the home, including worshipping at the husband's family temple (*sanggah* or *mrajan*) and carrying out life-cycle rituals. Parents are responsible

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<sup>56</sup> For a more comprehensive picture of social organization in Bali, see Barth 1993, Geertz 1980, Geertz and Geertz 1975, Lansing 1983, and Warren 1993.

<sup>57</sup> It is common for multiple *kuren* to live together in a single compound.

for their children's life-cycle rituals from birth to adulthood (marriage); meanwhile, children are responsible for carrying out the cremation ceremonies for their parents.

Each kuren belongs to a larger collective known as a *banjar*.<sup>58</sup> The banjar is the basic civic community throughout most of Bali, and it plays a ritual, social, and administrative role. Upon marriage, a couple typically becomes members of the husband's banjar.<sup>59</sup> As members, they are entitled to the banjar's assistance when carrying out cremation ceremonies, and in turn, they are responsible for assisting with the death rituals of their fellow banjar members, for helping with certain community purification rituals, and for contributing funds and labor to projects that the banjar collectively agrees to undertake.<sup>60</sup> The banjar controls rights to the land on which many Balinese families live as well as access to the cemeteries in which they must bury their dead, which means that it is crucial for people to maintain good relations with the banjar to which they belong.

Typically, one or several banjar are incorporated into another organization known as the *desa adat* or *desa pakraman*.<sup>61</sup> Defined by Clifford Geertz as "a bit of sacred

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<sup>58</sup> For a detailed description of the banjar and its social function, see Warren 1993.

<sup>59</sup> Balinese women typically join their husband's family upon marriage. However, in cases where the woman's family lacks a male heir, the husband may join his wife's family, a process called *sentana*. In such cases, the two join the wife's family's banjar.

<sup>60</sup> The male members of the banjar have regular meetings (*sankep*) to plan collective projects, resolve disputes, and deal with other matters affecting the banjar membership. Some women attend these meetings, but only men are required to attend. The women of the banjar (referred to as PKK) would also have occasional meetings, and on afternoons they would sometimes gather to sweep and pick up trash around the village.

<sup>61</sup> In Bali today the official name for the organization is *desa pakraman*. I have chosen to use the term *desa adat* because it seems to me to be more widely used, both in Bali and in scholarship on Bali. The nature of the relationship between banjar and *desa adat* can vary significantly, both in terms of membership and function. Sometimes the members of a *desa adat* all belong to the same banjar. More often, at least in central Bali, two or more banjar are incorporated into a single *desa adat*. The difference in function between the two institutions has been a subject of debate in the scholarship on Bali. While some scholars have framed the *desa adat* as essentially a religious counterpart to the secular banjar, the

space for which a defined group. . . is humanly responsible,” the *desa adat* is a territory that is ritually looked after by a specific community, the *krama desa* or *desa* membership, which in the case of Tegal, consisted of two neighboring *banjar* (1980: 52).<sup>62</sup> The primary responsibility of the *krama desa* is maintaining and worshipping at shared temples or *pura*.<sup>63</sup> A *pura* typically consists of a walled, garden-like space in which several tall shrines, or *palinggih*, are arranged. Each *palinggih* functions as an earthly ‘seat’ for, and a place to present offerings to, a particular spirit or deity. Each *desa adat* is officially required to have a minimum of three basic temples, known as the *khayangan tiga*: an origin temple (*pura puseh*), a village temple (*pura desa*), and a death temple (*pura dalem*). Each temple is “activated” (visited by the deities) on particular auspicious days throughout the year, and the *krama desa* are required to assist with these ceremonies, by contributing funds, joining in collective prayers, and, most importantly, participating in the collective labor of preparing and executing the ritual, which they call *ngayah* (ritual service).

Customary institutions like the *banjar* and *desa adat* play a fundamental role in structuring the social and political life of Balinese communities, both within and beyond

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reality is more complex. According to Warren, Balinese often see the *banjar* as focused on *sekala* (mundane) matters, while the *desa adat* is focused on matters related to *niskala*, but at the same time, the *banjar* is, or functions as the *desa adat* in many instances. Warren thus argues that the *banjar* should be seen as the “practical executor and institutional expression” of the *desa adat* (1993: 21). This framing aligns with my own informants’ statements on the matter. However, in other regions of Bali, the functions of the two institutions are organized differently. For example, see Warren 1993: 21, n30.

<sup>62</sup> Geertz refers to the *desa adat* membership as a *pemaksan*, a term which refers to a group of people who share the responsibility of worshipping at a particular temple or group of temples. In the *desa adat* where I conducted fieldwork, however, the terms *pemaksan* and *krama desa* were used to refer to two distinct groups. For example, as outlined in the *awig-awig* for this *desa adat*, the *khayangan tiga* are to be looked after by the *krama desa*, while certain other temples located on the *desa*’s land were looked after by *pemaksan*, groups which did not include all members of the *desa adat*.

<sup>63</sup> For a more detailed description of the Balinese temple system, see Lansing 1993.

what we commonly think of as the religious sphere. Since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and probably going back much further, the *desa adat* has always existed in a complex relationship with an overarching state. Throughout the many shifts in state power—from the small kingdoms of the pre-colonial period, to Dutch colonial rule, through the Japanese occupation, and Bali's eventual incorporation into the Republic of Indonesia—the *banjar* and *desa adat* have never been subsumed into the state apparatus. Instead, they have always been recognized as autonomous governing entities. This was true even during the New Order when other institutions of local government came under increasingly centralized control (Warren 1993).<sup>64</sup>

In addition to worshipping at the temples of their *desa adat*, Balinese families may belong to a variety of supra-local organizations that maintain their own temples. These include *dadia* (descent groups), *subak* (irrigation organizations), and *pemaksan* (temple congregations).<sup>65</sup> Modern institutions such as government offices, businesses, and schools also commonly maintain their own temples, which are looked after by their employees.

Although the *desa adat* continues to be an object of attachment for many Balinese people, it has also been subject to internal critique since at least the colonial period. In recent years critics have taken aim at so-called *kasus adat* (adat cases), conflicts within or between *banjar* or *desa adat*, which typically arise when an individual or group is perceived to have contravened adat law (e.g. *awig-awig banjar*). While these

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<sup>64</sup> Warren's (1993) book is an in-depth investigation of relations between adat institutions and the Indonesian state during the New Order period.

<sup>65</sup> On *dadia*, see Geertz and Geertz 1975. On *subak*, see Lansing 1983.

conflicts are not a new phenomenon, they have been exacerbated by recent developments, such as land scarcity, tourism development, economic instability and inequality, shifting livelihoods, and other issues (Warren 2000). As both scholarly and journalistic accounts of Balinese communal conflicts have amply demonstrated, village social bonds have an intense affective charge, manifest both in the strong sense of mutual obligation that members share, and in the collective outrage that sometimes erupts when an individual, family, or other segment of the community is seen as having offended the sanctity of the *desa adat*. Such transgressions are sometimes met with harsh sanctions, such as forcibly preventing the offending group from using the communal cemetery or praying at village temples. In the most extreme cases, the group may be permanently banished from their village. Many of the harshest sanctions have been formally banned by the *Parisada*, and when they involve violence or destruction of property, they are also considered illegal. Nevertheless, they still occur, and *adat* institutions have often shown themselves capable of imposing their will, even in the face of riot police. This means that, for the vast majority of Balinese Hindus, one's ability to live a good life crucially depends on maintaining a good relationship with one's *banjar* by being an active and dedicated participant in collective religious ritual and other *banjar* activities.

As can be seen from this description, each Balinese person is affiliated with several institutions, and as such, is subject to a variety of ritual obligations. The obligation to participate in the affairs of the *banjar*, *desa*, and other customary organizations typically begins at marriage and ends when one's children are married.

However, I witnessed many exceptions to this rule. For example, people who are unable to meet their ritual obligations—because of work or relocation to another area—are sometimes permitted to provide a monetary payment as a substitute for their labor. In addition, elderly people sometimes substitute for their married children, particularly if the latter are busy with waged employment. Conversely, unmarried adults may substitute for, or even take the place of, their aging parents. Such was the case with the Dangin family. By the time I met this family, their father had already passed away and their elderly mother had long since ceased to be active in her husband's banjar, yet all of their children were still unmarried. The family's obligations to their various customary institutions were taken up by Kompiang, Made, and Wayan. Kompiang was particularly active; she was a specialist in offerings and was frequently called upon to oversee the preparations for local rituals.

Ritual service, or ngayah, is divided by gender. Typically, men prepare ceremonial meals and build the larger items needed for the ceremony while the most laborious and time-consuming work of preparing the vast quantities of intricate offerings falls to the women. In my observation, women generally spend substantially more time on voluntary ritual labor than men do.<sup>66</sup>

As noted earlier, the overarching purpose of all of this ritual activity is to maintain proper relations with the niskala world, primarily by way of presenting offerings and prayers to a variety of invisible beings. Each individual type of ritual has its own unique

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<sup>66</sup> For more on the gendered division of ritual labor in Bali, see Jennaway 2002: 53-55.

procedure, and its own set of offerings and other items that must be prepared.<sup>67</sup> The immense variety and complexity of these rituals is too extensive for me to do it justice here, so a brief (and vastly over-simplified) description will have to suffice.<sup>68</sup> In general, all rituals are preceded by a period of preparation during which offerings are made by the members of the group holding the ritual (whether it be a kuren, a banjar, a desa adat, or some other institution). On the day of the ritual, a priest presents these offerings to the gods by way of mantras and sacred gestures (*mudra*) and the beneficiaries of the ritual join in collective prayers (*muspa*).

The details of ritual procedure are closely monitored and, at least in Tegal, they follow a well worked out pattern.<sup>69</sup> By contrast, discourses about the beings that are the beneficiaries of these rituals are far less regulated. I agree with Margaret Wiener's assessment that "it is difficult, and misleading, to render what Balinese have to say about divinities, demons, or spirits in systematic form" (1995: 54). To do so is to impose order on a body of knowledge that is rife with inconsistencies and uncertainty. As Wiener notes, this lack of standardization is due in part to the fact that speaking about

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<sup>67</sup> Balinese offerings come in an enormous variety of shapes, sizes, and materials. By and large, the precise composition of an offering is determined by custom; diverging from custom is risky, though it is tolerated to a limited extent. Many offerings are made of palm leaves woven into various intricate shapes. These are sometimes combined with flowers and various edible items, such as rice, fruit, coconut. There are also ceremonial cakes (*jaja*) made of rice flour dough, which is dyed in various colors, molded into a variety of shapes, and fried. Ceremonial meat (*lawar* and *sate*) is also a staple component of all but the smallest rituals. Many larger rituals also require the erection of decorative bamboo structures, such as *penjor*.

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed description of a Balinese temple ceremony and the offerings used therein, see Belo 1953.

<sup>69</sup> Kompiang, at least by her own account, played an integral role in maintaining this order. She kept a notebook detailing the precise types and quantities of offerings required for each type of ritual and oversaw offering preparation for many rituals in Tegal, ensuring that the offerings conformed to the standards laid out in her notebook. For example, once when the village purchased offerings for a large ritual from an outside seller, she oversaw the process of going through all of the offerings to ensure that nothing was missing.

the niskala world is considered dangerous. In addition, discussions of divine power that conflict with the monotheistic Hindu theology promoted by the state are largely kept out of public religious discourse. Confined to informal discursive contexts, talk about the niskala world tends to be richly varied.

One arena where beliefs about the niskala world are circulated and standardized is through ritual practice. These practices enact a binaristic conception of the niskala world, divided into higher beings (deities) and lower beings (spirits or *buta kala*). These two types of invisible beings are each associated with a particular physical realm: higher beings are associated with the mountains, lower beings with the sea. These two poles represent opposing types of spiritual energy. Humans and other *sekala* (material) beings occupy a middle realm between these two poles. This tripartite division of the world is represented physically through various spatial practices. The mountainward (*kaja*) and seaward (*kelod*) directions form an axis along which village, household, and temple space are organized.<sup>70</sup> Within a typical customary village, for instance, the three basic temples (*khayangan tiga*) are arranged at different points along this axis according to their degree of association with higher and lower powers: origin temples are furthest in the mountainward direction, death temples are closest to the sea, and village temples are somewhere between the other two. This tripartite arrangement is repeated in the architecture and orientation of the temples themselves. A typical Balinese temple consists of three compartments, or *mandala*, aligned along the mountainward-seaward axis: an inner sanctuary toward the mountains, an outer

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<sup>70</sup> For more on Balinese cosmology and its relationship to the organization of sacred space, see Lansing 1983.

courtyard toward the sea, and a transitional space between the other two. Likewise, traditional house compounds are made up of three segments with the most sacred area, the family temple, located on the mountainward side of the yard.

The binary division of the *niskala* world into positive and negative forces is reinforced in ritual practice. Many rituals begin with a *caru*, a ritual for lower beings that serves to clear the space of harmful forces, then proceed to a ritual for higher beings.<sup>71</sup> These two phases of the ritual are clearly distinguished from one another. During *caru* rituals, offerings are placed on the ground. These rituals often involve percussive noises, laughter, shouting, and unrefined forms of physical activity. Offerings for higher beings are placed in elevated shrines, and the portions of the ritual dedicated to them have a different sonic character and mood. They involve refined forms of music and dance as well as moments of quiet when the congregants engage in collective prayers, known as *muspa*

The question of who the beings are that Balinese worship can be answered in a variety of ways. When speaking of deities, my interlocutors would sometimes draw on state discourses that claim that all of the deities worshipped in Bali are manifestations (*manifestasi*) of Sang Hyang Widhi, the supreme god promoted in the monotheistic discourses of the Hindu reform, but largely unknown in Bali prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. People with more theological expertise might also state that Sang Hyang Widi has three aspects (*trimurti*): Siwa, Wisnu, and Brahma. At other times, however, people spoke as though the gods that they worship in a particular temple are unique, individual beings,

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<sup>71</sup> For more about Balinese *caru* rituals, see Warren 1993: 143-146.

who are not the same as the gods worshipped at other temples. The gods associated with temple relics, such as Rangda and Barong masks, sometimes have unique names, and when the relics are transported, the truck is often decorated and labelled with a sign indicating the name of the deity. When guiding worshippers through collective prayers, *penginter* (M.C.'s) seem to combine these two conceptualizations: worshippers are instructed to pray to Siwa, but also to the *betara betari* (gods and goddesses) of that particular temple. These discrepancies are not typically seen as contradictory; they are different ways of thinking about the divine.

Discourse about lower beings is also varied, but differently so. Lower beings do not typically have individual names. Instead, they may be differentiated by type. The most common term for them is *buta kala*, or simply, *buta*. This is a general term for spirit, which is used to refer to the beings who are propitiated in caru rituals, or *buta yadnya*.

When speaking to me about the niskala world, members of the Dangin family commonly used vague terms rather than indicating the specific individual or type of being at issue. Sometimes it was not even clear whether the being they were referring to was a deity or a buta. For example, the phrase *ada sesuatu disana* (there's something there) could refer to a higher or lower being. Similarly, the phrases *alam akan membantu* (the environment will help) or *dibantu alam* (helped by the environment) could refer to the assistance provided by ghosts or gods.<sup>72</sup> When referring

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<sup>72</sup> The Indonesian term *alam* is often translated as 'nature' or 'natural environment.' In my interlocutors' usage, however, it had niskala connotations. For example, in speaking about the spirit of their deceased father, members of the Dangin family would often say that their father *sudah menjadi alam* (has already become *alam*).

specifically to divine beings, they often used the Indonesian word *Tuhan*, a general (nonsectarian) term for god. In their usage, however, *Tuhan* could refer either to divine energy in a general sense or to a specific deity, as in the phrase *Tuhan yang ada di sana* (the god in that place). They would also sometimes mention the spirit of their deceased father, whom they believed was helping them from his 'other place.'<sup>73</sup> We already saw Kompiang use the term *wong samar* (a general term for ghost) to refer to the ghost living in their home. When referring to ghosts, members of the family more frequently used the term *hantu* (ghost).

According to Balinese beliefs, even lower beings have the potential to play a helpful role in people's lives. As Warren has written, and as Kompiang's comments about the *wong samar* illustrate, lower spirits are benevolent if treated properly (Warren 1993: 37). Thus, when it comes to thinking about the ways invisible beings act in human lives, the binaristic division of the *niskala* world into benevolent and malevolent beings starts to lose its relevance. This has prompted some scholars to contest the notion of a clear binary division of the *niskala* world into positive and negative agents (Wiener 1995: 53). Warren has written that *buta kala* are in fact the negative aspect of *dewa*; rather than two different sets of beings, she claims, they are like two sides of the same coin (1993: 143). This interpretation resolves some of the apparent contradictions that have emerged in my description thus far. However, it also does away with much of the ambiguity and uncertainty that accompanied the images of *niskala* that emerged in my interlocutors' narratives. Wayan even sometimes joked to me that there was no way of

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<sup>73</sup> The spirits of deceased ancestors who have undergone cremation rituals are considered divine.

knowing whether Balinese worship gods or ghosts. When reacting to signs of invisible presence, they could never be sure who they were dealing with. A mysterious knock on the roof could be a wong samar, but on another occasion, Kadek heard a similar sound and believed it was the deity of a Rangda mask calling him out to dance. What was clear beyond any doubt was that my interlocutors' world is populated by invisible forces that have the potential to powerfully shape their lives. In an effort to preserve the ambiguous quality of these forces, throughout this dissertation I tend to use encompassing terms like "invisible beings" or "god," rather than more specific terms, when referring to the niskala agents that intervene in people's lives.

### ***Niskala in Everyday Life***

The forgoing description of Balinese Hindu ritual may give the impression that Balinese exchanges with invisible beings make up a complex but ultimately static system of intersecting, repeating cycles, which bind successive generations into existing social networks in predictable ways while continuously reproducing the same sets of material and aesthetic practices. Such an image has indeed been a recurrent theme in the scholarship on Bali. The cyclical patterns of ritual exchange certainly do play a key role in structuring people's relationships with invisible beings. However, the scholarly tendency to highlight regularity at the expense of devoting attention to the irregular (but not infrequent) disruptions and disturbances in these patterns risks creating the impression that these relationships are formalized and remote. In fact, my research indicates that niskala beings and forces are intimately involved in people's lives.

While niskala beings are understood to be inaccessible to ordinary humans' senses, they must take semiotic form in order to have social significance. The niskala world's active and intimate presence is thus inseparable from the signifying practices that mediate it. Semiotic ideology serves the crucial function of connecting individual perceptions and circumstances in the material world to their hidden causes in the niskala world. It is through the mediation of semiotic ideology that the running toilet, the sound of footsteps, and Wayan's mysterious fatigue can cohere into an interconnected representational economy, such that they mutually reinforce one another and sustain the niskala world as a real and active force in people's lives.

This semiotic ideology is particularly revealed in what I will call, following Christina Schwenkel, practices of myth-making: the creation and re-telling of personal stories about encounters with niskala beings (2017). We saw several examples of this kind of myth-making in the opening section of this chapter. As Kompiang and I listened to the sound of the toilet running in the dark bathroom, she located the sound within a longer history of unusual occurrences, which included ghostly footsteps, Made's mental illness, and other misfortunes. The loud noise on the ceiling added a new, somewhat more dramatic chapter to this evolving narrative, prompting some family members to decide that it was time to "do something." Later that night, Kompiang presented an offering to the wong samar, consisting of a tiny glass of coffee, a cigarette, and a piece of candy. Wayan and Putu "talked seriously" about the incident, and, Kompiang later told me, she and her son made tentative plans to organize a ritual to ask the ghost what

it wants from the family. Together, the various pieces of this narrative, including the sounds and objects to which it refers, sustain the wong samar's presence in their midst.

Practices of myth-making situate unique perceptions and experiences that are proximate to the speaker within a more generalized body of knowledge about the *niskala* world, which includes knowledge about how invisible beings are made perceptible to the human senses, the times and places where these beings are particularly active, as well as the types of activities that are likely to provoke a response from them. As with the example of the wong samar, often the catalyst for acts of myth-making about the *niskala* world is a mysterious or surprising sensory experience. Sounds are particularly fertile in this regard. Certain animal sounds are believed to be signs of ghostly presence, but as we've already seen, even ordinary sounds can take on significance when they elude *sekala* (mundane) explanations.<sup>74</sup>

Although the *niskala* world is not confined to particular locations, the beings that inhabit it are believed to frequent certain types of places more than others. Gods are believed to favor visually striking locations, such as cliffs, coastlines, mountainsides, and natural springs.<sup>75</sup> Ghosts, on the other hand, are said to dwell in crossroads, graveyards, rivers, and uninhabited areas. Balinese call these places *tenget* (haunted, spiritually charged). At once beautiful and eerie, such places prompt a visceral

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<sup>74</sup> In particular, the sounds of dogs howling and the call of a particular frog are believed to be signs that ghosts are near.

<sup>75</sup> As Rachele Rubinstein describes in her study of literary depictions of the act of poetic composition in ancient *kakawin* poetry, these kinds of places are described in these writings as sites of poetic inspiration due to the divine presence believed to reside therein, a presence revealed to the poet in the profound beauty of the landscape. According to these depictions, such locations were sought out by poets, but avoided by ordinary people, for whom approaching the divine in this way would be dangerous. See Rubinstein 2000: 103-120.

response. Often likened to a chill on the surface of the skin, this sensation is said to indicate the presence of invisible beings. Places that provoke this sensation are often avoided if possible, especially at night or at inauspicious times. Since they afford a potentially dangerous proximity to the *niskala* world, *tendet* places often attract regular ritual attention, which aims to ensure that their invisible inhabitants do not cause trouble for the people who live and work nearby. Village crossroads, for example, are a common site for collective *caru* ceremonies, while the striking landscapes preferred by deities are often chosen as sites for temple construction.<sup>76</sup> The day when a temple is established is called its *odalan*. When the same day returns each calendar cycle, the gods of the temple are invited to inhabit their shrines and receive offerings and prayers from their human devotees. Both *caru* and *odalan* ceremonies aim to ensure human wellbeing by maintain proper relations between the visible and invisible inhabitants of a territory. In addition to being targeted for ritual activity, *tendet* places are also common settings for sensory encounters with *niskala* beings. The ceremonies and performances that take place at temples and crossroads are common sites for episodes of *kerauhan* (trance, spirit possession). In addition, when anything out of the ordinary is heard or seen in these locations, it is often taken as a manifestation of the invisible forces that inhabit the area. For example, when I saw an atlas moth during a ceremony at Besakih temple, my companions told me it was ‘from the temple’ (i.e. a divine being).

In addition to favoring particular places, invisible beings are also believed to be especially active at particular times. For example, the transitional points of the day are

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<sup>76</sup> As a perusal of Bali postcards quickly illustrates, many of the island’s largest and most famous temples are found near unique features of the landscape.

considered inauspicious; people tend to avoid going out or undertaking other risky activities at noon, dusk, and midnight, believing that dangerous invisible forces are at work during these times. Days can also be more or less auspicious depending on their location in the calendar. Balinese Hindus have their own 210-day calendrical system, which they use to identify appropriate times to undertake ceremonies and other important activities. This calendar is composed of cycles of varying lengths, which periodically coincide. The days when cycles coincide are considered particularly important.<sup>77</sup> For example, the day when the start of the 3-day cycle coincides with that of the 5-day cycle is known as *kajeng kliwon*. Households must put on a small ritual and the day is generally considered somewhat creepy.

The likelihood that a sensory perception will be experienced as a sign of invisible presence, and thus become a catalyst for myth-making, varies depending on the time and location where the perception took place. When significant, this information is often included in people's narratives about *niskala* beings, as it heightens the sense that the sound or other sensation was in fact a sign from the invisible world. Another factor that may push people toward this kind of myth-making is engagement in, or awareness of, activities that are known to upset invisible beings. When such a transgression has been made, any strange or unfortunate occurrences that follow are likely to be scrutinized as possible evidence of divine or ghostly offense. Diverging from ritual customs is one activity that frequently triggers myth-making of this kind. I encountered an example of this when Tegal held a mass cremation ceremony in 2014. I knew from conversations

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<sup>77</sup> For more on the Balinese calendar, see Geertz 1973b.

with Kompiang that there was some contention around the offerings for this ceremony. *Ada yang mau beli, ada yang mau bikin* (there are those who want to buy [the offerings], and there are those who want to make them), she told me. In the end, the community decided to purchase offerings from a seller in another village. Kompiang was involved in the painstaking process of checking all of the offerings to ensure that nothing was missing, a task which, for a ceremony of this size, must have been quite daunting. On the day of the ceremony I walked with her to the center of the village where the procession and burning of the sarcophagi would take place. Shortly after we arrived, an elderly woman came rushing toward us looking distressed. *Apa kuwang?* (what's missing?), Kompiang asked her. They conversed for a moment and then we all rushed to the second floor of the banjar meeting hall (*bale banjar*) where some of the offerings were being stored. The two of them immediately began assembling the missing offerings, giving me a quick demonstration so that I could also help. When we finished, Kompiang and I watched the procession, which went smoothly enough. As the bodies were being burned, however, one of the village temples caught fire. When I spoke to Kompiang about it the next day, it was clear to her that the fire had something to do with the changes that had been made to the usual procedure for cremations in Tegal. She speculated that the fire had happened because the gods in her village did not accept the way the ceremony was carried out this time, either because the offerings were different, or because the bodies of people of different castes were cremated together, an increasingly common practice, but one not typically done in Tegal.

Building is another activity that is likely to upset invisible beings. Since empty patches of land are common dwelling places for ghosts, clearing or developing land can upset human-niskala relations. When something unusual happens in the once-empty location where a new building now stands, this is likely to be interpreted as a sign from the land's invisible inhabitants. The Dangin family's narratives about the wong samar fit into this category of myth-making, since the piece of land that the ghost is believed to occupy was known to be haunted long before the new house was built. A similar narrative emerged around the strip of land that bordered the eastern edge of the Dangin family's property. This land had once been a small road leading to the center of the village, but by the time I met this family, the road was closed off and the yards bordering it were expanded to fill the space. At the time of my fieldwork only a stone wall separated the Dangin family's yard from that of their eastern neighbor, and the space where the road had once been was cut across by the walls that bound the southern and northern edges of the row of house yards. Sometime after the road was closed, the neighbors to the east created a small opening in the walls that closed off the road, and they also erected a shrine where the road had been and began making regular offerings to the spirits who, they believed, were using the path. Wayan told me that this was because the neighbors believed the closing of the road had angered the spirits, since it prevented them from moving freely through the space. The hole was cut in the wall to facilitate their movement. When I asked him what had given the neighbors this impression he guessed that it was because one of them had gotten sick, but he was unsure of the exact reason.

These acts of myth-making about encounters with *niskala* involve an effort to link effects in the material world to causes in the *niskala* world. Blending together unique experiences and general knowledge about *niskala* beings, these stories draw from, and feed into, a mutually reinforcing economy of signs, which together serve to reproduce the sense that these beings are a consequential force in human lives; this in turn reinforces the need to take precautions in order to avoid coming to harm. Since these precautions often take the form of cycles of ritual exchange, we might expect that the relationships they mediate are fairly static and formalized. In fact, however, these stories highlight the dynamic quality of these relationships. Although instances like the mass cremation discussed above, where a village decided to make a significant departure from customary practice may be fairly rare, it is nonetheless the case that variation and change are an unavoidable feature of Balinese ritual practices. For one thing, many Balinese rituals are so complex and involve so many people, offerings, and other variables, that it is virtually impossible to ensure that things are done exactly the same way each time. As we saw, despite Kompiang's best efforts to ensure that nothing was *kuwang* (missing) when Tegal purchased cremation offerings from an outside supplier, she nonetheless pointed to the offerings as a likely cause of deities' anger (the offerings for a cremation ceremony may simply be too numerous and varied to be fully accounted for). Furthermore, Balinese Hindus are under pressure (ideological and economic) to simplify their rituals, meaning that they often choose to diverge from tradition in order to save resources and conform with new norms. For these reasons, ritual exchanges always vary from one iteration to the next, in both intentional and

unintentional ways. One consequence of these variations is that the success of ritual is never guaranteed.

Kompiang's story about the wong samar illustrates another source of instability in human-niskala relations, namely, that the demands that invisible beings impose on humans may change at any time. Now that everyone can eat, she surmises, the ghost may expect a contribution. This statement recognizes that her family's relationships with niskala beings are tied to the dynamics of their life in the material world. As the family's economic situation improves, the ways they interact with niskala beings may also need to be adjusted. Her narrative thus highlights the dynamic interrelatedness of the visible and invisible worlds.

The various forms of instability woven into people's narratives about the invisible world sustain the impression that this world is ultimately unpredictable. To ensure their continued wellbeing, people must not only do what they can to maintain ongoing ritual customs, but they must also be attentive to signs that such practices are falling short or require revision. To succeed at this, people must be attuned to particular kinds of sensory cues. The Dangin family's evolving narrative about the wong samar's involvement in their lives, as well as their more general knowledge about the potential consequences of constructing on land known to be tenget, make them sensitive to sounds and other mysterious occurrences that might otherwise pass unnoticed. Acts of myth-making about the niskala world thus serve to maintain certain forms of embodied sensory attunement. At the same time, the sensations that attuned bodies perceive

become fodder for further acts of myth-making. Representational economies and embodied dispositions thus mutually sustain one another.

### ***Indexical Communication and the Management of Masalah Niskala***

As we can see from these examples, the solution to the dangers posed by niskala beings is not simply to avoid haunted places—this, in any case, is impossible, since nearly any place could potentially be haunted. Instead, the solution is to establish and maintain proper relationships with the invisible beings that live in one’s midst. Accordingly, people’s sensory attunement to the invisible world is shaped by their sense of being relationally entangled with invisible agents and forces. In other words, people are attentive to signs of invisible beings not only because they fear or want to avoid them, but also because of what these signs may indicate about their ongoing relationships with them. Particularly when it comes to the deities and ghosts that dwell in domestic spaces, people must be attentive to signs that a relationship has begun to fray and needs repair, and they must be prepared to respond appropriately.

My interlocutors approach the ongoing exchanges that mediate their relationships with the niskala world as forms of indexical communication that serve to define and maintain that relationship. An index is a sign that points to or indicates something in the communicative context, often by means of an existential, causal, or proximal connection with the thing being signified (Keane 2003: 413). Indexical communication encompasses a wide range of subtle communicative acts, from the use of speech registers or styles of dress to index social class to the ways that vocal

inflections and facial expressions can index a speaker's emotional state. In addition to defining individual identities, indexical communication is also widely used as a means of defining the relationship between parties to an interaction.<sup>78</sup>

One important way people use indexical communication to establish and maintain cordial relations with social others is through asking questions. In Bali this is called *metakon*.<sup>79</sup> Often this practice draws on a stock of standard questions, such as *kal kije?* (where are you going?), *be ngajeng?* (have you eaten?), or simply *enken?* (how are you?); other times the question might be more personal or specific. In either case, the questioning functions less as a means of obtaining information and more as a means of indexing the speaker's acknowledgment and respect toward the addressee. This kind of acknowledgment is essential to maintaining amicable social relations, both within the domestic sphere and outside it. To fail to ask when one ought to do so is to *nengil* (be silent), an act which is often considered offensive.<sup>80</sup> People who are particularly tight-lipped with regard to greetings are described as being *saklek* (arrogant). Members of the Dangin family often attached this epithet to a family who lived a few doors down the road to the south. They said that when they'd pass each

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<sup>78</sup> Although Goffman does not use this term, his work provides extensive illustrations of this process (1959).

<sup>79</sup> Another pervasive form of indexical communication in Bali is the use of language levels to code status relationships. Balinese speakers use *alus* (High Balinese) vocabulary when speaking to people of higher caste or status than themselves, and they use *kasar* (lower speech registers) when speaking to people of equal or lower status, or people with whom they are on intimate terms. The use of a particular language level is thus an index of the status differential between the two parties to the interaction.

<sup>80</sup> 'Asking' is not necessarily reciprocal. More often, it reproduces social difference. For example, my observations suggest that female family members are expected to initiate conversation by asking male relatives if they've eaten. If they do not do so, male family members may feel offended. On the other hand, male family members will often ask such questions of female relatives as well, but the stakes do not seem to be as high if they fail to do so.

other on the street, members of that household would simply stare straight ahead and not 'ask' anything, behavior which my friends saw as being exceptionally rude. They often spoke negatively of that household, claiming they were stingy. When one of the elderly women of that household fell ill I went with Kompiang to pay her a visit. I didn't notice anything particularly unusual in their behavior, but as we were walking home Kompiang remarked disapprovingly that none of them had 'asked' me anything during our visit. Metakon, then, is a way of showing respect and consideration for others, while failing to do so (*nengil*) can give others the insulting impression that they are not considered to be deserving of respect. In Bali, as elsewhere, indexes play a crucial role in structuring and defining social relationships, while semiotic ideology functions to stabilize the meaning of indexes, turning evanescent details of interaction into signs of "respect" or "disrespect."

Within the household sphere, a breakdown in the normal flow of asking was often employed as an indexical expression of anger.<sup>81</sup> Balinese discourage expressing anger directly, relying instead on indexical communication to make their feelings known. For example, sometimes Kompiang would maintain a conspicuous silence toward her younger brother Wayan. Following their father's death Wayan became acting head of the family. Kompiang did the shopping and prepared meals for the family, with some help from her aging mother. She expected Wayan to provide money for these purchases, an unspoken duty which he did not consistently fulfill. When the money ran short, Kompiang would become very angry at Wayan, and she would often

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<sup>81</sup> This is sometimes called *puik*.

communicate that anger to me. In her view, it was his responsibility to anticipate and fulfill her needs, so that she would not have to go through the humiliation of explicitly asking him for money. Therefore, rather than confront him directly, she expressed her frustration indirectly, through silence. As in the case of the saklek neighbors, this conflict arises because one party feels that they are not receiving the level of respect that is due to them. In this case, Wayan's failure to consistently provide money is not only inconvenient to Kompiang, but, as was clear from her conversations with me, it was also interpreted by her as an indexical sign that Wayan does not value or respect her contribution to the family.

It was not uncommon for Kompiang's silences toward Wayan to pervade the household, creating a heavy sense of unease and coldness that made conversation difficult, even between family members not directly embroiled in the conflict. Sometimes these quiet phases would gradually dissipate. Other times they were broken by the sudden sound of Wayan's zippo lighter or cell phone crashing down on the hard tile floor. Loud noises are another way of indexically expressing anger. In extreme cases, these expressions would force the conflict into the light. In other cases, however, loud noises served as a subtler expression of frustration, similar to Kompiang's silence. For instance, someone might set down an object more heavily than usual, as a sign that they are bothered by something (see Chapter 2). Both the weighty silences and the sudden noises index an angry emotional state.

As has been discussed already, the primary means by which people manage their relationships with invisible beings is through forms of ritual exchange. Like the

practice of metakon discussed above, these rituals—and especially the offerings presented during them—function as indexes of deference toward the deities and spirits to whom they are addressed. For example, whenever someone builds a new structure, they must follow this up with a *plaspas* ceremony, which serves to establish an appropriately deferential relationship between the visible and invisible beings that occupy the area where the new structure was built. We have already noted how places that are known to be *tenget* often become sites of ritual exchange. These landscapes can also provoke more spontaneous expressions of deference toward the spirit world. For example, when driving past *tenget* places, Balinese motorists often beep their horns. Described as ‘asking permission,’ this practice aims to protect the driver from spiritual harm. Balinese friends of mine can identify many *tenget* places along Bali’s roadways, as well as the particular style of beeping associated with them: in some locations, I was told, a single short and rather perfunctory beep is the norm, while in others, erratic sequences of louder longer beeps are often heard, particularly at night. The purpose of these sounds is to acknowledge the authority of invisible agents within particular kinds of places. By ‘asking permission,’ the driver indexically communicates their respect for the spirits or deities believed to inhabit the area. This practice could therefore be said to lie on a continuum with the practices of ritual exchange mentioned above, all of which make use of indexes to mediate and manage relationships with invisible beings. The construction of shrines and temples and the regular placement of offerings there constitutes the more formalized end of a spectrum which includes this

practice of beeping as well as other informal exchanges, such as burning incense or uttering mantras.

People seem to rely on some of the same semiotic practices and forms of sensory attunement in managing relationships with invisible beings as they do in managing mundane social relationships. In both communicative contexts, continuous signs of acknowledgment and respect must be conveyed in order to avoid causing offense, while at the same time, maintaining the appropriate level of deference for each interaction requires reading subtle indexical cues. Particularly when it comes to the less formalized interactions people have with the *niskala* world, even the indexes used are sometimes similar to those used in ordinary social interaction. Beeping one's motorbike horn, for example, can be a sign of acknowledgment for a ghost or a human acquaintance.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, a sudden noise can be a sign of dissatisfaction across both *sekala* and *niskala* communicative contexts. That said, there are also important differences between these two sets of mediatory practices. For example, when people express dissatisfaction in their relations with other people, it is not uncommon for the target of their dissatisfaction to become indignant. The latter may feel that the other's expectations are inappropriate or excessive. For this reason, indirect expressions of dissatisfaction, like *Kompiang's* silence, bring interpersonal rifts to light, but only rarely lead to a true resolution. *Wayan*, rather than simply acquiescing to the demands implied in *Kompiang's* disgruntled silences, would often contest them, complaining to me that if

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<sup>82</sup> This must be understood in the context of local practice. While in the US beeping one's horn is most often a sign of aggression, in Bali it is very common for people to beep horns at one another as a friendly greeting. Beeping one's horn can thus be understood as continuous with the practice of *metakon* described earlier.

she needs money, she should just ask him. By contrast, relations with the niskala world are always deferential. Therefore, I never witnessed anyone respond with resentment to perceived demands of spirits. They may be skeptical about the authenticity of those demands, and they may question the signs that stand for them (e.g. the mysterious sound of water flowing through pipes may simply be an electrical malfunction and not a hazy person who wants to 'ask for something'). However, if the nature and authenticity of the demands is not in doubt, then people will accept them as their obligation. Therefore, when signs of dissatisfaction come from the invisible world, they do not provoke the same kind of tension that they do in the human social sphere. In fact, as noted earlier, such signs may actually ease social tension as people are brought together by their shared sense of obligation toward niskala beings.

Much as people are sensitive to subtle signs of trouble in their relationships with neighbors and family members, they are also sensitive to indexes that could indicate that they are not being sufficiently deferential toward invisible beings. Kompiang's attunement to the sounds of her household plumbing system is a case in point. By framing these sounds as a sign that the wong samar wants to ask for something, she is sensitive to the ongoing circulation of a whole range of indexical cues. The new house, for example, is a sign that her family is better off financially. This newfound wealth may in turn be interpreted by the wong samar as a sign that the family is attending to its own needs while neglecting the invisible beings with whom they share a home. In other words, now that the family is comfortable (now that everyone can eat), they may need to do more to make the wong samar feel acknowledged. Kompiang's interpretation

illustrates that the intimate, dynamic quality of people's relationships with invisible beings makes them similar in many ways to ordinary (human) social relationships.

In addition to mysterious noises, adverse events, such as illness and death, can also index problems in the *niskala* realm, motivating people to act to prevent further misfortune. In such cases, people will often consult a medium (*balian*) to determine the cause of the misfortune and the proper response. Several years prior to the start of my fieldwork, a priest who lived to the south of my host family lost a young son in a motorbike accident. The priest consulted a *balian* who told him that his son's spirit was living in a small ravine located on the edge of the Dangin family's land. He was told that the gods liked the area and had taken his son to live with them there and look after the place. In response to this information, the priest built a shrine in that location and began presenting offerings there. He did this without seeking permission from the Dangin family, and the shrine soon became a point of contention between them. When a tree collapsed on the shrine the Dangin family took the opportunity to reclaim the land, seeking support from the village head. The priest asked permission to rebuild the shrine, but the Dangin family denied this and the priest relented. This meant that the priest was prevented from maintaining the ritual exchanges he had initiated in response to his son's death.

As can be seen from these examples, maintaining proper relationships with invisible beings requires much more than unreflective repetition of handed down practices. Not only do Balinese Hindus have to ensure that they do not neglect or fall short in their ritual duties, but they have to make choices about what exactly those

duties are. This involves being attentive to signs of breakdown in human-niskala relationships, determining the cause of problems when they arise, and enacting an appropriate response. It also involves compromise as people must strike an appropriate balance between the needs and demands of humans and those of gods and spirits. Despite their best efforts, people often fall short. These shortcomings are given material form in unusual and unfortunate events, which can serve as warnings and guidance when relationships with the invisible world have begun to unravel.

While the majority of interactions between human and invisible worlds take the form of indexical communication, it is also possible for spirits and deities to communicate with humans through direct verbal demands. This can happen, for example, during outbreaks of trance.<sup>83</sup> While this was not something that I witnessed during my fieldwork, I did come across many newspaper articles describing events of this kind. For instance, in the late summer and fall of 2014, the Indonesian-language newspaper *Nusa Bali* ran a series of articles about spontaneous outbreaks of *kesurupan* (spirit possession). Called *peristiwa niskala* (invisible world incidents), these events took place not in temples, but in schools and government offices. (The unusual location was probably the reason these events were considered newsworthy.) As an example, I will briefly summarize the coverage of three incidents that took place in September at a high school in the city of Amlapura.<sup>84</sup> These news stories, and the acts

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<sup>83</sup> For a detailed discussion of trance as a feature of religious rituals in Bali, see Belo 1960.

<sup>84</sup> My descriptions of these events are taken from the following newspaper articles: "Gedung Belum Dipelaspas, Belasan Murid SMA Parisadha Kesurupan," *Nusa Bali*, September 21, 2014; "Lagi, 8 Siswa Kesurupan," *Nusa Bali*, September 23, 2014; "Peristiwa Kerauhan Ketiga di SMA Parisadha, 7 Korban Lari ke Kantor Bupati," *Nusa Bali*, September 25, 2014.

of myth-making presented in them, provide a useful illustration of how sensory experiences can catalyze a sudden change in how people perceive their relationships with invisible beings, as well as the difficulties that can emerge when planning and carrying out an appropriate response to such changes.

At approximately 11AM on September 21<sup>st</sup> a female student at Parisadha high school began screaming hysterically. She and fourteen other students then became possessed. One of the students began pointing at objects and places around her saying that they were *leteh* (ritually unclean). With the help of a priest and some offerings, the students were soon revived, but the school principal cancelled classes for the rest of the day as a precaution. The secretary of the foundation that owns the school told the newspaper that he's convinced that this incident occurred because a temple spirit that inhabited the school grounds was disappointed due to the school staff's failure to perform several important rituals when the school was constructed. He admitted that the school building had not been given a *plaspas* ceremony before being used for instruction, as would usually be required in Balinese ritual practice. He also acknowledged that the land on which the school was built was previously a rice field, but that the school hadn't performed the necessary rituals to Dewi Sri, the goddess of fertility, when the land was converted. Aside from this, he said, the school grounds have long been known to be *tenget*. The land is located on a hill beside the city forest and crosscut by two streams that meet in the middle of the schoolyard before joining a nearby river, he explained. He also noted that the school had not been given a purification ceremony after it flooded five years prior.

On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, a second peristiwa niskala was reported at the same high school. At around 7:30AM eight students began screaming hysterically, their bodies thrashing as they fell into a trance. One of the students ordered all of the teachers at the school to construct a large shrine (*palinggih*) and conduct a purification ceremony on the school grounds. The school principal denied that there was an “invisible world problem” (*masalah niskala*) at the school, noting that the staff held routine purification ceremonies there every 210 days.

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, Parisadha High School witnessed a third outbreak of spirit possession. At 9AM eight students began screaming and then ran to the regent’s office, which was located beside the school. The trance victims pointed to a large banyan tree outside the office, which they claimed was tenget. One of the students instructed the office staff to build a palinggih near the tree. “What use are your big salaries if you can’t even afford to make a palinggih?” the spirit asked. The possessed students then ran to the city forest stopping at a place where a young pregnant woman had hung herself a few months prior. School staff told the reporter that they believed these students went into trance because the spirit of the young woman had entered their bodies. One of the spirits (speaking through a possessed student) ordered the regent’s office staff to build a palinggih near the spot where the woman had died and to place offerings there every day. The staff promised to fulfill the spirit’s requests. The paper noted that the school principal had fallen ill and was not available for comment.

In this series of events, spirits speaking through the voices of entranced students make demands for more ritual attention from the people who work in the areas they

inhabit (the school and regent's office staff). These demands initiate a process of reflection on the part of the spirits' addressees. As quoted in the September 21st article, one of the school administrators referred to this process of reflection as *introspeksi diri* (roughly, 'self-introspection'). He said that the incident had "reminded us to engage in more introspeksi diri and be more cautious, so that, a short time from now, we perform the *plaspas* and purification ceremonies." As I describe in later chapters, *introspeksi diri* is a common phrase in Indonesian moral discourse. Hindu reformers use the phrase to denote the practice of making a personal accounting of one's actions in light of an overarching moral code. The kind of reflection the administrator is capturing, however, is somewhat different. When people respond to peristiwa niskala, they reflect on an evolving relationship between humans and invisible beings. Instead of assessing whether particular actions align with or transgress a pre-existing code, they must think of their actions in relation to a dynamic set of demands and expectations, which are subject to change at any time. Introspeksi diri, in this sense, means interpreting signs from the invisible world in order to anticipate new demands before they go unmet and result in misfortune. This is less about following a code than maintaining a delicate balance.

As we can see from these examples, people's relational entanglement with invisible beings is mediated by signs that define that relationship. Communication flows in both directions. Humans index their deference and consideration for invisible beings through offerings, prayers, and by beeping their horns. Meanwhile, niskala beings respond to these signs in a variety of ways. A mysterious noise, an illness, or an

outbreak of trance—any of these could be an index of divine or spiritual offense. On the other hand, wealth and other signs of good fortune can be indexes of divine approval, an issue which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

These examples also show that there are many factors that can lead to a breakdown in human-niskala relations. One factor has to do with the ambiguity of the signs that mediate these relations. Although the peristiwa niskala described above involved explicit verbal demands, determining a proper response nonetheless gave rise to debate. As we saw, the school principal denies that there is an “invisible world problem” at the school and resists the idea that the school has fallen short in its ritual obligations. Meanwhile, the regent’s office staff readily agree to meet the spirits’ demands. (It’s noteworthy that after the principal made these claims he fell ill, an outcome which could be seen as an additional sign of the need for some sort of ritual correction). This shows that even when signs from the invisible world take explicit verbal form, determining their human implications and identifying a proper response is often a contentious matter. The inherently social and collective process of dealing with ‘invisible world problems’ means that these efforts require negotiation between different parties. One party’s efforts to be cautious and responsive may, in some cases, be blocked by another party who has authority over the necessary resources, as in the case of the priest’s efforts to appropriately respond to his son’s death. These elements of instability—the inherently dynamic, unpredictable character of invisible beings’ expectations and demands, and the frequent inability of humans to properly meet those

demands—motivate and sustain people’s sensory attunement to the various indexical and verbal signs that mediate their relationships with invisible beings.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter I have shown that invisible beings are an intimate part of everyday life in contemporary Bali. Through their acts of myth-making, as well as their communicative exchanges with deities and ghosts, Balinese Hindus create and inhabit a shared lifeworld in which their wellbeing depends on maintaining proper relations with invisible beings. The invisible world is made present in people’s lives through a set of interconnected signifying practices: a representational economy. What holds these signifying practices together, making them cohere, is a semiotic ideology that posits certain sensory perceptions as messages from the invisible world. Apprehended through the lens of this semiotic ideology, unusual and misfortunate perceptions and occurrences function as indexes of human-divine relationships, and these indexes provide opportunities for people to monitor and manage their relationships with invisible beings.

Because these relationships are unstable, they require vigilant attention. The need to monitor them thus gives rise to particular forms of sensory attunement. Drawing both on their shared knowledge about the *niskala* world, and from more mundane social skills of indexical communication, people work to define, manage, and (when needed) repair their relationships with invisible beings. Their sense of being relationally

entangled with invisible beings, like their experience of social relationships in the visible world, is deeply felt and embodied.

Insofar as the Dangin family's relationship with the wong samar can be considered an ethical project, the mysterious sounds of their plumbing system can be conceptualized as ethical affordances, which enable the ethical work of keeping that relationship in balance. In the next chapter, I show how signs from the invisible world afford opportunities for another kind of ethical activity, that of casting moral judgment. Building on my argument that human-niskala relations are dynamic and affectively charged, I show that they also form the basis for a set of evaluative practices that help Balinese Hindus navigate a complex moral world. My discussion further supports this chapter's claim that invisible beings have profound social significance in contemporary Bali.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ETHICS OF DIVINE BLESSING

#### ***Hot Ears***

One morning I went out to the kitchen to make myself some coffee. Kompiang was there and I heard her say something angrily under her breath. *Bagaimana?* (Excuse me?) I asked. *Panas kuping ibu!* (My ears are hot!) she said, laughing slightly, but clearly annoyed. *Oh, karena itu?* (Oh, because of that?), I asked, tilting my head towards the west where a pair of construction workers were working and talking loudly. Ya (Yeah), she answered.

The Dangin Family shared their plot of land with another family. Since the other family lived on the western portion of the land, they often referred to them simply as *dauh* (west) so I will call them the Dauh family. During my fieldwork, the Dauh family built a new bathroom and kitchen on their share of the land. They hired a man named Agung, another relative who lived in a neighboring village, to do the work. Agung was a large, gregarious man. He would arrive early each morning, accompanied by his wife, who served as his assistant, and the two would engage the members of the Dauh family in conversation. Over the course of these construction projects, the sound of Agung's booming voice became a common source of complaint among the members of the Dangin family.

"Doesn't he realize how annoying he is?," Kompiang asked me rhetorically. Then she did a pantomime to show me how she had loudly set down a heavy pot to communicate to them that she was irritated. "I almost went over there [to complain],"

she continued, “because I know Wayan just went to bed.” (Wayan had come home late after gambling all night).

As I would come to discover, the problem that the Dangin family had with Agung’s talking was not, primarily, that it disturbed their sleep. Their complaints were part of a larger conflict between the Dangin and Dauh families. Observing this conflict provided insight into their ethical lives, how they make judgments and how they work to achieve what Wayan called “a good life.”

The Dangin and Dauh families are the descendants of two brothers: Gusti Aji, the grandfather of the Dangin family, who passed away in 2007, and his eldest brother Gusti Rai, who at the time of this writing is still alive. In addition to Gusti Rai, the Dauh family consisted of Gusti Rai’s wife, their son and his wife, whom I shall call Jero Made, and two granddaughters. Toward the end of my fieldwork Jero Made became pregnant, and she later gave birth to a son.

According to Wayan, when his father and uncle were both single, they were very close. They were both musicians and performed together constantly. However, when they married, tensions arose because their wives did not get along. Wayan and his siblings despised their uncle’s wife, and they told me many stories of her suspicious activities and cruel behavior. They believed she was a witch and that she had caused the deaths of several siblings who died before birth or in early childhood. As the rift between the two brothers grew, they stopped speaking to each other. They made peace when Gusti Aji was on his deathbed, but the conflict was passed on to the younger generation.

The main fuel of the ongoing conflict is the shared piece of land that the two families inhabit. In Tegal, land is inherited by male offspring. Each plot of land is divided unequally: the oldest male sibling inherits the largest share and also bears more responsibilities; he is known as the *pengarep*. Younger siblings inherit smaller pieces of land and fewer responsibilities; they are known as *pengempi*. According to this framework, the Dauh family should have inherited a larger portion of the land. However, at some point in the past Gusti Rai could not afford to pay taxes on the land. According to Wayan, the two brothers agreed to switch roles: Gusti Aji became the *pengarep*; he paid the taxes on the land and took care of a third brother who never married and could not support himself, and in exchange, his descendants inherited the larger piece of land and also took over the middle brother's land when he passed away. As a result of this arrangement, the Dangin side of the family currently occupies more than twice as much land as the Dauh side. Another outcome that the Dangin family attributes to this agreement is Gusti Aji's early death. As Wayan explained it to me, when Gusti Aji agreed to take on Gusti Rai's responsibilities, the younger brother predicted that he would die before his older brother as a consequence of this change in roles. From the point of view of Gusti Aji's descendants, the fact that this has in fact come to pass permanently seals the agreement as well as the change in land ownership that it entailed.

The Dangin family's land surrounds the Dauh family's land on two sides: east and south. At the time when I first met these families, the Dauh family had only two structures on their land: a cement block house which served as their living quarters and

a mud and thatch kitchen where they prepared their food. The Dangin family, by contrast, had a nearly complete traditional house compound: a bale daja, bale dangin, a kitchen (built of cement blocks rather than thatch), and a mrajan. They also had the foundations for a bale dauh and the walls for the future guest house, both of which were later completed. Because some of these buildings—the mrajan in particular—need to be used to complete certain rituals, the Dauh family is dependent on the Dangin family for certain religious needs.

The unorthodox division of land between these two households is a continuing source of tension between the two families. Sometimes this tension is in the background, as when I first began visiting the Dangin family home. At that time, relations between the two families were fairly friendly. During my fieldwork, however, they were in a period of very bad blood. The downturn in their relationship started around 2011 when the Dauh family began making plans to construct some new buildings on their land: a bathroom and a new kitchen. These plans turned out to be highly controversial for the Dangin family. It was during moments of irritation, when my hosts ears became “hot” from listening to Agung’s loud talking, that they would express their concerns to me. As I aim to show, their concerns reflect a larger moral framework.

“Most people dislike him” Kompiang said, continuing to vent about Agung. She then turned her attention to the Dauh family. *Mereka hanya mau rumahnya bagus, tapi tak bawa apa-apa ke sana*, (All they care about is having a nice house, but they don’t bring anything there [to the *mrajan* family temple],) she said angrily. Wayan came out of his room a minute later. He was also annoyed. He asked if I could record Agung’s

talking on my digital audio recorder. He said he wanted to speak to the *bendesa* (customary village head) and the police, and he wanted the recording as proof. I was a bit uncomfortable with this, but I agreed to set up the recorder for him. After I turned it on Agung's voice quieted down. Wayan came into the room about an hour later and turned it off.

In conversations with me, Kompiang and Wayan presented two main reasons why this loud talking was offensive to them. First, Wayan felt that the Dauh family should have consulted him about their plans to build. As de facto head of the *pengarep* side of the family, he felt that he had authority over what happens on their shared plot of land, meaning that the Dauh family should request permission from him before beginning any major projects. On this occasion, however, there was no such request. Wayan interpreted this as an indication that the Dauhs did not accept his status as *pengarep*. He said he suspected that it was Agung who had instigated this. He knew Agung did not accept the arrangement between the two families, or Wayan's status as leader. His loud talking was, in Wayan's view, an expression of insubordination.

In addition to being affronted by the Dauh family's lack of respect for their authority, members of the Dangin family also worried that their relatives would use these construction projects as a way to lay claim to a larger share of their land. The arrangement between the two families rested on a verbal agreement, which had the backing of the current village head. At one point, Wayan sought to *sertifikat* his share of the land (acquire a legal title for it), but this turned out to be prohibitively expensive.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Many Balinese families live on plots of land that are collectively owned by the *desa adat*. Rights to this land are under the authority of the *desa adat* rather than the state. There may be no (or only very limited)

Lacking official documentation, Wayan was worried that the agreement could one day be called into question and he could be forced to give up a portion of his land. He repeatedly assured me that if the Dauh's dared to build on his father's land he would "fight."

The Dangin family's concerns about maintaining the established boundaries between the two plots of land were especially palpable on the day the Dauh family broke ground for the new kitchen, which was to be located right near the border between the Dauh family's land and their own. Tensions had been running high all day. During part of the afternoon I helped Kompiang make *tipat* (an offering). She didn't say anything to me the whole time I was working with her. At first, I wondered whether she was angry with me about something, but I later realized she was eavesdropping on the conversation between the Dauh family and the construction workers. I could hear her muttering half-audible (but clearly irritated) responses to some of their statements. Later in the afternoon Agung and his wife tore down the Dauh family's old kitchen. The sheets of tin roofing made loud crashing sounds as they fell, which visibly annoyed the members of the Dangin family. I thought to myself that under friendlier circumstances they probably would have made a joke about the sound to indicate that it didn't bother them, as I had seen Kompiang do in response to their eastern neighbor's noisy chicken de-feathering machine. Instead, they were silent, merely glancing over occasionally, as

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documentation regarding the rights of individual families to specific plots of land. The arrangement between the Dangin and Dauh families, for example, rested exclusively on a verbal contract. In attempting to *sertifikat* his land, Wayan was hoping to gain official state documentation of ownership. It is not clear to me whether this process would have amounted to a *change* in his ownership (whether the rights to the land would have been transferred to him from the *desa adat*); what I do recall was that the price was in the tens of millions of rupiah (thousands of dollars), which seems like a large sum to pay only to document ownership that is already in place.

if to make sure no damage was done to their property as the pieces fell. Once the kitchen was mostly torn down Agung and his wife started using string to take some measurements. Wayan and Putu stood on the southwest corner of the *bale dauh* asking them questions and making sure the plans stayed within the boundary of the Dauh family's plot. Wayan later muttered the words "just fake" to me. When I asked what he meant he said that they were only pretending to care about respecting his authority. In reality (so he believed) they felt that they were entitled to a larger portion of the land. In another bid to prevent them from building beyond the agreed-upon borders, Wayan and his nephew built two temporary structures to fill the empty strip of land that bordered the Dauh family's area on the southern side, thereby closing in the Dauh plot on two sides.

One day I asked Wayan whether he thought it was possible for the Dauh family to lay claim to a larger share of the land. He described another family that had a similar conflict and land did change hands. However, he also told me that his own side of the family had the support of the village head, which suggested that, in the unlikely event that the Dauh family did try to build on Dangin land, the community would back his side. This convinced me that when Wayan raised the specter of a "fight" with his relatives, he was not sincerely worried that they would suddenly start building on his land—an act which they would never have attempted, much less been able to achieve, without the community's support. His claims instead seemed to be part of an effort to discredit the Dauh family by exaggerating their unreasonableness. Over time it became apparent to me that the very fact that their relatives were building at all—even within the boundaries of their own plot—was deeply troubling to Wayan and his siblings. What really worried

the Dangin family about these buildings was not their physical location but their semiotic potential. However, the Dangin family seemed unwilling to acknowledge this, preferring to keep the focus on their relatives' insubordination.

Wayan once told me that when he was away from home the Dauh family was more *berani* (brave) and his own family was *tidak kuat* (not strong). When I asked for an example he said that one day when he returned from a trip to north Bali Kompiang told him that while he was away she had overheard Agung talking loudly, telling the Dauh family to use their money to buy building materials a little at the time, so that they could keep constructing more and more buildings on their land. He indicated that his sister was deeply offended by this statement, and that Agung would not have dared to say such a thing if he had been present. When I asked him why, he claimed that his relatives' plot to keep building was part of an effort to make his family angry and jealous. In following up this statement, however, Wayan seemed anxious to convince me that the new buildings, in and of themselves, were of no concern to him. He compared the two families' property, drawing attention to how much more numerous, larger, and more impressive the buildings on his own plot were, and reassuring me that it would be easy for him to just build a small kitchen and bathroom, as the Dauh family had done. His relatives were, he stressed, *masih jauh di bawah* (still far below) his own family.

Although his point was to minimize the Dauh family's accomplishments, his statement also revealed that something significant was, in fact, being accomplished through all of this building. While the new buildings did not directly challenge the Dangin family's status as *pengarep*, since they were built within the agreed-upon boundaries of

the Dauh family plot, they did, in a sense, narrow the status gap between the two families: the Dauh family remained ‘far below,’ but apparently not as far below as they had been previously. The Dangin family’s immediate concern was not about loss of land, but loss of status, and Wayan’s exaggerated claims about the Dauh family’s plans to steal his family’s land was part of his bid to deny the claims that the new buildings could make about status. To preview an argument that I develop more fully below, these buildings, like other signs of wealth and status, could be interpreted as signs of divine moral judgment with respect to the Dauh family’s actions and behavior—a kind of karmic blessing. This interpretation could undermine the Dangin family’s moral judgments against them and potentially threaten their position of authority within the extended family. In short, wealth is (or has the potential to be) interpreted as a manifestation of its owners’ relationship with god, with significant moral and social implications.

In the last chapter I showed how members of the Dangin family treat a variety of semiotic forms as indexes of their relationships with invisible beings. In this chapter I show how indexes of human-niskala relationships are approached as ethical affordances that reflect people’s moral status. Analysis of the conflict between the Dangin and Dauh families reveals a unique ethical semiotics in which signs of status are linked to local conceptions of the “good life.” Within this semiotic ideology, the visible disparities between the two families’ properties do not merely signal a difference in wealth; they also indicate a difference in ethical standing. I describe this ethical semiotics in detail in the next section. Before turning to that, however, I would like to

briefly situate the arguments I make here within existing scholarship on Balinese culture.

For readers familiar with the anthropological literature on Bali, one obvious framework for interpreting the conflict between the Dangin and Dauh families is “status competition.”<sup>86</sup> While I agree that competition and status are important issues at play, I will argue that this conflict departs from the representation of status competition present in other ethnographic writings about Bali, and that it suggests the need for a rethinking of the Balinese ‘obsession’ with status. In the work of Clifford Geertz, for example, the dramatization of status through competitive practices like cock fighting is said to serve a socially reproductive role: hierarchy is preserved, not altered, through these activities, which therefore fit within Geertz’s broader conception of Balinese society and concepts of personhood as static and cyclical (Geertz 1973a and 1973b). Although the competition between the Dangin and Dauh families is closely linked to customary ways of life—to the ritual exchanges between humans and invisible beings that are the *raison d’être* for customary institutions—it nonetheless reveals a picture of Balinese society that differs significantly from the static world that Geertz describes. While Geertz recognizes that status competition is a kind of performative world-making (Geertz 1980: 104), he rules out the possibility that such world-making might result in real social change (Geertz 1973b: 433, 436, 443-446). Whereas Geertz sees status as always a given in Balinese society, my research reveals that status is, at least in some cases, negotiable. The Dangin family’s status as *pengarep* is a case in point: this status was

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<sup>86</sup> On Balinese status competition, see Geertz 1973b and 1980, and Howe 2001.

achieved not by an accident of birth but because of the unequal economic status of the two families, which gave rise to negotiation and adaptation of the usual rules of status. Even if these kinds of status reversals do not happen very often, it is nonetheless the case that individuals' standing vis-à-vis social others is mutable, to some extent. This means that people are motivated to act to maintain or improve their status, not just to dramatize it, as Geertz suggests.<sup>87</sup> Such motivations were a driving force behind many of the practices I discuss in this chapter and a big part of the reason that the form of ethical life that I will be describing was so compelling to people.

Another way in which my research pushes against earlier analyses of Balinese status competition is by highlighting the ethical dimensions of status. As I came to discover, signs of status are closely connected to my interlocutors' conception of what it means to be a good person and live a good life. Such signs formed part of a broader ethical semiotics, in which things in the material world served as evidence of divine moral judgment. These signs are "ethical affordances," which informed not only how people judged themselves and others in relation to one another, but also how they evaluated and chose between different possible courses of action in their own lives. This ethical semiotics underwrites particular forms of self-making and world-making. It makes possible a particular way of imagining and striving for a good life.

By focusing on the dynamic nature of Balinese customary practice, this chapter builds on my discussion in Chapter 1. There I showed how maintaining relationships with invisible beings requires more than just rote repetition of rituals; people must be

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<sup>87</sup> Geertz argues, by contrast, that Balinese cultural practices serve to downplay the notion of a biographical self that develops and changes over time (1973b).

attentive to signs from the invisible world and adapt their behavior accordingly. In this chapter, I highlight the ethical dimensions of these relationships. I show how exchanges between humans and invisible beings function as a basis for moral judgment and as a dynamic space in which people's sense of self and moral standing is worked out. Rather than simply limiting individuals' freedom by imposing an undue burden on them (as some religious reformers suggest), these practices also create spaces of possibility that enable forms of freedom and agency that may be foreclosed in other moral spaces that Balinese Hindus inhabit. This freedom, I suggest, is part of the reason adat practices are so resilient even in the face of reformist critiques.

This chapter focuses a great deal of attention on the semiotics of ethical life in Bali. To some readers this focus on semiotics might seem overly concerned with superficial matters of appearance and performativity rather than properly ethical matters. It bears stressing that my discussion here is not meant to be an exhaustive portrait of ethical life in Bali; many important aspects of ethics, such as the compassion and strong sense of mutual obligation that inflect many Balinese social relationships, are underrepresented here. Instead, my interest is precisely in the relationship between ethics and mediation. Building on Michael Lambek's claim that "ethical personhood is constituted through an interplay of performance and practice," I seek to show that acts of performative self-presentation, such as those involved in the kind of status competition described earlier, can be understood as a form of ethical practice (Lambek 2013: 844).

In the next section I describe the semiotic ideologies and practices that undergird the ethics of divine blessing. Focusing primarily on the conflict between the Dangin and Dauh families, and the forms of moral evaluation that this conflict elicited, I show how signs of divine intervention in people's lives are taken up as criteria for casting moral judgment on others and used as a form of moral guidance that helps people make decisions about how to act in a morally complex world.

Following this, I discuss the inherent ambiguity of the signs emanating from the niskala world, and I explore how this impacts ethical practice. I argue that while this ambiguity does introduce a degree of uncertainty, this does not detract from the importance that people attribute to the judgments that these signs allow them to make. Rather, the ambiguity of this moral semiotics creates spaces of possibility; it affords opportunities for people to fashion themselves as moral persons through performative engagements with their material surround.

In the final section of the chapter, I turn to the issue of performativity. I make the case that the tendency to see the practices discussed in this chapter as overly focused on appearances, and therefore lacking in ethical depth, is rooted in a particular conception of moral personhood, which seeks to construct an ethical subject that is autonomous from material form. We should be especially wary of this line of argument because, as I show in Chapter 3, it is also deployed in Indonesian state religious ideologies as a way of delegitimizing Balinese adat practices and subjectivities. Using the ethnographic material presented here as a case in point, I show that the separation of the subject from the material world is not a necessary condition for ethics and is

therefore inappropriate as an analytical starting point. I argue instead for an analysis that recognizes the deep entanglement of ethical life with semiotic forms.

### ***The Semiotics of Blessing and the Pursuit of a Good Life***

One late afternoon I was helping Kompiang make *jaja* (rice flour offerings) for the holiday honoring the goddess Saraswati. The sound of tiny *gongseng* bells drifted down to us in soft waves from the flock of pigeons circling in the grey sky overhead, filling the lulls in our conversation with their high-pitched warbling. Kompiang told me that the *jaja* were for a client of hers, for whom she'd made Saraswati offerings every year for many years. As we sat rolling and pressing tiny bits of white and brown rice flour dough into the complex shapes that make up *jaja Saraswati*, she said that nowadays she's mostly given up making offerings for payment, continuing to fulfill orders for only a few longtime clients. She explained the reason for this through the following story. One day several years prior someone placed a large order with her. She was hesitant to take the order because she knew there was a risk the work would prevent her from completing the offerings for a ceremony her own family would be having in a few days. In the end, however, she accepted the job because her family desperately needed money to buy supplies for their own ceremony. She worked day and night to finish the offerings in time, but then, when the client came to collect his purchase, he didn't have the money to make an immediate payment. This meant that Kompiang was unable to use her earnings for her own family's ceremony, as she had hoped to do. She said this misfortune was a sign that God didn't approve of her making offerings with the

expectation of payment, and that since that time, she has shifted primarily to providing ceremonial help for free. She explained that now, whenever her family needs money, it always comes, somehow, and that this was a divine reward for her voluntary labor.<sup>88</sup>

In this narrative, Kompiang touches upon several of the semiotic and ethical beliefs that I will be discussing in this chapter. First, she interprets events in her life as examples of good and bad fortune, which she then reads as indirect consequences of her own activity in the world. Her interpretation is like a theory of karma, in which moral actions yield rewards while immoral actions yield punishments, but rather than seeing outcomes as deriving from the automatic workings of a moralized cosmos, my friend attributes the consequences of her actions to divine participation in her life. Specifically, positive circumstances, such as her family's relatively secure economic position, are seen as divine blessings, and thus as signs of divine approval with regard to her behavior, while negative events, such as her client's inability to pay, are punishments and signs of disapproval. By reading events in her life as signs of divine judgment, my friend is able to wisely evaluate and adapt her own behavior, and in doing so, to advance toward the goal or telos of her ethical practice: to become a person whose life is filled with divine blessings. I call this ethical orientation the ethics of divine blessing.

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<sup>88</sup> In this conversation Kompiang used the Indonesian word "Tuhan," which I've translated here as "god." In other conversations however, she attributed divine blessings to the deities of her family temple, and to the spirits of specific deceased relatives. According to reformist theology, the many gods and deified ancestors worshipped in Balinese ceremonies are manifestations of a singular god called Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. I believe that in referring to "Tuhan" in this conversation, my friend was referring to divine agents in a general, inclusive sense, a framing which is consonant with both reformist, monotheistic representations of Balinese Hinduism and with traditional religious discourses and practices, which recognize a plurality of deities. I follow her usage in this chapter by using "god" as a general term for any and all benevolent invisible agents.

Like the forms of myth-making I described in Chapter 1, Kompiang's story is grounded in a semiotic ideology that links effects in the perceivable world to causes in the *niskala* world. These myth-making practices draw from the same representational economy. However, Kompiang's story reveals another facet of this semiotic ideology: the belief that material objects, events, and circumstances brought about by invisible agents can be *signs of divine moral judgment*, which can provide insight into the ultimate moral value of an individual's (family's, community's) actions, behavior, and character, and can thus serve as both a source of moral guidance and a basis for moral evaluation. These indexes are ethical affordances, which invite inferences (what Alfred Gell calls "abductions") about the agents responsible for them.<sup>89</sup> For example, in the case of Kompiang's story, a misfortune (her client's inability to pay) invites abductions about its cause (my friend infers that her misfortune is divine punishment for engaging in the sale of offerings). The misfortune thus indexes the improper behavior that precipitated it. Two basic beliefs inform these abductions: first, Kompiang believes that when she acts, god responds (or may respond) by providing or withholding blessings and protection; second, she believes that these responses reflect divine moral judgments upon her actions. Thus, not only does this semiotic ideology link outcomes, indexically, to actions, but it also assumes a rough equivalence between their respective values, such that the negative quality of a particular outcome indexes the negative moral value of the act, behavior, or individual character that precipitated it.

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<sup>89</sup> As noted in the Introduction, the term abduction denotes a particular type of inference made in relation to indexical signs, in which a known causal relationship produces an inference from the index back to some likely cause.

In this chapter I explore how this moral semiotics shapes ethical life in the Dangin household. Although the ethnographic material I discuss is largely drawn from a single family, I suggest that it reveals an underlying moral logic that is more widespread. When members of the Dangin family draw on signs to make judgments, and to give reasons for those judgments, they seek to make their claims legible to a broader moral community. In other words, their evaluations and justifications are *outwardly oriented*, and thus we can infer that they reflect the shared moral commitments to which they, as social beings, feel themselves to be accountable. Given that the members of the Dangin family are active participants in communal social life, it seems likely that their claims would resonate, at least to some degree, with the evaluative practices of others in their community. I suggest, therefore, that the semiotic ideology revealed in Kompiang's story has currency that extends beyond her own household.

One example that suggests that the connection between misfortune and immoral action may be a more widespread feature of Balinese moral thought is the multivalent word *papa*. In both Balinese and Indonesian, *papa* means destitute. My Balinese dictionary also gives several other, related meanings, such as misfortune, disaster, and hell (Shadeg 2007: 385). In this sense, *papa* is similar in meaning to the more common Balinese word *lacur*, which means poor or poor person.<sup>90</sup> In Sanskrit, however, the word *pāpa* means sin, or morally evil action. *Papa* is used this way in Balinese Hindu

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<sup>90</sup> The Balinese word *lacur* is most commonly used as an exclamatory curse, as in the phrase *aduh lacur*, which can be roughly translated as "oh damn." Once when I visited the home of a particularly poor family, one of the women of the family gestured toward a dilapidated building on her property and said *nak lacur* (poor people). I heard Jero Biang use this same phrase once during a family crisis. In this case, I think the meaning was less about material poverty than a kind of moral failure, something closer to "god-forsaken people."

religious literature and in the text of the Puja Trisandhya (see Chapter 3), a reformist Hindu prayer.<sup>91</sup> Within Balinese religious language (which blends indigenous and Sanskrit vocabularies), *papa* covers a range of meanings, and links immoral acts to their outcomes: poverty, misfortune, hell. To be *papa*, then, is both an ethical and a material condition. This linking of moral and material value is key to the ethical practices I discuss in this chapter.

Within the ethics of divine blessing, a wide variety of semiotic forms can take on moral significance. Semiotic ideology plays a role in defining what forms of good and bad fortune are likely to count as potential signs of divine judgment, but it does so in an open-ended and flexible way: while signs of wealth, poverty, and illness are perhaps the most common, many other sorts of things can also be interpreted in this way and end up serving as a basis for moral judgment. The Dangin family had a cousin who lived in another area of the village. He owned a couple of successful local businesses and was considered to be relatively wealthy. When Wayan was a child he used to help out in this cousin's household, caring for their children, painting handicrafts for their business, and taking up other odd jobs around the house. Despite their wealth, the family treated him poorly and paid him only a pittance, if anything, for his services. Members of this family also consistently refused to drive an elderly aunt home when she would visit them during holidays, which meant that one of the men of the Dangin family always had to pick her up and take her home. The Dangin family resented this cousin and saw him as stingy. Later in life, this cousin became a *balian* (traditional healer). He led meditation

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<sup>91</sup> In *Upadeça Tentang Ajaran-Ajaran Agama Hindu*, the word *papa* is defined as *perbuatan yang tidak baik* (action that is not good/right) (Parisada Hindu Dharma [1967] 1978: 30).

sessions at his home, which were supposed to have healing effects. Like most *balian*, he served his clients without pay. When I asked Wayan how this transformation had come about, he said that his cousin had had a calling in his dreams. He claimed that this calling was punishment for the man's stinginess. In other words, the 'misfortune' of having to serve the public without pay was evidence that, despite this man's wealth, he was nonetheless disapproved of by god.<sup>92</sup>

Another interaction I had with Kompiang will serve to further clarify how this semiotic ideology provides a basis for casting moral judgment. During the final months of my fieldwork Bali was experiencing a drought. I began to see neighbors filling buckets of water at a spigot near the edge of the Dangin family's property, and friends made sarcastic jokes about the good fortune of those rare men whose tall ladders and unusual bravery allowed them to earn an extra income during the dry season by climbing deep into empty wells and digging down to a water source. Kompiang was friends with a woman who lived in the household immediately to the south of her own family's plot. This southern neighbor woman would sometimes walk with us to the temple during ceremonies, and she and Kompiang would often help each other with rituals. Then one day Kompiang told me that this woman had taken credit for work that she herself had done. Clearly angered by this, she said that her friend was *pintar bicara di depan umum* (clever at speaking in public). Then, a few days later, Kompiang told me that her neighbors to the south (the neighbor woman's family) and west (the Dauh

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<sup>92</sup> The calling to become a *balian* need not necessarily be interpreted as a misfortune. Wayan saw it as such in this specific case because he saw his cousin as business-oriented, and thus assumed that he would not wish to work for free. In general, however, *balian* are venerated. Wayan's own brother Kadek was a great admirer of this cousin; he studied with him and sometimes attended his meditation meetings.

family) did not have any water left in their wells. As we stood chatting in the hot midday sun, she explained that these neighbors' wells had dried up during past droughts too, but her own family's well always continued to flow. Although she did not say so explicitly, it was obvious to me that her comment about the wells was a morally loaded comparison. The distinction she drew—between wells that dry up and wells that never do—was part of an ongoing argument about the respective families' relative moral standing. For her, a household that was spared from having to endure an empty well in the midst of a drought was one that had earned divine protection, while her neighbors' recurrent suffering validated her negative judgments about them. Of course, it is possible that she was merely pointing out her neighbors' bad luck, an interpretation which rests upon a different abduction of agency and responsibility, and which therefore does not carry the same moral implications. However, within this semiotic ideology, this is not a very plausible (or compelling) explanation; things happen the way they do because agents—human or invisible—make it so (Wiener 1995: 49).

This tendency to assume that unfortunate circumstances have hidden moral causes is evidenced by the fact that, on other occasions, Kompiang did draw these kinds of connections explicitly. For example, she often accused the Dauh family of slacking on their ritual obligations, saying *makanya, sampai sekarang, mereka tak punya apa-apa* (that's why, until now, they have nothing [are poor]). Thus, rather than seeing Kompiang's statement about the wells as merely a comment about luck—an interpretation that misses a key part of what she was trying to convey—I would argue instead that she assumed I would recognize the indexical link between misfortune and

moral failing, and this obviated the need for her to be more explicit in her comparison. Without having to say so directly, Kompiang showed me that her neighbors were in the wrong while her own family was in the right. If my interpretation is correct, this example demonstrates that the importance of semiotic ideology lies not only in the specific semiotic links that it favors or ignores, but also in its capacity to circulate and gain widespread currency, creating a shared awareness that the semiotic links that one person perceives are also legible to others in his or her social milieu. As we will see, it is this mutual awareness of a shared semiotic ideology that gives the indexes I discuss in this chapter their moral weight and performative potential.

As we can see from these examples, signs of misfortune can be used to bolster claims against people who one perceives as acting (or having acted) improperly. Such signs can function as evidence that one's own negative judgments are also shared by god, who has either caused the perpetrator's misfortune or failed to protect them from it. This connection was made particularly clear to me during a conversation I had with Wayan about his conflict with the Dauh family. We were having dinner at a food stall in a neighboring village. Only a narrow strip of sidewalk separated us from the busy street, so the atmosphere was suffused with the lights, sounds, and smells of the motorbikes streaming by outside. We sat eating and chatting at one of the stall's long wooden tables as a quick stream of customers flowed through to buy *bungkus* (take-out). Wayan was complaining about the Dauh family. The *Galungan* holiday was approaching and he told me he planned to forbid them from placing offerings in his mrajan, as they usually did on this and other important days in the Balinese ritual calendar. Sensing that this

had the potential to provoke a heated confrontation, I asked whether he was sure such a move was justified. He said they were disrespectful toward him—he reiterated his complaint that they hadn't asked his permission before beginning the recent construction projects on their adjoining land, and added that when he'd held a large ceremony the previous month, they provided only minimal assistance. In short, he felt that they had failed to fulfill the obligations that would entitle them to the privilege of worshipping in the temple his family maintained.

Conflicts of the kind Wayan was describing are remarkably common in Bali. Local newspapers often run stories about families who were prevented from using their village's temples because they were accused of contravening "custom" (*adat*). As noted in Chapter 1, such sanctions, and the tense and sometimes violent confrontations to which they can give rise, have become an object of public debate in recent decades. Though upheld by many communities, practices of punitive exclusion have been condemned by religious reformers, who claim they are against the Hindu religion.<sup>93</sup> According to this view, villages and families who enact these kinds of punishments do so because they are ignorant of their own religion's teachings. If only people understood these teachings, the argument goes, then these kinds of conflicts would not arise, or at least, if they did, they could be resolved peacefully, and violence could be avoided.

It was clear that Wayan was not trying to engage me in a debate about moral principles, religious or otherwise, but I wanted to know whether religious teachings provided any guidance that he could draw upon in order to make sense of his family

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<sup>93</sup> For example, see Jyoti 2012: 24.

conflict. It seemed to me that the media said to contain these teachings—texts like the *Sarasamuccaya*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Kakawin Ramayana*, etc.—focused on obscure concepts, broad abstract principles, and events and circumstances far removed from contemporary life in Bali; and that the sermons, books, and magazine articles that tried to link these abstractions to concrete experiences rarely provided illustrations showing how religious teachings could be applied to messy, real-world problems like the one my friend was facing. I had read that the Parisada had a policy stating that it was against the Hindu religion for customary villages to prevent members from praying in village temples under any circumstances, even as a sanction for serious offenses, so I asked Wayan whether he thought the same policy applied to him. Growing more animated, he provided additional examples of his relatives' wrongdoings, insisting that they needed to respect his position as head of the household if they wanted to continue to use his temple. I said I thought his relatives probably had their own justifications for their behavior and asked if there was a specific rule that they had transgressed or a story or proverb that admonished people not to behave as they had; something beyond his own feelings of offense, which could prove that they were in the wrong. "There should be a sign," he said.

In making this statement, Wayan makes explicit the role of 'signs' in moral evaluation, a relationship which usually remains implicit. Rather than grounding his judgments in a moral code, Wayan points to signs of good and bad fortune as evidence of people's relationship with god—of whether or not god approves of their behavior. Signs provide Wayan with a means to evaluate people and their actions independently

of his own personal biases (or at least, they appear to do so). This distancing from personal bias lends authority to these judgments, much as reference to an external moral code might do.

In addition to serving as a basis for casting judgment on others, signs from the invisible world can also help people evaluate and choose between different possible courses of action in their own lives. In this way, signs from the invisible world function as a kind of moral guidance. We have already seen how Kompiang was able to discern that she needed to stop making offerings for money, and how this change in behavior yielded karmic benefits for her, indicating that she was now on a correct moral path. The story about the cousin who became a balian could also be interpreted in this way. His dream is a sign that he needs to take on a new role, and he heeds this guidance by becoming a balian. Wayan frames this transition as a punishment for his cousin's wrongdoings, however, it could also be interpreted as a kind of ethical practice. Heeding this kind of 'calling' from the invisible world is a key part of living a good life within this ethical framework.

The act of heeding a calling is sometimes called *ngiring* (to follow). To *ngiring*, in this sense, is to respond to signs from the invisible world by taking measures to improve or correct one's relationship with invisible beings. We saw a commonplace example of this in Chapter 1, when a mysterious noise on the roof prompted questions about whether an invisible presence wanted to 'ask for something,' which in turn prompted the placement of a precautionary offering. When the word *ngiring* is used, however, it usually refers to a more dramatic intervention. I have been friends with a North Balinese

family since 2004. Beginning in 2009 they experienced a series of tragedies. Two members of the family passed away in quick succession, including a young mother, and the eldest adult son began suffering from repeated bouts of near-fatal illness. In the summer of 2014 I visited the family at their home in North Bali. When I arrived I found that the house compound had been dramatically rearranged, to the point where it was no longer recognizable to me. My friend explained that he had had to *ngiring*, due to all of the problems his family was having; rebuilding his house was part of this process.<sup>94</sup> In this example, signs of misfortune function as a form of moral guidance, showing my friend that he must act to repair his relationship with invisible beings by correcting the location of buildings on his land and building new shrines to place offerings to those beings. This is similar to Kompiang's story, but here the results are inconclusive. Since the time of my visit the family has suffered further deaths.

When signs from the invisible world function as a form of moral guidance, they need not take the form of a misfortune. Blessings can function in a similar way. Kompiang was something of an expert at making offerings. She knew the correct types and numbers of offerings for a wide variety of different ceremonies and was therefore highly sought after to help with offering preparation for communal and domestic rituals in Tegal. One day when I was helping her make offerings she told me that she was

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<sup>94</sup> Many Balinese Hindus believe that the buildings that make up a traditional Balinese house compound can have supernatural effects. When a new building is constructed it must be given substantial ceremony before being used. If these ceremonies are overlooked, or if the location, size, or proportion of the buildings is not correct, this can have an impact on the wellbeing of the people who dwell there. Once I accompanied Wayan on a visit to a *balian* and the *balian* told him that one of the buildings in his compound was out of place by a few meters. He recommended Wayan's family aim to rebuild in the correct location; until they were able to do so their life would be 'stuck' and they would have difficulty achieving things that they want to achieve.

mystified at how she had picked up this expertise so quickly. She said that when she began to learn, the rituals came in quick succession, one after the other, allowing her to gain a substantial amount of experience in a relatively short period of time. *Kenapa begitu?* (Why was that?) she asked rhetorically. *Sepertinya ada takdir* (It's as though it's my destiny) she explained, adding that, if someone asks her for help with a ceremony, she *harus pasrah* (must surrender [to their request]). In describing her ability as a *takdir*, she suggests that invisible forces intervened to help her acquire these skills. This in turn indicates to her that it is her duty to do this work. In this instance, guidance on how she should live her life comes in the form of a god-given ability.

In these examples, signs of good and bad fortune serve as a basis for evaluating actions—one's own and those of others. When approached as criteria for casting judgment, signs can distance judgments from personal bias, creating a more authoritative (and apparently objective) basis for judgment. When approached as a tool for self-reflection, such signs can function as guidance in the ethical work of managing one's relationships with invisible beings.

One particularly compelling feature of this ethical framework is that it provides a way of understanding and acting appropriately within a complex ethical world.<sup>95</sup> The kind of ethical complexity that I am evoking here is richly portrayed in the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics (both widely known and loved in Bali). The characters in these stories encounter morally complex situations in which the most ethical course of action

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<sup>95</sup> We could also point out some problems with this ethical framework. For one thing, it equates wealth with moral status, which would seem to confer undue privilege on the wealthy. My intention here is not to condone or condemn this moral framework, but to understand what it affords for the people who engage with it.

requires taking steps that, from a less enlightened perspective, appear immoral. One famous instance of this type of dilemma is the one that Arjuna faces in the *Bhagavad Gita* when he must slaughter members of his own family in order to serve the greater good of purifying the world of evil. A similar example of moral complexity appears in a famous passage from the *Kakawin Ramayana* (a Kawi poem composed in Java in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and frequently performed by contemporary Balinese *pepaosan* practitioners: see Chapter 4) when Rama consoles Wibisana, who has chosen to join Rama's army in the fight against his own brother, Rawana.<sup>96</sup> In both of these examples, the question of what constitutes right action depends on the specific context, a context which is, in many cases, not fully understood by ordinary humans. (When characters approach the world from a human point of view, they feel compelled to be loyal to their family members; in both cases, this loyalty does not serve the highest good and must be rejected). A simple moral code—which prohibits some actions (e.g. committing violence against one's own family members) while allowing or encouraging others—is an insufficient guide to this complex moral world. To discern the proper way to act requires extraordinary wisdom, the wisdom to understand the world from a divine point of view and to choose one's actions accordingly.<sup>97</sup> The ethical semiotics that I have been describing provides just this kind of insight. In contrast to the guidance provided by a

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<sup>96</sup> Another interesting example is the fate of Kekayi from the Ramayana. Kekayi forces her husband to banish his eldest son Rama to the forest so that her own son can become king. For this, she is universally despised, even by her own son, who renounces her and refuses to take the throne. In some versions, however, it is revealed later that Kekayi's actions were divinely sanctioned because they set in motion a chain of events that will end with Rama's defeat of the demon Rawana.

<sup>97</sup> In the case of Kekayi, it was arguably not wisdom that allowed her to follow the correct path, but destiny. She is therefore a more morally ambivalent character than either Wibisana or Arjuna, who understand and choose their actions (even if their choice may have been pre-ordained).

moral code, the guidance that individuals obtain by reading signs from the invisible world is unique to them and attuned to the complexities of their specific situation.

As I describe in more detail in Chapter 4, proponents of the Indonesian Hindu reform promote texts as the exclusive source of religious ethical knowledge. According to this view, it is to texts like the Mahabharata and Ramayana that Hindus should look for guidance on how to act in the world. Within reformist discourse, however, these texts are treated as though they can be boiled down to a kind of catechism that will provide answers to all of life's moral questions. This is problematic because, as I have just described, the moral dilemmas represented in these texts are deeply tied to the specific narrative context, which means that figuring out how their insights can be applied to other contexts is far from straightforward, and even morally problematic. To claim, as spokespersons of the reform often do, that people's moral failings are due to the fact that they have not read this literature, suggests that the teachings these texts contain are transparent, a view which seems to flatten both the moral complexities of the stories contained in the texts, and the inherent complexity of ethical life in the real world, for which they are supposed to serve as a guide. The ethical semiotics described in this chapter, by contrast, provides a way of dealing with that complexity.

This is not to say that this view of the world provides sure-fire answers to all of life's ethical questions. On the contrary, the insights that my interlocutors gained by reading signs from the invisible world were ambiguous and uncertain. As I show in the next section, ambiguity is a defining feature of this ethical lifeworld. But rather than undermining or diminishing the significance of these signs in their lives, this ambiguity

may actually serve to fuel people's engagement with them because it allows for forms of creativity and freedom.

### ***Ambiguity, Performativity, and Spaces of Possibility***

Having encountered several examples illustrating the links between people's material circumstances and their moral status, we are now in a better position to understand the semiotics at play in the conflict between the Dangin and Dauh families. The members of the Dangin family feel that the Dauhs have continuously acted improperly toward them, from causing the deaths of their siblings and children to refusing to respect their position as pengarep. Wayan's assertion that "there should be a sign" expresses his view that there ought to be some sort of perceptible misfortune to indicate that the Dauh family's actions were immoral. Instead, the Dauh family's fortunes seem to be taking a positive turn, as indicated by the new buildings on their land: signs of wealth, which could be interpreted as a form of divine blessing. This is clearly frustrating to Wayan. In conversations with me, he and the other members of his family seem anxious to sway me toward a different interpretation. When Wayan made this reference to "signs" as a means of judging worldly actions, he referenced the concept of *karmaphala*, the Hindu belief that human actions yield karmic consequences: *saya lebih baik kalau hukumannya langsung* (It's better for me if the punishment is immediate), he said. By referencing *hukum* (punishment), he suggests that his relative's current situation is temporary: punishment is coming, and he wishes it would come sooner. Wayan and his family also sought to minimize their relatives' accomplishments

in other ways, such as by memorializing their former poverty with statements like *sekarang mereka merasa mampu, tapi dulu tidak* (now they feel well-off, but in the past they were not). Taken as signs from the invisible world—a visible manifestation of their relationship with god—the Dauh family’s relative position of poverty supports Wayan’s claims about their moral status. However, he wants a clearer, more immediate sign that his relatives are in the wrong. What he gets instead is an ambiguous mix of messages.

Sometimes the preponderance of messages conflicting with his own evaluations brought him to the point of despair. Such was the case when Jero Made, who was already approaching middle age, gave birth to her son, shortly after the end of my fieldwork. Prior to this birth, the youngest members of the Dauh family were both girls, which left the Dauh family without an heir. From the Dangin family’s point of view, this was a possible avenue for resolving the land conflict in their favor: eventually the two girls would marry and there would be no one left to battle for the land. However, they felt certain that the Dauhs would do everything they could to avoid this outcome. They waited anxiously through Jero Made’s pregnancy, wondering about the gender of the child. When I spoke to Wayan on the phone after the birth, he was defeated. He described a conversation he had had with his nephew Putu in which the latter proposed that the two of them were just a *transisi* (transition). When I asked what this meant he said his nephew was suggesting that they will not be able to get a good life *in this life*, and must instead wait for the karmic consequences of their conduct to be realized in subsequent generations.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Balinese Hindus generally believe that individuals are reincarnated within their own family line.

The signs at play in this ethical semiotics are inherently ambiguous. Wayan interprets his relative's good fortune one way—as a small and momentary blessing in a life otherwise largely characterized by poverty—but he recognizes that other interpretations are also plausible, and that others in his community may interpret things differently. Importantly, the ambiguity of these signs does not diminish the significance that they have for him. The buildings on his relatives' land are a source of concern in spite of their ambiguous meaning.

Part of this ambiguity arises from the difficulty of establishing clear links between signs of divine judgment and the specific actions that precipitated them. A misfortune, for instance, may be the product of the victim's own wrongdoing, but it could also be blamed on sorcery (what Balinese call "magic" or "black magic).” Likewise, as in the case of Wayan's contentions about his neighbors' new buildings, wealth may not always be a sign of divine approval, a point I return to later. Furthermore, even when a misfortune is recognized as an index of moral failing, it can be difficult to determine which action or behavior was the catalyst.<sup>99</sup> Conversely, actions are not always followed by clear signs of divine judgment. As reflected in Wayan's statement, "there *should* be a sign," but there may not be, and in any case, one has no way of knowing when or in what form the sign will come. The practice of making moral judgments and decisions by interpreting indexical links between actions and consequences is thus fraught with uncertainty. While semiotic ideology helps narrow the field of possibilities, it also leaves room for ambiguity and contestation

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<sup>99</sup> Establishing causal links between actions and outcomes is further complicated by the fact that one person's actions may have karmic effects on their entire family, including unborn descendants.

In addition to the problem of sorting out the causal relations between actions and outcomes, another source of ambiguity is the problem of determining which signs are relevant as evidence of a person's moral status. Because there are many signs that can potentially provide insight into this, it's possible that some signs may be overlooked or attributed undue significance. For example, people may judge a person based on their poverty and overlook other circumstances, such as their exceptional talents. This was an issue that both Wayan and Kompiang discussed with me. When Wayan was a child his elementary school organized a student gamelan group. Wayan was not chosen to play in the group in spite of the fact that his father was one of the most prominent musicians in Tegal and Wayan himself was already an experienced performer. When I asked him how this could be he said it was because his family was poor. He explained that people in Bali often mistakenly assume that poor people do not have talent. Kompiang told me a similar story about her own experience being excluded from a dance troupe as a child. Like Wayan, she claimed that the organizers favored children from wealthy families. According to these stories, the community tends to assume that wealth and ability go hand in hand, but their own family's experience contradicts this assumption, suggesting that poverty does not always correspond to moral status. As additional evidence of this, they gave a more recent example. Tegal was home to a prominent youth gamelan ensemble. At one point the group needed to choose a new drummer, and they selected a boy from a wealthy family. According to Kompiang and Wayan, this boy did not turn out to be particularly talented, and the group's level of playing began to decline. They both felt that Kompiang's son Putu would have been a

better choice, but that he had been overlooked because their family was, despite recent economic gains, still viewed as relatively poor. By critiquing the community's tendency to equate poverty with low moral standing, Wayan and Kompiang contest the judgments that (they are painfully aware) are conferred on them as a result of their persistent reputation as a poor family.

As we can see from this example, the ambiguity inherent in this ethical semiotics is not only a source of uncertainty; it also creates a space for acts of performative self-making. That is to say, people can intervene to construct the semiotic world that represents them in a variety of ways. We have seen throughout this chapter how Wayan and Kompiang seek, in their conversations with me, to shape my impression of things in a way that favorably represents them. (These acts of verbal self-fashioning were the primary way that I learned about this ethical semiotics). One especially common way people seek to mold impressions in this way is by concealing or downplaying unfortunate events and circumstances in their lives. For example, when I found out that a female friend had been in a motorbike accident, she responded to my inquiries by simply saying "I'm fine now," ignoring my attempts to find out how the accident had happened and how, if at all, she had been injured. When a close male friend of mine mysteriously lost consciousness for two weeks I wasn't able to get more than a brief account from him of what had happened before he uncomfortably changed the subject. In addition to exhibiting signs of discomfort when asked about these misfortunes, my acquaintances in the field would also avoid taking steps that would publicly acknowledge a problem. For example, when I told Wayan that my expensive camera

had been swiped from my bike basket by a thief on a passing motorbike, he encouraged me to quietly report the incident to the police while concealing it from people in his village. Wayan and Kompiang's mother Jero Biang suffered from a chronic cough that periodically became quite severe, prompting her children to debate whether they should seek medical treatment for her. The grandmother herself was ambivalent: as Wayan told me, she often expressed worry about the shame she would feel if people knew she'd been taken to see a doctor, an intervention which would mark her as seriously ill. As we might expect, this desire to delay treatment in order to avoid the shame associated with illness can have serious health consequences: when a neighbor died of complications related to diabetes I was told that she had long known that she was sick but refused to seek medical attention.

Another common and more controversial example of these efforts to manipulate signs of divine judgment is the use of loans to cover ceremonial expenses. When a family hosts a lavish ceremony, this is likely to be read as a positive reflection of their own social and moral standing. This is because pulling off a large ceremony is presumed to require certain valued forms of assistance: social networks must be mobilized to prepare large quantities of offerings and food, and divine blessings of wealth and protection are needed to cover costs and to guard against bad weather and other misfortunes that might disrupt the ritual. The observable objects and events that make up the ceremony index this assistance, which in turn indexes the ceremony's hosts, whose relationships with people and gods enable them to mobilize the assistance

in the first place.<sup>100</sup> Aware of these indexical relationships, and the moral weight that they carry, families sometimes take out loans in order to afford a level of ceremony that would otherwise be beyond their means, a practice which is stigmatized but not uncommon. The use of a loan is morally significant, as it reduces dependence on other forms of assistance: the limitations of poverty can be overcome without having to wait around for divine blessings, and the extra money may allow for offerings and food to be purchased rather than prepared by volunteers from the hosts' family or community. Loans thus destabilize the causal-indexical relationship linking the material form of the ceremony to the social and moral standing of the hosts. No longer dependent on the hosts' relationships with community members and deities, the ceremony is a product (and index) of a different kind of agency, which doesn't have the same moral value. A lavish ceremony is thus a morally ambiguous sign; determining its true moral significance means correctly identifying the forms of agency responsible for it, a point I return to later.

As we can see, the awareness that people actively work to shape their semiotic surround creates an additional layer of ambiguity. These examples highlight another key aspect of the semiotic ideology I've been describing, namely the belief that signs of good and bad fortune are (at least potentially) both indexical and performative: that is, they both passively reflect reality and, at the same time, are available as resources for performatively creating it.<sup>101</sup> The performative potential of these signs introduces the

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<sup>100</sup> This resonates with Geertz's description of the basis for royal power in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bali (1980).

<sup>101</sup> Drawing on J. L. Austin (1962) and Judith Butler (1990), I use the word performative to describe actions that simultaneously represent and constitute reality. Indexicality, on the other hand, refers to signs that passively reflect a *given* reality. In practice, the two are often intertwined: the materiality of indexes

possibility of deception, that people may manipulate their material surroundings in order to create an impression that contradicts divine judgments about them. That is, they may actively work to encourage incorrect abductions about their moral status.

We might expect that this ambiguity would serve to diminish the relevance that this ethical semiotics has for people. If the signs are so ambiguous, they may not matter to people very much. I have already indicated that this is not the case. The example of ceremonies provides particularly strong evidence in support of this claim.

Notwithstanding the performative, self-fashioning possibilities that they afford for their hosts, ceremonies are a source of tremendous anxiety, and, when successful, a great source of pride, precisely because of their *indexical* significance, what they are believed to *reveal* about a person's moral status. I was present as the Dangin family prepared for two major life cycle rituals. Both involved many sleepless nights as the family and their network of voluntary assistants scrambled to prepare the elaborate offerings and decorations needed to mount a level of ceremony appropriate to their caste and social status.<sup>102</sup> During the prayers at the end of one of these ceremonies, Wayan started crying uncontrollably. He told me later that he had been overcome with emotion because his ceremony had been a success. He said his feelings of joy and relief were

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makes them available for human projects of *active* world-making, but part of their significance may depend on their being misrecognized as *passive* reflections of the world. For example, gender performances are often presumed to be indexes of a gender identity that is already given, and this misrecognition is part of their power. Similarly, within the semiotic ideology I'm describing here, the ethical significance of signs depends on the abduction of non-human (i.e. divine) agency, which the signs are supposed to *passively* reflect. Thus, the distinction between indexicality and performativity, as I am defining it here, is part of this local semiotic ideology in the sense that people work to determine whether a particular sign is a passive reflection of a given reality or an active attempt to redefine or misrepresent reality.

<sup>102</sup> They referred to this level of ceremony as *bebangkit*.

mixed with a sense of vindication toward the Dauh family, as though he presumed the latter would hope for the ceremony to be a failure. This example demonstrates that although the indexical meanings of ceremonies are unstable, they nonetheless carry significant moral weight.

I would therefore argue that the inherent ambiguity of this semiotic system serves not to diminish its relevance in people's lives, but to enhance it. The uncertain, contestable nature of these signs allows room for creativity, for people to have agency in shaping their moral status through mediatory practice. Rather than only defining people as 'good' or 'bad,' these mediatory practices provide a space for self- and world-making. In the case of the Dangin family, these performative practices were deeply meaningful to them.

Bringing up issues of performativity may seem to shift the focus away from ethics as we commonly understand it. Performative practices like "self-presentation" or "impression management" run counter to the forms of activity most commonly associated with ethics (Goffman 1959). Within a certain pervasive understanding of ethics, behaving ethically seems to demand, on the one hand, that we turn our attention inward, to cultivate virtues and use these virtues to choose correct action. On the other hand, ethics also demands that we relate to others in a particular way; that we act in ways that promote human flourishing. Both in how we act on ourselves and how we relate to others, we are not supposed to concern ourselves with impressions too much.

Right action should be undertaken for its own sake, not because it will benefit our status or reputation.<sup>103</sup>

It is my contention, however, that we must take performative practices seriously as ways of living ethically, at least within the Balinese context. In the next section I address the issue of performativity and explain why our commonsense ethical frameworks are insufficient to the task of interpreting this particular form of ethical life.

### ***Performativity and the Materialization of Ethical Selves***

In the spring of 2014, the Dangin family was preparing to hold a large tooth-filing ceremony. In the midst of the preparations they made plans to demolish their small, smoke-blackened kitchen and replace it with a larger, more modern one. They appeared to force this project to come to fruition in advance of the ceremony, even though they couldn't really afford it at that time, and the added work and financial strain was creating extra anxiety and hardship during an already stressful period. One day, when Wayan was fretting over the cost of the building materials, I asked him whether it would be better to wait and build the new kitchen after completing the ceremony. He answered in English, "If people see my kitchen like this, they'll say I'm a bad person."

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<sup>103</sup> One illustration of this commonsense ethical position can be found in Goffman's work on self-presentation. While Goffman himself does not adhere to the idea that the work of impression management is immoral, his text nonetheless highlights the moral problems that are created (within a particular tradition of ethical thought) when "instead of allowing an impression of their activity to arise as an incidental by-product of that activity" . . . people instead "reorient their frame of reference and devote their efforts to the creation of desired impressions (1959: 250). Goffman sees acts of impression management as a ubiquitous and necessary feature of social interaction, and he describes the work of impression management as "amoral," rather than immoral (*ibid.*: 251). However, his descriptions, and especially his emphasis on the lengths to which people will go in order to conceal the work of impression management, suggest that he presumes his readers will see the activities he is exposing as deceptive, and therefore immoral. This moral position thus pervades his work.

At the time when Wayan said this to me I did not know what to make of it. On the one hand, his statement seemed to indicate that his community would view his lack of economic means as a *moral* failing. This seemed extraordinarily unjust to me, so I was surprised by his apparent acceptance of it. But given his acceptance, I was even more surprised by his response. It seemed like the project was nothing more than a shallow bid to make his family *appear* wealthy, and it seemed out of character for him to so candidly admit to this kind of vanity. Later, as I came to better understand the ethics and semiotics of wealth display as he and other members of his household and community understood them, however, I came to see the link between having a bad kitchen and being a bad person in a different light.

As the de facto head of his family, Wayan was the person in charge of new building projects. Before his father passed away, the two of them had worked together, along with Kadek, to collect funds to build several new buildings on their plot of land. In their final project together, they built the walls for a large brick house, which they hoped to one day rent out to foreigners, the house that I lived in during my fieldwork. When I first met this family, shortly after the father's death, the house remained unfinished. There was no roof and tall green grass grew where the floor should have been. Since that time, Wayan has managed to finish the guest house, and build or improve several other structures within the home. He oversaw the construction of a new bale dauh, as well as the new kitchen just mentioned, and made substantial improvements to his family temple, adding new shrines, a wall, a gate, and a small garden in front of the entrance. In speaking to me about these projects over the years, he often connected

them to what he called (in English) “a good life.” On several occasions, he expressed sadness that his father wasn’t there to see the improvements he had made. He blamed himself for this, seeing it as having failed to “give him a good life.” He worried that his mother too would pass away before this elusive “good life” was achieved. At first, I thought what Wayan meant by a good life was a matter of comfort, that he wanted his parents to have comfortable places to sleep, cook, pray, and so on. Over time, however, it became clear that what he wanted to provide for his parents was more like a sense of completion, a confirmation that his family has succeeded in life, not just materially, but also ethically. Having a nice kitchen, or a nice house more generally, is not just to avoid being *called* a “bad person.” These material successes are also reassurances that one is not, in fact, bad.

Wayan’s statement did not make sense to me initially because it diverged so significantly from the ethical frameworks that were familiar to me. One factor that made this statement so counterintuitive was that it seemed to conflate persons and things: what kind of *person* Wayan is seems to depend on what kinds of *things* he has. Meanwhile, the commonsense Western ethics in which I was raised draws a strict separation between human subjects and material objects. A key piece of this ethical framework is the normative ideal of sincerity. Within the framework of sincerity, interior parts of the self are understood to be the core of ethical personhood. According to this view, interior thoughts and motivations are the source of (ethical as well as unethical) acts and the proper object of ethical cultivation (i.e. efforts to cultivate virtues). Material

practices (including speech acts) are morally suspicious because they may misrepresent the interior sentiments of the actor or speaker (Keane 2002, 2007).

We have already seen that the deceptive potential of material practices is also problematic within the moral framework I am describing here. The new buildings on the Dauh family's property are frustrating to members of the Dangin family because (in the latter's view) they create an inaccurate (even deceitful) impression of their relatives' moral status. However, the problem is not that the Dauh family's actions are insincere. That would imply that what is at issue is the latter's intentions: that the buildings are morally problematic because they were constructed with the intention to misrepresent reality. Other interactions I had with the Dangin family indicate that intentions were not the main issue for them, suggesting that intentions are not morally problematic in the same way that they are within the framework of sincerity. For example, in discussing his struggle to build a new kitchen before his family's ceremony, Wayan is clear that part of his intention is to prevent people from calling him a bad person. In this sense, the project is an intentional act of impression management. His ready acknowledgement of this fact is significant because in all of our conversations about the Dauh family's buildings he is meticulous in representing himself and the members of his family as morally upright. The fact that Wayan does not attempt to conceal his intention to manipulate others' impressions of him suggests that he does not see this intention as morally problematic. Whereas, within the framework of sincerity, people look to

intentions to discover the true moral value of actions, intentions do not seem to be a major concern for Wayan.<sup>104</sup>

As we have already seen, wealth and other signs of good fortune take on moral significance when they are understood to be a divine response to human activity. The ability to discern divine judgments on the basis of material circumstances depends on the abduction of a certain combination of human and divine agency. For any set of circumstances, other abductions are possible, which may prompt very different evaluations. Because of this, distinguishing whether or not divine forces contributed to producing a particular outcome is morally significant. The importance of this distinction was apparent in the ways Kompiang would gossip about the Dauh family. When we chatted while making food or offerings, Kompiang would often reveal what she perceived to be the hidden machinations behind the various signs of good fortune that attached themselves to her cousin-in-law, Jero Made. For example, when Jero Made's husband came home with a new motorbike, Kompiang was quick to point out to me that it had been purchased with a loan. On another occasion, she commented on the offerings she'd seen Jero Made preparing for an upcoming ceremony. "Her offerings look very nice and expensive," she said, with a note of irony in her voice. Then she pointed out that her cousin leaves the plastic wrapping on the grapes and other costly, ant-attractive items in her offerings. "We have no way of knowing how God consumes these things," she said; then she explained that she always makes a hole in the plastic

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<sup>104</sup> I do not mean to suggest that intentions do not have any moral significance for my interlocutors in Bali. When a person causes harm to another, the question of whether they did so intentionally matters a great deal. Here I am making a more limited claim about the moral significance of intentions vis-à-vis acts of performative self-making, particularly those that involve inferences about divine agency.

on her own offerings, to ensure that the food inside can be accessed. During the course of a Balinese Hindu ritual, offerings are placed in shrines and other locations, whereupon deities and spirits are invited to enjoy them. Then, once the ceremony is over—anywhere from an hour to several days later—whatever remains in edible condition becomes available for human consumption. Although eating these leftovers is encouraged, it is not considered appropriate for a person to construct offerings with their own mouth and stomach in mind. From Kompiang's point of view, the intact plastic wrappings in Jero Made's offerings betrayed the latter's cheap and selfish effort to ensure that the food would not spoil before the ceremony's completion. By pointing out these intact plastic wrappings, my friend reframes the expensive fruits and cakes inside them as indexes of frugality, rather than wealth. These two moments of gossip differ in content, but they follow a similar pattern: first, Kompiang identifies potential signs of wealth and good fortune—signs which, if taken as indexes of divine judgment, would reflect positively on her cousin-in-law's moral standing; then, she reveals that the true agency behind these observable outcomes is not divine blessing, but her cousin's efforts to appear wealthy while, at the same time, acting in ways that are unlikely to earn divine favor. In drawing these connections, my friend is clearly sensitive to both the indexical and performative potential of signs of divine judgment. That is to say, she's aware of the tendency to read these signs as passive, transparent reflections of some underlying and given reality, and she's also aware that practices of wealth display can be misleading, creating the appearance of divine blessings where there are none to be found. Although intentions are lurking in Kompiang's descriptions (e.g. Jero Made's

intentions to appear wealthy and to preserve food) they are not the most morally significant issue for her. The moral weight of Kompiang's statements derives instead from how they expose the 'fact' that Jero Made isn't actually wealthy or devout, for if she was, Kompiang suggests, her husband would buy the motorbike outright, and she would be less worried about preserving the food and more concerned with pleasing god; she would cut holes in the plastic wrappings, as Kompiang herself does. In making these morally laden statements, Kompiang is gesturing toward the generative forces that gave rise to a particular set of material circumstances. While expensive offerings may invite abductions of divine blessing, she pushes me toward a different abduction: that Jero Made, not god, was responsible for these apparent 'blessings.'

To grasp the ethical import of these indexes, it may be useful to think of them not as *representations* of people's relationships with god, but as *manifestations* of that relationship. This framing helps clarify the fact that these relationships are inherently mediated; they do not exist, and are not discussed, independently of the indexes that mediate them. Following from this, the performative acts of self-making that I discuss here should not be thought of only as acts of impression management (though that is part of what they are). These acts do not merely represent (or misrepresent) people's relationships with god; they enact and materialize those relationships, making them available for reflection and evaluation. In a sense, they can be thought of as a kind of ongoing test of the relationship, whose success or failure depends on whether or not divine agents choose to cooperate. An individual or family may be able to manage impressions without divine cooperation, but only in a limited way. At some point in the

future, the karmic outcome of their actions will catch up to them. This means that to properly act within this representational economy people must consider how god will respond. Therefore, we must take people's engagements with material things seriously as a form of ethical practice. To surround oneself with signs of divine blessing is to constitute oneself as a moral person.

Another example may serve to further illustrate this point. After a bout of severe food poisoning I decided I wanted to provide funds so that the Daging family could buy a small refrigerator, which I hoped would help me avoid eating out at local food stalls. When I proposed this to the family Kompiang brought up the fact that the wall around the family temple remained unfinished. She noted that the cost of finishing the wall was roughly equivalent to the price of a small fridge and suggested that it would be better to finish the wall first. This wasn't the first time I'd heard her speak disapprovingly of a refrigerator purchase. Just a few weeks prior, the Dauh family had bought one. At the time of their purchase, they were in the process of constructing their new kitchen, but the project had been on hold for several months. According to Kompiang, they should have waited to purchase the fridge until after the kitchen was complete. From her point of view, this inappropriately-timed purchase served as one of many examples of how the Dauh's always *salah arah uangnya* (send their money in the wrong direction) which, she claimed, was one of the reasons why *sampai sekarang, mereka tak punya apa-apa* (until now, they have nothing). In expressing her hesitation about her own family's decision to buy a fridge, she was certainly sensitive to how this purchase might be perceived by others, what impression it would give of her family's relationship with god.

But she was equally, if not more concerned about how the purchase could *affect* that relationship. Members of the Dangin family often spoke about the importance of striking the right balance between religious and personal expenditures. Within this moral economy, the construction of sacred and semi-sacred structures on one's property (a category which encompasses not only the family temple but also the other buildings that make up a traditional house, including the kitchen) should take priority over the purchase of things like new clothing, appliances, and other seemingly unnecessary items. Although she didn't say so explicitly, I believe Kompiang was concerned that purchasing a fridge before completing the temple wall might upset this balance and risk putting her own family in the undesirable position of 'having nothing,' a position which is both material and ethical, since to have nothing is to have a broken relationship with god, or in Wayan's terms, to be a "bad person." If this analysis is correct, it follows that actions like buying or building things can be a form of ethical self-cultivation.

If this conclusion seems paradoxical, that may be because it seems to suggest that an ethical transformation of the self can be effected simply by altering appearances. This apparent paradox dissolves if we remember that the signs that mediate how people appear to others are also manifestations of their relationship with god, and it is this relationship, rather than an interiorized self, that is at the core of my interlocutors' conception of moral selfhood.

When my interlocutors make judgments about the true or hidden moral value of an action, the question they ask is not whether actions were sincere or insincere, but rather, what kinds of generative forces were involved in producing the consequences

that followed from the actions. If the kitchen that Wayan constructed before his family's ceremony is a manifestation of divine blessing, then it carries a positive moral value regardless of whether he acted with the intention of manipulating his guests' impressions.<sup>105</sup> It is part of the accumulation of signs that mediate and manifest his relationship with god. If, however, the kitchen can be determined not to be a manifestation of divine blessing but a product of human agency only, then it would not carry this same moral value. This shows that performativity presents a different kind of moral problem in Bali than it does in a context where the norm of sincerity is predominant. Within such a context, the difficulty in evaluating others on the basis of indexes derives from the fact that appearances may conceal motives, intentions, and personal qualities that are not in keeping with the persona that is being projected. The challenge in that case is to look past the outward persona and see the true self concealed beneath it.<sup>106</sup> But within the ethics of divine blessing the problem is that the signs that index divine blessing may be acquired by purely human means. Within this ethical orientation, discerning underlying intentions is often less important than determining whether or not divine agency was involved in producing the observable result.

## ***Conclusion***

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<sup>105</sup> It's conceivable that the kind of performative self-fashioning that troubles sincerity frameworks is simply taken for granted in Bali. Whereas Goffman vividly portrays the ways in which people work to conceal and dissimulate their acts of impression management, in order to make them appear 'natural,' it's possible that my interlocutors in Bali accept that everyone intends to make performative claims about themselves, and that the important question is whether or not god steps in to support those claims.

<sup>106</sup> Of course, this process too depends on the reading of indexes.

In this chapter I have explored how a particular semiotic ideology underwrites and enables a unique form of ethical life in which a person's moral status is believed to be reflected in their material circumstances. Within this ethical semiotics, signs of good and bad fortune—such as new kitchens, motorbikes, lavish offerings, skills, and poverty—are ethical affordances, which provide a basis for moral judgment and decision-making. While these signs serve as guidance for navigating a complex moral world, they may also be misleading. As we saw in the case of Wayan's efforts to construct a new kitchen in order to avoid being seen as a "bad person," this ambiguity creates spaces of possibility for people to materialize their relationship with god through acts of performative self-presentation, and in doing so, to redefine their moral status.

The ethics of divine blessing provides a particularly clear illustration of the way ethical subjectivity grows out of, and is situated within, mediatory practices. While material forms are central to the ways members of the Dangin family think and talk about ethics, the forms of ethical life that I discuss in the remaining chapters tend to downplay the role of material forms, focusing instead on individuals' interior thoughts, intentions, and feelings. Yet, even these more interiorized versions of ethics require material forms in order to gain social currency and become livable in practice. As I seek to show, both within the ethics of divine blessing, and in the forms of ethical life that I discuss in later chapters, the processes by which semiotic forms are taken up as affordances within the practical activity of ethical life play a crucial role in forming ethical subjectivities.

The picture of ethical life that I've painted here highlights signification and performativity. This focus on appearances, surfaces, and especially performance, may seem to suggest that the ethical life I'm describing lacks the kind of depth we typically expect of the ethical domain. Readers may wonder whether the judgments and evaluations I've discussed are truly ethical in nature, or whether they would be better described in other terms (e.g. as a kind of micro-politics). This would imply that what's ultimately at stake in these practices is reputation, not striving to live a good life in a deep ethical sense. I would argue, however, that when my interlocutors engage in acts of performative self-presentation they are also submitting themselves to the judgments that result. According to Lambek, it is this condition of being subject to judgment that constitutes ethics (2013: 840). Rather than a simple ploy to manipulate impressions, these acts entail a certain kind of ethical commitment: a commitment to be held morally accountable if the performance fails. When successful, these performative acts can alter the criteria by which actors will be judged, but this is only because success is believed to depend on, and thus reflect, a divine moral endorsement.

I believe the pervasive tendency to view ethics and performance as somehow antithetical to one another is part of the reason that questions of ethics have rarely been raised in the scholarship on Bali. When ethics has been discussed in this literature, it is usually in reference to the reformist ethics I discuss in the next chapter, not the ethics of customary and domestic life discussed here. It is as though Balinese Hinduism only begins to concern itself with ethical matters after it has been reshaped through colonial encounter and the demands of post-colonial nation-building and capitalist expansion.

I would argue instead that this line of thinking is itself grounded in a particular set of values that, according to Webb Keane, originated in ascetic Protestantism and subsequently came to influence discourses of modernity worldwide—the value of sincerity and the concept of moral personhood that it expresses, in particular (Keane 2007).

As I show in the next chapter, the idea that traditional Balinese religiosity is characterized by a lack of concern for ethics has been taken up by religious reformers, who argue that Balinese Hinduism, as traditionally practiced, is superficial—overly focused on the material aspects of ritual and neglectful of the deeper ethical and philosophical dimensions of Hinduism. In place of what they perceive to be an overly-ritualistic approach to religion, reformers promote the doctrine of *tulus ikhlas* (sincerity), which asserts that inner feelings and intentions, not material forms, ensure the efficacy of worship and define the moral value of actions. In refocusing attention on sincerity, these reformers claim to be correcting an ‘imbalance’ in Balinese religion by reviving concern for ethical matters.

Rather than seeing the Hindu Reform as (re)introducing an ethical dimension to religious life in Bali, the next two chapters seek to show that what the Reform in fact does is introduce a new kind of religious ethics based on different values and a different conception of moral personhood. If this reformist ethics has been more widely recognized as *ethical* by Western scholars, this is because it more closely aligns with commonsense Western ethical thought.

In this chapter, I have sought to show that although the norm of sincerity is a particularly pervasive ethical framework, it is not a necessary condition for ethics. It is possible to have a robust ethical life that does not hinge on the distinction between sincere and insincere action or privilege interiority as the core of moral selfhood. In the next chapter I show that the framework of sincerity is not just a misplaced analytical tool. It is also an ideological tool being employed by the Indonesian state to delegitimize certain aspects of Balinese religious practice and redefine what it means to be a devout Hindu.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PUJA TRI SANDHYA AND THE ETHICS OF SINCERITY

#### ***Silencing***

One late morning I was watching TV in the Dangin family's *bale dauh*. I Wayan Windia was being interviewed on a television program called *Inspirasi Bali* (Bali's Inspiration). I recognized Windia's name and face because I owned two of his books. I thought of him as a progressive thinker, not someone who wants to leave Balinese traditions behind, but someone who has put careful thought into how they could best be adapted to modern life. Windia and the program's two hosts, one woman and one man, both attractive and in their twenties, were seated in chairs in front of a small table. Mirroring norms of dress common throughout Indonesian television, the young woman was dressed in a knee-length sleeveless dress and the young man was wearing khaki pants and a button-up shirt. Meanwhile, Pak Windia was wearing Balinese *pakaian adat* (customary dress): a black *jas* (jacket) with a reddish-brown batik *udeng* (Balinese headscarf) tied around his head. His appearance thus reflected both his ethnic and his religious identity. The conversation was about marriage. The female guest asked what she called a *pertanyaan sederhana* (simple question): *kenapa kawin?* (why marry?) Pak Windia said the first reason was to fulfill sexual needs, the second reason was to have descendants, and the third reason, which he described as *niskala*, was to *menebus dosa leluhur* (roughly: atone for ancestral sins). *Dosa seperti apa misalnya?* (What sins, for example?) the male host asked. Pak Windia demurred. Because the issue had to do with *niskala*, he explained, it was a matter of *kepercayaan* (belief), and therefore *pribadi*

(private, individual). *Kalau tidak percaya*, (if you don't believe) their guest said, *bisa coret saja* (you can just cross it out). Windia then went on to discuss the two *sekala* (material, 'real') reasons for marrying in more detail, reiterating that the third reason *tidak perlu dibicarakan* (doesn't need to be spoken about) because it was linked to *niskala*.

In the previous two chapters I showed how the *niskala* world is a dynamic presence in the lives of the people I lived with in Bali. This presence takes shape through practices of myth-making, by which people attempt to interpret and evaluate their relationships with invisible beings, and through forms of ritual exchange and other communicative practices, through which they seek to manage those relationships. What emerges from these various activities is a particular conception of human-*niskala* relations, which sustains and is sustained by, a whole range of socio-material practices. In Chapter 1, I showed how practices of representing and interacting with the *niskala* world sustain particular forms of sensory attunement, which in turn sustain the sense of being relationally entangled with invisible beings. In Chapter 2, I showed that people's relationships with invisible beings have ethical significance, and how ongoing ritual exchanges are central to their understanding of what it means to live a good life, and thus form the basis for forms of ethical self-making.

The particular conception of human-*niskala* relations described in those chapters was not the only one that I encountered in the field. When I shifted my attention from the moral space of the Dangin household to that of the local mass media, I found a markedly different conception of this relationship. Twice per day, the local television

station Bali TV broadcasts recordings of *dharma wacana* (Hindu sermons) recorded at temple ceremonies and other religious gatherings throughout Bali. On April 30, the station aired a sermon by Ida Pedanda Gede Made Gunung, one of the program's most popular preachers. He was discussing common misconceptions about *buta kala* (lower spirits). To illustrate one of his points, he depicted a hypothetical ritual. The scene was chaotic; there were people shouting and falling into trance. "The buta kala are going that way! They're running away!" the speaker said, imitating the voices of the villagers performing the ritual. Then, returning to his own voice, he pointed toward his body and said: *Padahal buta kala dini ngoyong!* (However, buta kala stay here [in us]). His point was clear: buta kala are not beings running around out in the world, they are parts of ourselves. In between programs, the same station would sometimes air a short video clip of a middle-aged woman walking among the trees of a rubber plantation. Speaking in a calm and gentle voice, she admonished her (Balinese Hindu) audience to be *tulus ikhlas* (sincere) like the rubber tree, which gives without expecting anything in return. Like the interview with which I started this chapter, these televisual images effectively silence the lifeworld I described in previous chapters, bracketing it from the sphere of public religious discourse and replacing it with a different set of ethical values and ideals.

As described in the Introduction, from the 1950s to the present, various state institutions have sought to impose their version of Hinduism on the Balinese population, a project I call the Hindu Reform. Although the post-authoritarian period has seen a relaxation of censorship laws and greater opportunities for religious expression,

reformist interpretations of Hindu doctrine and practice continue to dominate public discourse about Balinese religiosity. Thus, although Bali TV is not a state-controlled media outlet, the programs it airs tend to align with state religious doctrine and can thus be understood as broadly continuous with the state's reformist project. Central to this project is an effort to transform how Balinese Hindus conceptualize, relate to, and interact with invisible beings. In this chapter I discuss one of the key tools in this effort: the Puja Tri Sandhya. A distinctly modern Hindu prayer, the Puja Tri Sandhya gives material form to several aspects of reformist Hindu doctrine and ideology. It promotes a monotheistic concept of divinity, a nationalistic vision of Hindu identity, and an individualized and dematerialized understanding of religious devotion. Of particular interest to me, the prayer also supports the broader reformist effort to promote what I call an ethics of sincerity (*tulus ikhlas*), a vision of ethical life that posits interior thoughts and feelings as the core of ethical selfhood and the primary medium of human-niskala interaction. The Balinese mass media is full of Hindu-themed programming that admonishes its addressees to be more *tulus ikhlas*. Yet the Puja Tri Sandhya is unique in that it provides Balinese Hindus with a concrete way of embodying sincerity in their daily lives.

The normative ideal of *tulus ikhlas*, as articulated within the Hindu Reform, is linked to a particular semiotic ideology, which holds that sincere words and thoughts are the ideal medium of communication between humans and the divine, a view which contrasts markedly with the moral semiotics described in Chapter 2. As linguistic anthropologists like Richard Bauman, Charles Briggs, and Webb Keane have shown,

language ideologies that privilege direct, transparent forms of expression have played a crucial role in the construction of modernity across a range of national contexts by fostering new subjectivities and justifying new relations of power (Bauman and Briggs 2003, Keane 2002). In this chapter, I make the case that the Puja Tri Sandhya is part of a similar ideological project.

The Puja Tri Sandhya exists in multiple forms.<sup>107</sup> I focus on the two most common of these. First, I look at the Tri Sandhya's circulation as an audio and video recording. As a pervasive feature of the contemporary Balinese soundscape, I argue, the Tri Sandhya gives audible form to a distinctly modern form of religious identity and belonging. Second, I investigate the Tri Sandhya as a religious pedagogy of voice, which is learned in school, and, ideally, performed privately on a daily basis. I explore how the act of reciting the Tri Sandhya differs from other Balinese prayer practices and consider its role in cultivating one of the core virtues promoted by the Hindu Reform: *tulus ikhlas* (sincerity). I argue that the policy of teaching the Tri Sandhya in school is a tool for inculcating the norm of sincerity, while also providing Balinese Hindus with a way of inhabiting that norm in their day-to-day interactions with the divine. In closing, I consider the role of the Tri Sandhya in the lives of adults. I suggest that the prayer affords the possibility for a particular kind of narrative re-envisioning, and I provide some limited ethnographic evidence to suggest that such a process is in fact taking place.

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<sup>107</sup> Two interesting manifestations of the Tri Sandhya that I do not get around to discussing deserve mention. First, the Tri Sandhya is part of *lomba desa pakraman* (desa pakraman competitions), where *pelaksanaan Tri Sandhya* (implementation of the Tri Sandhya) is one of the criteria on which villages are judged. Second, the Tri Sandhya is part of the national *Jambore Pasraman*. *Pasraman* (ashrams) are informal schools where children and youth study Hinduism. The *Jambore Pasraman* are state-sponsored festivals where pasraman from across the country compete in various religious activities, including chanting the Tri Sandhya.

### ***Puja Tri Sandhya: A Modern Hindu Prayer***

The Puja Trisandhya is a thrice-daily private prayer introduced to Balinese Hinduism in the 1950s. As explained in a 5<sup>th</sup> grade Hindu Religion and Character textbook, the word Tri Sandhya comes from the root words *tri*, meaning three, and *sandhi* meaning *hubungan* (connection); it refers to the practice of *berhubungan* (connecting) with god three times per day (Darta and Duwijo 2014: 3). Although the practice did not originate in Bali, the particular form it takes there appears to be unique to Indonesian Hinduism.<sup>108</sup>

The Puja Tri Sandhya is unique among reformist interventions in that it was unknown in Bali before the reform movement got underway. Thus, while many efforts to reform Balinese Hindu religiosity have consisted of applying new interpretations to existing material practices, the Tri Sandhya represents a rare case in which an entirely new practice was introduced. Though loosely based on priestly practices of mantra recitation, the prayer departs significantly from the ways Balinese Hindu laity typically interact with god.

In its most basic form the Puja Tri Sandhya consists of a Sanskrit *mantram* (mantra), which is chanted while maintaining a specific hand posture. The recitation is often preceded by an exercise to regulate the breath (*pranayama*). The text of the mantra is composed of six stanzas, which are compiled from several Vedic sources.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> According to Titib, the practice of praying three times a day is advocated in the Rgveda (V.54.6) (Titib 1997: 31) The term also appears in the Bhagavad Gita.

<sup>109</sup> The text begins with the Gayatri Mantra then proceeds through passages from the *Narayana Upanisad*, *Sivastava*, and *Ksamamahadevastuti* (Titib 1997: 32-35).

The text discusses the unity and singularity of god and asks for god's protection and forgiveness.

The Tri Sandhya first appeared in Bali during the post-independence period, when Balinese religious reformers were working to convince the Indonesian government that the people of Bali had a legitimate religion.<sup>110</sup> The practice resembles the Islamic *salat* and was therefore useful for legitimizing Hinduism in the eyes of Muslims.

According to Martin Ramstedt, the Tri Sandhya was introduced by Narendra Dev Pandit Shastri, a Hindu missionary who settled in Bali in 1950 and became involved with the Hindu Reform movement there (2004: 11-12).<sup>111</sup> Shastri described the Puja Tri Sandhya in his book *Intisari Hindu Dharma (The Essence of Hindu Dharma)*, an Indonesian-language book that summarizes many Hindu beliefs that would eventually become foundational principles in the state version of Hinduism in Indonesia. He also taught the Tri Sandhya at Yayasan Dwijendra, a foundation and school that provided courses on Hinduism and served as a meeting place for reformist organizations during the early years of the reform movement's existence (Landmann 2012: 257-259).

The Puja Tri Sandhya has been taught in Balinese public schools since at least the 1960s. Today Balinese students recite it at the beginning and end of each school day. On quiet afternoons I could sometimes hear the sound of the prayer wafting over from the nearby elementary school. In an interview I conducted with a teacher at the school, she told me that students begin learning the prayer in first grade, initially

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<sup>110</sup> For more on the history and development of the Puja Tri Sandhya, see Lanus 2014.

<sup>111</sup> Bakker claims that Shastri was sent to Bali by the Arya Samaj (1993: 227). Ramstedt supports this claim, but also notes that Shastri himself apparently denied it (2004: 11). Somvir, on the other hand, claims that Shastri's activities in Bali were funded by the Birla Mission (2004: 258).

memorizing only the first stanza, then they gradually memorize additional stanzas each year until by the time they finish third grade they have memorized the entire text.

Balinese children are taught that it is their duty as Hindus to perform the Puja Tri Sandhya three times each day. Nevertheless, the practice of orally reciting the Tri Sandhya appears to be one that most adults associate primarily with their childhood and with school in particular. Wayan vividly described how, when he himself had attended the elementary school near his home, the entire school would recite the prayer simultaneously, each class vying to be louder than the others. Each class had its own distinct melody and rhythm, creating a complex polyphony. As an adult, however, Wayan struggled to remember some of the words of the prayer. Kompiang, for her part, never mentioned the Tri Sandhya to me, despite being an exceptionally devout Hindu who conversed with me about all kinds of other religious practices. During temple ceremonies in Tegal, the congregation would sometimes recite the Tri Sandhya immediately before the first cycle of muspa.<sup>112</sup> However, this was not done consistently, and even when it was done, it was not repeated during subsequent cycles of muspa, which meant that only the first wave of congregants (often a small minority) participated in the recitation. Indeed, no one in the Dangin household, and none of the other adults I interviewed about the Tri Sandhya, actually claimed to recite the text in its entirety on a daily basis. These observations suggest that the Puja Tri Sandhya, in its recited form, has a limited role in the religious lives of many adults. We will see later on, however, that what it means to perform the Tri Sandhya is not limited to oral recitation. Given that

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<sup>112</sup> This is always done during the full moon and new moon ceremonies at the Jagat Natha temple in Denpasar, the prayers for which are broadcast live on RRI Denpasar.

my primary interest in this chapter is in the Tri Sandhya as a means of inculcating and inhabiting the state's model of Hindu ethical subjectivity, I will give detailed attention to the various embodied ways of performing the Tri Sandhya later on. Before turning to that, however, I take a brief detour to discuss the Tri Sandhya's mass-mediated presence.

### ***The Puja Tri Sandhya and the Hindu Soundscape in Bali***

While the practice of orally reciting the Tri Sandhya is largely confined to school classrooms, the prayer has nonetheless become a pervasive feature of Bali's soundscape, not as a live performance, but as a recording. The Tri Sandhya was first recorded at RRI Denpasar in 1967 for broadcast over the air. Today many recorded versions exist, and RRI itself has re-recorded it several times. Most recordings follow the basic format of the original RRI recording, in which the text is sung in a slow and highly ornamented manner, and it is accompanied by the sound of *gender wayang* (a small gamelan ensemble) and *genta* (a bell that Balinese Hindu priests ring during rituals). During my fieldwork, the current RRI recording was by far the most common version in circulation. The musical accompaniment for this recording features a *gender* composition entitled *Merak Ngelo*, which has today become virtually synonymous with the Tri Sandhya.<sup>113</sup>

During the period of my fieldwork the Puja Tri Sandhya was broadcast at 6am, noon, and 6pm on nearly all local radio and television stations in Bali. In addition to

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<sup>113</sup> For more on the musical accompaniment to the Tri Sandhya, see Gold 1998: 45-48.

these on-air broadcasts, many customary village organizations have taken it upon themselves to broadcast recordings of the Tri Sandhya locally, on community-owned loudspeakers. Most often, a PA system is rigged up with a CD player and a timer, so that the recording plays automatically at the appropriate times, but occasionally the responsibility of playing the recording is delegated to a resident of the village. Almost invariably, the current RRI recording is used.<sup>114</sup> Although Tegal did not amplify the Tri Sandhya, several nearby villages did, and their amplification was loud enough that the prayer could easily be heard in the Dangin family home coming from several directions. At noon and 6pm in particular, when many households have their television or radio turned on, the distant sounds of the amplified prayer would intermingle with the nearby sounds of on-air broadcasts. The full recording lasts about five minutes, but each broadcast would start at a slightly different time. This meant that over the course of about six minutes or so, multiple layers of the recording could be heard playing slightly out of synch with one another, the sound growing denser as new layers started up, then petering out as each recording reached its conclusion.

This practice of broadcasting and amplifying the Tri Sandhya invites comparison with the Islamic call to prayer, which is also broadcast on television in Bali and amplified from local mosques. Indeed, as I discuss later on, my interlocutors in Bali often equated the two practices. However, the meaning of the two practices is in fact somewhat

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<sup>114</sup> Recordings of the Trisandhya are commercially available. However, the RRI recording is not. When I asked an employee at RRI how people outside RRI acquired this recording, he said sometimes people request a copy from the station, and they give them a CD, but he speculated that most people simply dub the recording from the radio. Throughout my fieldwork the only location I encountered that regularly amplifies the Trisandhya using a recording other than the RRI recording is the Jagat Natha temple in Denpasar.

different. For one thing, Muslims distinguish between the *azan* (the call to prayer) and the *salat* (the five daily prayers). Meanwhile, the Hindu equivalents of these practices fall under the single label “Tri Sandhya,” which can refer either to the prayer itself or the amplified or broadcast recording, which is often thought of as a reminder for the prayer. Secondly, Muslims are required to perform *salat* at particular times of day. To hear the *azan* and not follow up by promptly performing *salat* is thus considered a sin.<sup>115</sup> The sounding of the Tri Sandhya, on the other hand, is not widely understood as an imperative to stop whatever one happens to be doing and pray. As several of my informants told me, Hinduism is *fleksibel* (flexible), particularly in comparison to Islam, and this applies to the Puja Tri Sandhya.<sup>116</sup> Thus, while the airing of Tri Sandhya recordings follows a regular schedule, the corresponding prayer practices may be performed at the individual’s convenience.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Another key difference between these two practices is that the *azan* is generally performed live, whereas when the Tri Sandhya is amplified the source is typically a recording. One exception to this is that sometimes schools will use a PA system to amplify their daily recitations of the prayer. During my fieldwork I visited a school in Silungan that did this. Two students recited the text over the PA while all other students recited it in unison along with them, which created a more uniform effect than what I’d seen at the school in Tegal. The sound of the amplified recitation was loud enough to be audible throughout the surrounding neighborhood, whereas the sound of the school near where I lived was only audible to a few houses nearby.

<sup>116</sup> The idea that Hinduism is a more flexible religion than Islam is also a recurrent theme in reformist texts. Both in conversation and in texts, this claim was often accompanied by references to the Balinese concept of *desa kala patra*, which refers to the variation in custom from one village to another.

<sup>117</sup> Reformist texts vary as to how much flexibility is acceptable with regard to the Tri Sandhya. A 2014 textbook for the Hindu Religion and Character curriculum (5<sup>th</sup> grade) includes a chapter on the Tri Sandhya that states that the prayer must be performed at 6am, 12 noon, and 6pm, and that it may also be performed at other times *in addition* to the three mandatory (*wajib*) iterations. However, most other texts are far less strict. In *Upadeça Tentang Ajaran-Ajaran Agama Hindu (Clarification Regarding the Teachings of the Hindu Religion)*, one of the best-known reformist texts, The Tri Sandhya is described as a prayer that’s done individually, at a time and place of one’s own choosing (*diwaktu dan tempat yang dipilih sendiri*) (Parisada Hindu Dharma [1967] 1978: 71). In a more recent text entitled *Menjawab Pertanyaan Umat (Answering the Religious Community’s Questions)*, the author explains that although the Tri Sandhya should ideally be performed during sunrise, at midday, and during sunset, he does not specify exact times for each of the three daily prayers. In a later passage he explains that while priests must do their prayers on a strict schedule, laity are not bound by this requirement, and failure to pray at

In another sense, however, the Tri Sandhya does function similarly to the azan. Listeners may respond to the muezzin of their own mosque while at the same time recognizing the call as addressed not only to a particular congregation, but to the Muslim *umma* as a whole. The azan thus summons its addressees as members of a global religious community.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, amplified and broadcast recordings of the Tri Sandhya are understood to be addressed to all Balinese Hindus (or, for some listeners, all Indonesian Hindus).<sup>119</sup> They, too, summon a trans-local religious community, albeit one whose reach is confined to those who share a common ethnic or national identity.

To appreciate the significance of this, it will be useful to compare the sound of the Tri Sandhya to the ritual soundscape discussed in Chapter 1. As already noted, Balinese rituals and their associated sounds generally occur on and around particular

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the appropriate times will not in any way reduce the worshipper's piety (*bhakti*). This, he asserts, is because it is not the frequency but the quality (*kualitas*) of prayer that god evaluates (Widana 1997: 45-52). All of the people I spoke to about this issue concurred that the schedule for the Tri Sandhya was merely a guideline, not a requirement.

<sup>118</sup> In an article on debates around the use of amplification for the calling of the azan in Pakistan, Naveeda Khan provides several examples to illustrate this point. She includes a conversation in which one of her interlocutors described the experience of hearing the azan while traveling overseas and feeling a sense of connection with fellow Muslims in that country (Khan 2011: 585). Further emphasizing the idea of the azan as something that unites all Muslims worldwide, she also quotes a book by a Pakistani imam that described the azan as "The Voice that Reverberates around the World at All Times." "Have you ever realized," the text reads, "that not a second passes in our world without thousands, nay hundreds of thousands of muezzins announcing the singularity of Allah and the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him)" (*ibid.*: 587). However, her article also shows that there were different styles of calling the azan in Pakistan, which reflected divisions within the Muslim community, along sectarian and national lines (583-584). Thus it would seem that the azan has the potential to address Muslims simultaneously as members of a global *umma* and of specific subgroups within that broader collectivity.

<sup>119</sup> My interlocutors in the field exhibited varying degrees of awareness of the Indonesian Hindu community beyond Bali. While many saw themselves as sharing a common religion with members of other ethnic groups, some seemed to be either ignorant of the fact that some non-Balinese Indonesians call themselves Hindus, or resistant to the idea that their own religion is in fact 'the same' as that of those other groups. As I discuss later on, another reason the Tri Sandhya is often perceived as 'Balinese' has to do with the vocal style and musical accompaniment on the recordings.

auspicious days. Some of these days are celebrated throughout Bali.<sup>120</sup> Most, however, are not. Here I am referring primarily to temple *odalan*, the dates for which are unique to each individual temple. While an *odalan* is in progress, otherwise *sepi* temple spaces become exuberantly *ramé*, and their festive soundscapes carry well beyond the temple spaces from which they originate (and often beyond even the neighborhoods where the relevant congregations live). I would guess that from the Dangin home, the *odalan* of about fifteen temples were within earshot. For members of the Dangin family, these near and distant sounds marked out a complex yet familiar pattern as the sequence of ceremonies repeated itself every 210 days.<sup>121</sup> The nearby sounds of the eight village temples in which the family regularly worships provided an appropriately festive atmosphere as we prepared to present offerings to visiting deities. These sounds enacted the *desa adat* as an “acoustic community,” a social body whose collective identity is manifested or symbolized in sound.<sup>122</sup> The more distant sounds were sonic reminders of other acoustic communities. Marking ritual events in which the family was

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<sup>120</sup> This includes holidays like Galungan and Kuningan as well as days that are considered auspicious for carrying out weddings and other life cycle rituals. On particularly auspicious days many families throughout Bali will seize the opportunity to hold a ceremony. On such days, I was often invited to perform at one, or sometimes multiple, ceremonies, either playing *gender* with *Wayan*, or singing with one of the *sekaa santi* (see Chapter 4). Travelling to and from the ceremony, I would commonly see colorful decorative gates and groups of people in festive *pakaian adat* (traditional clothing) in front of many homes along the way, indicating that there was a ceremony taking place in the home.

<sup>121</sup> Since each temple has its *odalan* once every 210-day calendar cycle, these sounds follow a repeating, cyclical pattern. That said, the size and duration of each *odalan* may vary from one cycle to the next. For example, instead of completing an *odalan* in a single day, a congregation may choose to celebrate it for anywhere between three days to several weeks. Each ceremony’s impact on the soundscape will therefore also vary from year to year. An especially large *odalan* can pervade the neighborhood soundscape for months.

<sup>122</sup> I have borrowed the term “acoustic community” from Barry Truax, but my usage differs slightly from his. While Truax defines an acoustic community broadly as “any system within which acoustic information is exchanged,” I am specifically interested in patterns of (primarily environmental or broadcast) sounds and the groups of people for whom those sounds are relevant, and whose shared identity is therefore represented by the sounds (Truax 2001: 66).

not involved, whose comings and goings were in the background of their awareness, these sounds were a common topic of relaxed conversation as family members tried to determine which neighboring village was having an odalan on a given day. Obviously, the specific pattern of ritual sounds that was audible from the Dangin family's home is unique. In Tegal, there were periods during the calendar cycle when several temple odalan would happen in close succession followed by periods of relative quiet. In other villages, however, dates of local odalan may occur earlier or later in the calendar cycle; they may be more tightly clustered around particular dates or more evenly spaced throughout the year. The important point here is that the cyclical patterns of temple sounds are highly localized—like the religious communities they represent—which means that the soundscape of customary ritual sounds varies from one village to another.

The Tri Sandhya is unique among Balinese religious sounds in that it is broadcast at the same time throughout all of Bali.<sup>123</sup> The broadcast and amplification of the prayer thus introduces a daily cycle of religious sound that can be heard simultaneously across the island. Moreover, unlike the sound of odalan, the sound of the Tri Sandhya applies to all Balinese (and indeed, all Indonesian) Hindus, irrespective of their membership in specific temple congregations. The sound thus addresses its listeners not as members of specific customary institutions (desa adat, banjar, dadia, etc.), but as individuals who share a common religion: members of a pan-Balinese (or

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<sup>123</sup> I am not aware that the Tri Sandhya is broadcast or amplified elsewhere in Indonesia. A presenter at RRI Denpasar assured me that it is not broadcast on any RRI stations outside Bali. However, this does not rule out the possibility that it may be broadcast on other (non-RRI) stations or over PA systems.

national) acoustic community. Like the *azan*, the *Puja Tri Sandhya* gives sonorous form to a specifically religious form of identity and belonging, which transcends the communal and kinship bonds that form the basis for much of Balinese Hindu religious practice. It should be further noted that while *odalan* ceremonies reinforce the idea of localized deities that are inseparable from particular villages and temples, the notion of a single prayer that applies to all Balinese (and Indonesian) Hindus reinforces the monotheistic idea of a singular abstract god who is worshipped by the entire Hindu community. Monotheism is a central theme in reformist discourse and one that is further reinforced in the text of the *Tri Sandhya*, as I discuss below.

In contrast with the *azan*, the *Puja Tri Sandhya* is unique to Indonesian Hinduism, and in its recorded form, it has a distinctly Balinese sound. Thus, whereas the *azan* is known throughout the Muslim world and summons Muslims as members of a global *umma*, the gamelan accompaniment included on most recordings of the *Tri Sandhya* bears the unmistakable mark of Balinese cultural identity.<sup>124</sup> The Balinese quality of the prayer is also emphasized in the video recordings that accompany televised broadcasts. Nearly all of the videos broadcast on Balinese television stations feature images of Balinese rituals. People in Balinese traditional dress are prominently featured as are famous temples and other features of Bali's landscape. These recordings invariably include subtitles in Sanskrit and Indonesian. While the use of the national language points toward a national Hindu community, the use of Balinese script

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<sup>124</sup> While instruments called *gender* are shared across several Indonesian gamelan traditions, the specific ensemble used on these recordings, known as *gender wayang*, is unique to Bali, though I believe a closely related ensemble is also found in the neighboring island of Lombok.

for rendering the Sanskrit on some of the televised recordings is an additional link to a distinctly Balinese cultural identity.

Tri Sandhya recordings endeavor to bridge the gap between customary forms of worship and the modern religious ideologies of the state. However, public soundings of the recording can highlight disjunctures between these two spheres of religious knowledge and practice. As noted earlier, locations that amplify the Tri Sandhya often rely on a timing system so that the prayer plays automatically at 6am, noon, and 6pm. The sound is typically loud enough to be heard throughout the village and in several neighboring villages. This means that when the prayer is playing the area around the loudspeaker can become quite noisy—enough to make conversation difficult, or even impossible—for about five minutes. If the sound plays automatically it can be quite disruptive. The first time I attended class at IHDN a recording of the Puja Tri Sandhya suddenly started playing in the middle of the instructor’s lecture. I glanced around to see if any of the students would take the opportunity to pray. None did, or at least, not visibly. After a brief pause, the instructor tried to resume his lecture, shouting over the sound of the recording, but the volume was so loud that it was impossible to make out what he was saying. After a minute or so he gave up and the class sat awkwardly waiting for the recording to end. *Lebih baik dikecilkan* (it would be better if it was turned down), the instructor said when it finally finished. I witnessed another interruption of this kind while attending a ceremony at a temple in Klungkung. While we were seated inside the temple waiting to perform collective prayers (*muspa*) a recording of the Tri Sandhya suddenly started playing on a loudspeaker right outside the temple. The people

gathered in the temple looked around with bemused expressions on their faces. A dancer who was in the midst of a *topeng pejegan* (sacred masked dance) performance seized the opportunity to make a joke: *Om bhur bwah swah, amonto gen tiang inget* (“Om bhur bwah swah [first line of the Tri Sandhya], that’s all I remember!). Again, no one responded by visibly praying. Later on, however, the congregation recited the Tri Sandhya as a group before doing muspa. These disruptions emphasize the lack of fit between the state’s idealized notions of how Hindus ought to pray and actually existing prayer practices. As I discuss later, Balinese Hindu prayer is typically embedded within a longer ritual process, which involves the presentation of offerings. Therefore, rather than being timed to a specific schedule, it is done when the appropriate point in the longer process has been reached. The idea of individually taking time to pray while being in the middle of some other activity—as is expected within Islam—is quite unknown within Balinese customary practice.

Interviews that I conducted in several villages that amplify the Tri Sandhya indicate that while few people view the sound of the prayer as an essential part of Balinese Hindu worship, its amplification is nonetheless widely seen as important. When I inquired further, my interlocutors almost invariably spoke of Islam, saying things like ‘Muslims have the azan; Hindus have the Tri Sandhya.’ Others answered in ways that revealed uneasiness about the perceived or potential Islamization of Bali’s soundscape. During an interview at RRI Denpasar, one of the station’s most well-known presenters, and a host of several religious programs, told me that there was a plan to amplify the Tri Sandhya in all of the banjar in Denpasar. When I asked him why, he said it was

because the sound of the azan was growing increasingly common; amplifying the Tri Sandhya was a way to *mengantisipasi, supaya 'balanced'* (anticipate, so that [the Hindu and Muslim soundscapes] will be balanced). The five daily repetitions of the Muslim call to prayer have in fact become a powerful presence in some Balinese neighborhoods, against which the traditional Hindu soundscape, with its irregular patterns of ceremonies, can seem to fade into the background. Playing the Tri Sandhya over loudspeakers three times a day is seen by many of the people I spoke to as a way to preserve the Hindu identity of an increasingly diverse religious space.<sup>125</sup>

While the Puja Tri Sandhya has been taken up as a way of preserving the Hindu character of Bali's soundscape, the version of Hindu-ness that is sounded through the prayer is distinctly modern. The sound of the prayer summons Balinese Hindus as members of a pan Balinese, and, somewhat more tenuously, a national and even global, Hindu community. This in turn reinforces a monotheistic conception of the divine, which aligns with state policies that require all Indonesian citizens to worship Tuhan Yang Maha Esa (the Almighty God). By sonically embodying a de-localized Hindu community sharing in the worship of a single god, the Tri Sandhya interpellates its addressees as national subjects.

However, this does not mean that listeners will necessarily experience the prayer in this way. The prayer affords opportunities for Balinese Hindus to imagine themselves

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<sup>125</sup> In an article on the amplification of the azan in Singapore, Tong Soon Lee describes how mosques reduced the volume of their loudspeakers as neighborhoods became more religiously diverse (1999). In Bali, the trend seems to be moving in the opposite direction as increasing diversity motivates more widespread use of amplification, at least among the island's Hindu majority. When the azan is amplified in Bali, it tends to be at a much lower volume than in other regions of Indonesia.

in particular ways and to experience particular forms of belonging, but there is no guarantee that they will actually engage with the prayer in this way. In fact, some of my interlocutors said that they hear the sound as little more than an indicator of what time it is.

How, then, might the Tri Sandhya contribute to the shaping and re-shaping of ethical subjectivity in Bali? To begin exploring this question, I turn to consider how the Tri Sandhya is taught and performed in school. For students in Balinese public schools, the Tri Sandhya is more than just background sound. Hindu students are required to recite the prayer at the beginning and end of each school day, and they are also provided instruction as to what the Tri Sandhya means and what its purpose is. School is therefore an important site for examining the Trisandhya's role as a tool of ethical reform.<sup>126</sup>

### ***Embodying the Puja Tri Sandhya***

To begin it is important to point out that by the time children begin learning the Tri Sandhya in school most of them have already been participating in prayer for a number of years. Children typically accompany their parents to religious ceremonies where they join in the collective prayers.<sup>127</sup> I have seen infants as young as six months old being

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<sup>126</sup> I did not have IRB clearance to conduct research with children. Although I did observe the Tri Sandhya being performed in a couple of schools I did not observe classes or conduct interviews with students. My analysis in the next section is therefore based on interviews I conducted with adults, including one elementary school teacher and one junior high school teacher. I also discuss textbooks and teacher manuals for the 2014 *Agama Hindu dan Budi Pekerti* (Hindu Religion and Character) curriculum, which offer instruction in the Tri Sandhya.

<sup>127</sup> Belo states that mothers are permitted to begin bringing infants to temple once the child has undergone its *sambutan* ceremony at three months of age (Belo 1953: 36).

held on a parent's lap while the latter presses the child's tiny hands together in a *sembah* (gesture of prayer where the palms of two hands are pressed together with the fingers straight and pointed up). This prayer practice is called *muspa* after the offerings of flowers (*puspa*) which are held between the fingers, or *mabakti*, from the Sanskrit word *bhakti* (devotion or piety). *Muspa* generally takes place near the end of a ritual, after a series of rites have been carried out by the priest and his or her assistants.<sup>128</sup>

During *odalan* ceremonies, for example, each family in the congregation will bring a basket of offerings to the temple (*maturan*). The priest presiding over the ceremony utters mantras and rings a *genta* (bell) to 'send' (*ngastawayang*) the offerings to the visiting deities while the people (women, primarily) who presented the offerings participate in a series of *sembah* (prayers). Nowadays, these prayers are typically led by a *penginter* (M.C.) who announces each *sembah* over the temple PA system.<sup>129</sup>

Typically the *penginter* instructs the worshippers as to the deity or deities to whom each prayer is dedicated and the flower offering that should be used in each case.<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>128</sup> For a detailed description of these rites, see Belo 1953: 20-34.

<sup>129</sup> I have been told that before amplification was widespread, people prayed *sendiri-sendiri* (individually, i.e. not in unison). This aligns with Belo's description in *Bali: Temple Festival*, which is based on fieldwork conducted in the 1930s (Belo 1953: 34-36). According to one of my elderly informants, as the population grew and temple ceremonies became increasingly crowded, it was desirable to have a *penginter* to keep the prayers orderly. With the leadership of a *penginter*, the prayers happen in waves: a group of people will fill the temple, place their offerings, pray in unison, receive holy water, then exit *en masse*, allowing the next group, who will have been lining up outside, to enter.

<sup>130</sup> There have been some efforts among reformist Hindus to impose a standard pattern on these prayers. This standard pattern, known as *kramaning sembah*, consists of a series of five *sembah* or prayers. According to the book *Sembahyang ke Tempat Suci* (Praying at Sacred Places), *kramaning sembah* begins with a *sembah puyung* (empty prayer, i.e. without flower offering), then proceeds through prayers to the god Siwa Raditya (also called Sang Hyang Surya), the gods/goddesses who have assembled at the temple (which the book calls "Ista Dewata"), and god as the giver of blessings (Bhatara Samodaya); the sequence ends with another *sembah puyung* (Arwati 2006: 24-31). During my fieldwork I found that this general pattern was followed by the *penginter* at most, but not all, of the ceremonies I attended. When the *penginter* diverged from this pattern, it was typically to insert additional *sembah*, which were performed alongside those just listed.

purpose of *maturan* (bringing voluntary offerings to temple during an *odalan*) is to pay reverence to the visiting deities; the accompanying prayers serve the purpose of asking the gods to witness this act of reverence and give blessings to the families who presented them. Following *muspa* officiants give each of the congregants *tirta* (holy water) and *bija* (rice grains, which are placed on the forehead). After receiving these, the congregants disperse.

The Puja Tri Sandhya is different from *muspa* in several respects. This means that when children enter school they begin learning to pray in a new way. One significant difference is that the Puja Tri Sandhya is readily detachable from the materialities of customary worship. *Muspa* is generally performed as part of a larger ritual. This need not be a temple ceremony, as just described, though these are probably the most common contexts in which people participate in *muspa*.<sup>131</sup> The fact that *muspa* happens in the context of a larger ritual most often means that it requires entering sanctified spaces, such as *pura* (temples), *mrajan*, or *sanggah* (house temples). To enter these sanctified spaces, people must dress in *pakaian adat* (traditional dress) and must not be *sebel* (in a state of ritual impurity as happens immediately following the death of a family member, and to women during menstruation and immediately following the birth of a child). According to this custom, participation in prayer is also subject to these same restrictions. Although the Tri Sandhya is also

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<sup>131</sup> During life cycle rituals, the individuals undergoing the ritual typically *muspa*; however, the other attendees at the ceremony do not participate. Some Balinese Hindus also *muspa* at home on a daily basis (typically in the morning). However, as I discuss later, this private form of prayer is often equated with doing the Tri Sandhya, so I believe it should be understood as distinct from other forms of *muspa*. In its most typical form, *muspa* is a form of prayer that accompanies the presentation of offerings.

sometimes done in ceremonial contexts, it is most pervasively envisioned as a private prayer performed independently of ritual events. It can therefore be performed anywhere, by anyone, regardless of their appearance or state of bodily purity. This point is driven home in a recent Balinese Hindu self-help book entitled *Menjawab Pertanyaan Umat* (Answering the Religious Community's Questions). In a chapter entitled "Tri Sandhya during Menstruation," the author explains that Hindus are permitted, and indeed expected, to perform the Tri Sandhya even when in a state of *sebel*, as during menstruation. This, the author claims, is because the Tri Sandhya does not require the worshipper to enter a sanctified space, so it's not subject to the restrictions that apply to other forms of prayer. The Tri Sandhya can even be done in one's bedroom, the author explains, so although it is popular to perform it in one's house temple, this is not, in fact, a doctrinal requirement. This option of performing the Tri Sandhya within the private space of the bedroom was also presented in a recent school textbook, which included photographs of the proper posture for performing the Tri Sandhya while lying down in one's bed (Darta and Duwijo 2014: 9).

Another way the Tri Sandhya is different from *muspa* is in the emphasis it places on individual responsibility. When women *maturan* and *muspa* at their village temples, they do so on behalf of their family. While it is considered beneficial for other family members to join as well, they do not need to do so in order to receive benefits. In the Dangin household Kompiang was usually the one who would *maturan* for *odalan* in Tegal. However, if she was menstruating she could send her younger sister instead. Wayan and his male siblings would often go separately to *muspa*, but not always. For

them, the purpose was more social than religious, since the crucial act of performing *maturan* was carried out by the women. Their elderly mother rarely attended temple ceremonies in the village, but she would often pray from the family's *mrajan* instead. As noted in Chapter 1, people's obligations toward *niskala* beings are understood to be shared, not individual. The practice of *muspa* also fits this description in that it can be delegated to, or performed on behalf of, other people. The Puja Tri Sandhya, on the other hand, is an individual responsibility. At least in theory, each individual Hindu is supposed to perform it three times each day.

One of the most crucial differences between *muspa* and the Puja Tri Sandhya has to do with the use of offerings or other material items (*sarana*). As described above, *muspa* is most commonly performed in conjunction with *maturan* or some other form of presenting offerings. As traditionally understood, the offerings are the primary medium of interaction between the worshipper and god; the prayers that follow are merely to ask god to bear witness to the fact that the offerings were presented on behalf of a particular group of people. The Puja Tri Sandhya, by contrast, is usually performed without any kind of *sarana*. As explained in prayer books and by nearly everyone I interviewed on the topic, the purpose of the Tri Sandhya is to focus one's thoughts on God. As one elementary school teacher explained to me, students are taught that thinking about God as they recite the Tri Sandhya is in itself a way of maintaining a proper relationship with God. This act of thinking is thus the source of the Tri Sandhya's efficacy, and thought, in this sense, takes on a role traditionally played by propitiatory objects and gestures.

This notion that thought can be an efficacious way of maintaining a proper relationship with god raises significant questions about Balinese religious practice. If it is possible to pray effectively without any kind of offering, then what is the purpose of holding elaborate rituals involving hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of offerings? In this chapter, I focus on how this idea challenges the ethical disposition I described in Chapter 2. As noted above, I see the Tri Sandhya as an ideological tool whose purpose, in part, is to transform Balinese ethical subjectivity. The proposed transformation has crucially to do with how the prayer positions interior thoughts and feelings (rather than material objects and gestures) as the primary medium linking humans to the divine, a framing which supports the broader reformist project of placing interiority at the center of Balinese Hindu ethics. Before delving further into how the prayer inculcates this interiorized ethical disposition, I need to clarify how my analysis departs from other scholarly writing on the ethical dimensions of the Hindu Reform. While I agree with much of what has been written about the Hindu Reform, I take issue with how the topic of ethics has been discussed in the literature. In my view, authors have tended to rely on an overly narrow (and peculiarly Western) conception of ethics, which has the unfortunate consequence of deflecting attention away from the ideological project to reconfigure Balinese ethical subjectivity.

### ***Ritual vs. Ethical: A False Dichotomy***

Throughout the scholarship on religious modernization in Bali, there is a tendency to characterize the state-sanctioned version of Hinduism as having an ethical

bent (Bakker 1993: 274, Geertz 1973a: 175, 185, 188). The most detailed discussion of this matter appears in the work of Leo Howe, who writes that the Hindu reform proposes a shift away from a “ritual interpretation” of religion toward an “ethical interpretation” (Howe 2005: 68). Howe characterizes this shift as a “protestantization” of Balinese Hinduism: “a belief in the importance of ethical conduct and inner spirituality rather than in external ritual and magical action” (*ibid.*: 7). He further explains this difference by way of a discussion of two divergent Balinese interpretations of *caru* rituals (rituals for lower beings or *buta kala*). According to Howe, most Balinese Hindus believe that *buta kala* “are real entities with an independent existence, [who] consequently must be given offerings. . .in order to assuage and change them.” Meanwhile, the minority of reformist-oriented Hindus in Bali see *buta kala* as “symbols of morally bad behaviour,” an interpretation which places less emphasis on placating spirits, and more on “monitoring [one’s] own behavior in ethical terms.” It would seem, then, that part of what Howe means by a ritual orientation to religion is one in which religious practice is directed at entities outside the self, while within an ethical orientation, it is the self that is the primary object of religious concern. He further elaborates this difference in his discussion of the Balinese saying *suci baan banten*, *suci baan kenehe*, which he translates as “pure through offerings, pure through thoughts.” According to Howe, Balinese Hindus interpret this saying in one of two ways. Some see it as meaning that “a benefit—becoming *suci*, or pure—can be obtained in two different ways, either through material offerings or through purity of thought.” Howe writes that this interpretation “adds weight to the idea that malevolent spirits are real physical entities

which can be placated with offerings of real meat.” Others, however, see purity of thought as the crucial element. According to this explanation, “offerings are merely outward signs of inner sincerity, and therefore not really necessary.” This latter understanding of the saying, Howe states, “places the emphasis on an *ethical interpretation rather than a ritual one*, since it relates to a person’s actions and intentions” (Howe 2005: 71-72, my emphasis). Here again, the difference between the ritual and ethical interpretations of religion hinges on whether concern and action are directed primarily toward the self or external entities.

Howe is right to emphasize the diversity of Balinese beliefs about niskala beings and human obligations toward them. His description of two distinct interpretations regarding caru rituals resonates with much of what I’ve written: what he calls a “ritual interpretation” of religion mirrors what I described in Chapter 1 and 2, while his “ethical interpretation” aligns with the television clips discussed above. Problematically, though, Howe’s analysis seems to be rooted in a narrow conception of ethics, which views interiority as the core of ethical selfhood and thus expects ethical practice to be directed inward, toward the interior aspects of the person. This is why, in his view, ritual appears to be opposed to, rather than central to, ethics.

As I argued in Chapter 2, Balinese Hindu ritual has important ethical implications, and many of these are intertwined with beliefs about the existence and potency of invisible beings and the “magical” efficacy of ritual action, beliefs which Howe locates within his “ritual interpretation.” By setting up a contrast between these beliefs and those more explicitly focused on individual conduct and character, and by claiming that the

latter amount to an “ethicized reworking of Balinese religious ideas” (*ibid.*: 7), Howe’s analysis seems to deny—implicitly, and perhaps unintentionally—that the practices of ritual exchange that I described in Chapter 1 and 2 can be ethical in any ‘real’ sense. Although the ethics of divine blessing is largely implicit—embedded in everyday practice and informal talk rather than formalized moral codes—it is an ethics no less insofar as it guides people’s judgments and actions (Keane 2016: 24-26, Lambek 2010: 2-3). To claim that the Hindu Reform proposes a shift from a ‘ritual’ to an ‘ethical’ orientation is problematic not only because it overlooks the ethical dimensions of ritual exchange, but also because it resonates with reformist discourse, which casts the average Balinese Hindu as being overly focused on the ritual aspects of their religion while neglecting its ethical aspects.<sup>132</sup> Although Howe’s analysis lacks the normative tone of reformist discourse, it is nonetheless complicit with the ideological claim that ethics is a matter of inner disposition and character, not material exchanges between humans and invisible beings.

In the introduction to this dissertation I proposed that it will be useful to think of Balinese Hinduism as a moral assemblage, a heterogeneous collection of practices, values, and beliefs concerning what it means to live a good life, be a good person, and, especially, be a good Hindu. The Hindu Reform, itself a diverse collection of sometimes

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<sup>132</sup> According to reformist discourse, Hinduism is made up of three components: *tatwa* (philosophy), *susila* (ethics), and *upacara* (ritual) (Jyoti 2012: 41-44, Parisada Hindu Dharma [1967] 1978: 13-14). These three elements ought to be kept in balance, but in Bali, the reformist argument goes, people have been overly focused on ritual, allowing the philosophical and ethical aspects of their religion to wither away (Jyoti 2012: 53-58). Reformist texts stress the need to correct this imbalance and propose a variety of solutions. This way of conceiving of ethics and ritual as two distinct components of religion (rather than, for example, seeing ritual as a form of ethical practice) serves to justify reformist interventions, such as efforts to reduce the amount of time and resources that Balinese Hindus expend on ritual.

conflicting values and doctrines, provides some key components of this assemblage, but, as we saw in Chapter 2, it is not the only source of Balinese Hindu ethical thought. Rather than enacting a shift from a ritual to an ethical orientation to religion, what the historical emergence of the Hindu Reform has done is introduce a new set of ethical values and projects that diverges from the ethics embedded in domestic and communal ritual practice. I would therefore propose that we conceive of the Hindu Reform's ethical project as an ongoing and incomplete effort to enact a shift from an ethics of divine blessing to an ethics of sincerity. Interaction between these two competing ethical frameworks is a characteristic feature of contemporary Balinese Hinduism, and it will be a key theme of the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

### ***The Puja Tri Sandhya and the Ethics of Sincerity***

The theory and practice of praying without offerings, as promoted by way of the Puja Tri Sandhya, is linked to a broader reformist argument about Balinese Hindus' relationships with god. While most Balinese believe that material offerings are necessary to maintain a proper relationship with the niskala world, reformers assert that offerings are unnecessary. According to this view, the efficacy of ritual and prayer comes from the interior disposition of the worshipper, not the material objects exchanged.<sup>133</sup> This means that rather than concerning themselves with the material

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<sup>133</sup> When reformers make this claim, they often back it up by citing verse 9.26 from the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Indonesian translation of which reads "*Kalau seseorang mempersembahkan daun, bunga, buah atau air dengan cinta bhakti, Aku akan menerimanya*" (If one offers Me a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water with love and devotion, I will accept it) (Prabhupada 2000). The idea here is that rather than desiring the kinds of elaborate offerings typical of Balinese ritual, god will accept any form of devotion provided it is offered out of devotion. During a class I observed at IHDN the instructor recited this verse in reference to his claim

dimensions of ritual, people should worry about cultivating a proper disposition toward ritual acts. According to reformist discourse, the worshipper's interior disposition is what god cares about, and without a proper attitude, worship will be ineffective (Jyoti 2012: 48-51, Parisada Hindu Dharma [1967] 1978: 32). Within reformist discourse, this ideal disposition is called *tulus ikhlas* (sincere, sincerity).<sup>134</sup> The Indonesian phrase *tulus ikhlas* has become ubiquitous in reformist Hindu discourse. We have already encountered one example of it in the television clip, described earlier, admonishing Hindus to model themselves after rubber trees. The phrase also appears frequently in the sermons aired on Bali TV, both in the sermons themselves and in the band of titles that periodically appears across the bottom of the screen. These titles list some of the themes covered in the sermon, and they frequently include exhortations for Balinese Hindus to be more *tulus ikhlas*. For example, during a sermon broadcast on April 27, 2014 on the topic *upacara yadnya sebagai media pendidikan untuk meningkatkan moralitas umat* (ritual as an educational medium for improving the religious community's morality), one of the themes listed in the titles was *menyembah tuhan dengan hati yang tulus ikhlas* (worship god with a sincere heart). Another sermon broadcast on May 8, 2014 included a title that read *selalu tumbuhkan sifat tulus ikhlas* (always cultivate sincere character).

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that Hindus *boleh sembahyang tanpa sarana banten* (are permitted to pray without offerings) (see also Jyoti 2012: 49).

<sup>134</sup> The Arabic-derived word *ikhlas* is used widely in moral and religious discourse in Indonesia (for example, see Hoesterey 2016). Here I focus specifically on its usage in reference to Balinese Hindu religiosity.

As used in reference to Balinese Hinduism, the phrase *tulus ikhlas* has a similar, though not identical meaning, to the Protestant notion of sincerity as discussed by Webb Keane in his writings on Calvinism in Sumba (2002, 2007). Keane asserts that the framework and performance of sincerity has been important in enabling new, distinctly modern, forms of subjectivity among Sumbanese converts to Calvinism. Given Keane's attention to the role of mediatory practices in enabling particular forms of selfhood, his work can serve as a model for thinking about the Puja Tri Sandhya and how it might contribute to enabling a distinctly modern form of ethical subjectivity rooted in the value of sincerity. According to Keane, the notion of sincerity (as generally understood in English) is rooted in a set of beliefs about language, selfhood, and social relations that privileges interiority as the core of selfhood and draws a sharp distinction between the inner world of the self and the outer world of social and material relations (2002: 68-69). As semiotic ideology, the framework of sincerity assumes that a person's outward speech, action, and demeanor may potentially misrepresent their true motivations and intentions, and as a normative ideal, it places a high value on forms of expression that are transparent representations of internal thoughts and feelings (i.e. "sincere" forms of expression) (*ibid.*: 74-75). According to Keane, representational practices and ideologies related to the notion of sincerity (such as praying from the heart rather than a written text) are an important means by which the transcendent and autonomous subject of modernity is made to "work in concrete terms that can become part of ordinary everyday experience" (*ibid.*: 79). I would suggest that the Puja Tri Sandhya serves a similar purpose in the Balinese context, making the abstract idea of

the tulus ikhlas Hindu person into something that people can actively ‘be.’ Following Keane, I believe such mediatory practices are necessary for abstract theories about subjectivity and selfhood to have meaning in people’s lives (*ibid.*: 74, 2003: 413, 2007: 68).

In the discourse about Balinese Hinduism, tulus ikhlas is most commonly used to describe ritual and prayer. Like the more general understanding of sincerity, it refers to a particular alignment between a person’s inner disposition and their outward action. The discourse of tulus ikhlas is also based on (and promotes) certain assumptions about ritual, namely, that the purpose of Balinese Hindu ritual activity is to express one’s love (*cinta kasih*) and devotion (*bhakti*) toward god without hope of receiving anything in return (*kerja tanpa pamrih*). As we saw in Chapter 2, this is not how all Balinese understand ritual in all cases. Within the reformist discourse of tulus ikhlas, however, this is more or less taken as a given. To be tulus ikhlas, outward *representations* of devotion—such as the presentation of offerings—must be backed up by *internal feelings* of devotion (*rasa bhakti*). Thus, when Hindu reformers instruct Balinese Hindus to “worship god with a sincere heart,” what they mean is that the worshipper must actually *feel* the devotion that is given form in their outward gestures of piety.

To better understand the meaning of tulus ikhlas in reformist discourse, it will be useful to consider the kinds of attitudes and motivations that reformers *contrast* with the feeling of sincerity. Reformist discourse gives several reasons why the feeling of tulus ikhlas may be lacking. For example, the worshipper may not understand the purpose of

ritual activity and may simply be blindly following along.<sup>135</sup> Or, the worshipper may have limited personal involvement in the ritual, simply letting the priest and other officiants take care of everything (Jyoti 2012: 55-58). In either case, there is a disconnect between the material activity of the ritual and the inward disposition of the worshipper, rather than the kind of alignment that characterizes sincerity. Relatedly, a person may participate in ritual activity because they feel social pressure to do so. For example, people often feel pressured to spend lavishly on ritual, and they may do so even when they can't afford it and must resort to selling land or taking out a loan. According to reformist discourse, such acts are not *tulus ikhlas* because the worshipper feels forced into them (*ibid.*: 33). In each of these three cases, the individual's acts of religious devotion are not *tulus ikhlas* because they are, in a sense, not wholly their own, not authentic. The sincere individual must be self-aware and autonomous; their actions in the ritual sphere must be transparent expressions of that awareness and autonomy.

Another reason ritual activity may not be *tulus ikhlas* is that the worshipper may have ulterior motives. For example, their activity in the ritual sphere may be motivated by *pamer* (showing off) or *gengsi* (prestige) (*ibid.*: 10, 56). Or, it may be a way of seeking particular kinds of material benefits, such as wealth (*ibid.*: 13). In other words, the worshipper may be acting out of a desire for personal gain. This is insincere because ritual acts are presumed to stand for the worshipper's devotion. If the intentions behind them are tainted by motivations other than that of expressing

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<sup>135</sup> Hindu reformers use the Balinese phrase *nak mula keto* (or simply *mula keto*), which roughly translates as 'what's been done from before,' as a parody of someone who unthinkingly repeats handed-down ritual traditions without understanding their meaning or purpose. For example, see Jyoti 2012: 36, 76-80. See also Howe 2001: 173.

devotion, then there's a disjuncture between interior attitude and outward gesture, meaning that the gestures are not *tulus ikhlas*.

To pose the question of whether religious activity is *tulus ikhlas* or not is already to make certain assumptions—about the purpose and meaning of ritual, about the nature of the human subject and its relationships with other beings and with the material world—that conflict with the beliefs described in earlier chapters. What emerges from these discourses about *tulus ikhlas* is not just a particular view of how Balinese Hindu ritual ought to be performed, but also a particular conception of ethical selfhood. While the forms of myth-making discussed in Chapter 1 and 2 emphasize the entanglement of humans with invisible and social others and with the material world, the ethics of sincerity imagines a religious self that is abstracted from these entanglements. The discourse of *tulus ikhlas* emphasizes autonomy, individuality, and interiority.

Now I would like to consider how the *Puja Tri Sandhya* may provide a way of inculcating and inhabiting this distinctly modern self-understanding. I have already noted that the process of learning and reciting the *Tri Sandhya* in school teaches Balinese Hindu children that they can connect with god without the use of material mediations; without entering sanctified spaces or wearing traditional dress; without giving offerings or relying on priest's mantras to connect them with god. This process also teaches children that prayer is their individual responsibility, not something that can be handed off to someone else. By learning the *Tri Sandhya* in school, Balinese Hindus are familiarized with, and socialized into, an interiorized, de-materialized relationship with the divine. In the next section I focus on the language of the *Tri Sandhya*. I argue that

the Tri Sandhya promotes a distinctly modern understanding of religious language, which further reinforces the notion of an interiorized religious subject.

### ***Subjectivity and the Language of Prayer***

One way the Puja Tri Sandhya works to make a modern religious subjectivity inhabitable for Balinese Hindus is by promoting new ways of using language to connect with god. When performing muspa, Balinese Hindus typically pray *dalam hati* (silently, from the heart). Although the Hindu Religion and Character curriculum teaches specific mantras to be recited during muspa, in practice people often pray in more personal and spontaneous ways. This was brought to light during a call-in television show I watched during my fieldwork. In the evening the members of the Dangin family would frequently gather in the bale dauh to watch television, some attentively, others more passively. On one such night we watched part of an on-air healing program on Bali TV. This was one of several programs in which the public was invited to call in to discuss their health problems and receive healing over the phone.<sup>136</sup> The idea behind these programs is that the host has the power to effect cures by way of his mediated voice and image. On this particular evening, the program was hosted by a Javanese *dukun* (traditional healer), but the callers were Balinese. During one call, the host instructed the male caller to *berdoa menurut kepercayaan sendiri* (pray in accordance with your own belief). There was silence on the line. After a long pause, the host repeated his prompt for the caller to pray. Again, his request was greeted with silence. As the *dukun* kept repeating

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<sup>136</sup> These programs are referred to as *penyembuhan jarak jauh* (long-distance healing).

his requests, the viewers gathered in the bale dauh became increasingly amused. Finally, the host asked the caller to pray *supaya saya bisa dengar* (so that I can hear). Another lengthy silence followed, then the caller finally responded *maaf pak, saya tak bisa* (I'm sorry sir, I can't), whereupon the bale dauh erupted with laughter. Part of the reason this awkward interaction was so humorous was that it revealed the Muslim host's lack of knowledge about the religious norms of his Balinese audience, which in turn cast doubt on his legitimacy as a religious healer, which, even before this incident, was quite dubious to those around me. The host was apparently unaware that Balinese Hindus typically pray silently, and furthermore, that they do so (more often than not) without using publicly recognized entextualized prayers, and in some cases, without using language at all. Thus, while attempting to situate his show as non-denominational by asking callers to pray "in accordance with their own beliefs," the host also defines 'prayer' as something that takes the form of an audible (presumably linguistic) formula that can be comfortably performed in public, like the texts recited during the Muslim *salat*. It is entirely possible that the caller *was* praying in accordance with his own belief the whole time, but because the host was unfamiliar with Balinese assumptions about prayer, he failed to recognize this.

While the gestures of Balinese Hindu prayer are formalized and standardized, the internal mental activity that accompanies these gestures is not (or at least, not to the same degree). As explained earlier, the most common form of prayer, *muspa* or *mabakti*, is often done as part of the practice of *maturan* (bringing voluntary offerings to temple on behalf of one's household). In this practice, the offerings are the crucial

medium of human-divine interaction; prayer is secondary, and according to Balinese beliefs, it does not need to take any particular verbal or textual form to be effective. The physical gesture of obeisance is sufficient. This is evidenced by the fact that infants may begin praying before they possess language, and further supported by the ways my interlocutors spoke about prayer.<sup>137</sup> When I first began participating in Balinese Hindu prayers, I was told to follow along with the outward gestures; no one instructed me regarding my thoughts. Then one day, after I had already been visiting Bali for a few years, Wayan asked me what I think about when I pray. I told him that I typically tried to meditate, stopping the language of my thoughts and focusing on my breath or other sensations, such as environmental sounds or the smell of incense and flowers. I expected that he would tell me this was ‘wrong,’ or at least unusual, but instead he told me that he sometimes does the same. In another conversation, however, he told me that he sometimes silently recites the last stanza of the Tri Sandhya when performing muspa, suggesting that his prayer practices do not follow any fixed pattern. When people did offer instruction as to how to direct my thoughts during prayer, they often told me to ask for something. For example, when I was applying to graduate school, friends instructed me to pray that I would be accepted. Before leaving to travel out of Bali, Kompiang and Wayan would often take me around to the village temples to pray, and on these occasions, they instructed me to ask for protection during my trip. This practice of asking for something during prayer aligns with Belo’s description of prayer in 1930s Bali. Belo writes that during the ceremony she observed, some of the worshippers

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<sup>137</sup> Of course, one could question whether Balinese believe infants’ prayers are efficacious.

brought especially lavish offerings to the temple in fulfillment of a “promise” that they had made to the gods (i.e. they had previously requested something from the gods—a cure to an illness, the return of a lost cow—and promised the gods that if their request was fulfilled they would bring certain gifts to the temple in return) (Belo 1953: 36).

Members of the Dangin family would also make these sorts of agreements with the gods in their *mrajan* (household temple), praying for help with some difficulty or other and promising to make specific improvements on the *mrajan* (e.g. adding new shrines, building a surrounding wall, etc) if the help was granted.<sup>138</sup> In the context of *muspa*, people seem to pray in a spontaneous, personal, and context-dependent manner, and they may even pray without using language.

The personalized forms of prayer just discussed stand in contrast to the practice of reciting mantras (*mantram*), which is another way Balinese Hindus connect with god. The terms *mantra* and *mantram* are used in Bali to refer to entextualized Sanskrit phrases that are believed to produce some sort of effect in the world.<sup>139</sup> According to

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<sup>138</sup> As I discuss more later on, there are standardized Hindu prayers in Sanskrit, which are taught in school and circulated in prayer books, but these do not seem to be widely used, or at least, praying in a more impromptu manner is not widely considered to be any less effective than using a written formula, despite reformist claims to the contrary. The mantras that the priest recites during *muspa* are responsible for enabling the necessary connection between human and divine worlds; for the congregants to recite mantras as well could therefore be seen as redundant.

<sup>139</sup> Much has been written about Balinese beliefs about the power of written and spoken language and I can only briefly mention a few points here. Zurbuchen has written that Balinese understand language as an interface between macrocosmic and microcosmic realms, whose sounding through vocal recitation makes possible the union of human and divine power. Sacred syllables are uttered by priests as a means of achieving unity with the supreme deity, a feat which enables the priest to produce the divinely infused water (*tirta*) used in Balinese Hindu worship. As Zurbuchen describes it, the priest’s mantras are able to affect the outer world because they are “a distillation of the ‘written language within the body’ (*sastra ning sarira*), a literal exhalation or ‘ex-expression’ (forcing out) of inner power toward some external goal” (Zurbuchen 1987: 96). According to Lansing, Balinese believe the Sanskrit language is particularly powerful because its words are connected to the things they signify not by arbitrary convention but by an intrinsic iconicity. This iconicity—which allows words to bring about the things that they name—is not unique to the Sanskrit language; it is also present in other archaic languages, such as Kawi, but to a

traditional beliefs, using these phrases poses significant dangers and should only be undertaken by people who can handle these dangers.<sup>140</sup> Therefore, practices of chanting, reading, whispering, or silently reciting mantras are strongly associated with priests and other religious adepts, such as traditional healers (*balian*), who are believed to have the requisite power to deal with the forces that these phrases can unleash.

While many Balinese living today believe in the power (and possible danger) contained in language (and especially written texts), the taboo on studying and reciting Sanskrit is no longer in effect.<sup>141</sup> It is difficult to know to what degree this shift is attributable to state efforts to promote the Puja Tri Sandhya, as well as the use and study of Sanskrit texts more generally, but certainly these efforts have played a role. Today, Sanskrit phrases have become an ordinary part of everyday life in Bali. For example, the phrase *om swastiastu* is used as a formal greeting, and the phrase *om santi santi santi om* is used to close an event, such as a radio or television program or a public gathering.

Performers of *pepaosan* (discussed in Chapter 4) recite the mantra *om awignamastu* before they perform. And of course, the Puja Tri Sandhya is itself referred to as a mantra, as are the *doa sehari-hari* (everyday prayers), which I discuss later.

As we can see from the discussion thus far, Balinese Hindus use language to interact with god in at least two distinct ways: through spontaneous, personal forms of

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lesser degree. Sanskrit, believed to be the oldest language, is considered the most powerful (Lansing 1983: 86-87).

<sup>140</sup> Some manuscripts contain warnings against sharing the text indiscriminately (*aja wera*) (Zurbuchen 1987: 60-61). Because the power embodied in texts is potentially dangerous, priests and others who undertake intensive study of sacred texts must undergo ritual purification (*mawinten*) to prepare themselves for contact with this power.

<sup>141</sup> I spoke with one of the gender players on the original 1967 recording of the Tri Sandhya and he said that at that time, it was highly unusual for ordinary lay persons to recite mantras.

prayer they request blessings and protection from god, and through the entextualized language of mantra they seek to use the divine power contained in language to achieve a variety of ends. These practices reflect underlying beliefs about language, or what linguistic anthropologists call language ideology. Within the particular language ideology at play in the prayer practices just described, archaic languages (Sanskrit in particular) are believed to be imbued with the power to bring about changes in the material world, and thus should not be used casually. Meanwhile, the languages of everyday communication, such as modern Balinese and Indonesian, are primarily valued for their referential function (i.e. as a means of conveying information), as in the practice of 'asking for something' through prayer.

Changes in language ideology have been key to the production of modern subjects across various contexts (Bauman and Briggs 2003). Here again, Keane's writing on Sumba can serve as an illustration. Keane writes that while Catholics and ancestral ritualists use formulaic, entextualized language to pray, Sumbanese Calvinists value spontaneous, authentic forms of prayer. Hence, Keane writes, they conspicuously close their eyes during prayer (2002: 77). Theirs is a distinctly modern language ideology, which treats the individual's interiority as the locus of agency; from their point of view, the use of language in ancestral ritual appears as a kind of idolatry, a misattribution of agency to words themselves which at the same time fails to recognize the true agency and autonomy of the individual human subject. The practice of engaging in sincere Protestant prayer gives embodied form to a range of abstract ideas

about language and personhood that are foundational to many understandings of modernity.

How does the Puja Tri Sandhya compare to Calvinist prayer, and to other Balinese prayer practices? With its use of entextualized Sanskrit language, the Tri Sandhya would seem incompatible with a modern view of language as primarily referential. I would suggest, however, that despite its apparent similarities to traditional forms of mantra recitation in Bali, the Puja Tri Sandhya in fact functions as a means of inculcating a modern language ideology. To understand how this is so, it will be useful to look at the relationship between language and the speaker's interiority as configured in reformist discourses about prayer and in the language of the prayer itself. One way interiority comes into these discourses is around the issue of the meaning contained in language. Here I would like to focus on a chapter on the topic of mantra, which appears in a teacher's manual for the 2014 Hindu Religion and Character curriculum (7<sup>th</sup> grade level). When we pray, the text states, it is best to use a mantra; however, if we do not understand the meaning of the mantra, then it is best to pray in our mother tongue, the language we understand best (Sugita and Widia 2014: 55). Later the author explains that to pray using a mantra that we don't understand has no benefit; like a piece of firewood that has been soaked in oil, which will not burn unless you light it with a match, so too is the person who recites mantras without ever receiving the illumination of true knowledge (*ibid.*: 65). According to this view, simply uttering the words of a mantra has no effect; in order for the words to have efficacy, their meaning must be understood by the speaker. Further driving this point home, all mantras discussed in school textbooks

and commercially available prayer books are accompanied by a translation into Indonesian. Likewise, as noted earlier, television broadcasts of the Tri Sandhya also always include subtitles in Indonesian. This emphasis on meaning and understanding around the Tri Sandhya stands in stark contrast to traditional beliefs about mantra. Belo quotes a priest stating that he “would not dare to understand” some of the mantras he recites, for fear of coming to harm, implying that these mantras are capable of producing effects whether or not the priest understands them (Belo 1953: 9). Indeed, it seems that the priest’s ability to use the mantra effectively depends on him not understanding it. Within the language ideology promoted in this textbook, however, it is the speaker’s interiority (rather than material form, such as sound or written shape) that imbues language with efficacy. This language ideology emphasizes the interior self as the site of agency. Words do not have power independent of the speaker’s consciousness and intent.

To ‘understand’ a mantra is to have a particular interior relationship to its meaning. Within the textbook view of Hindu prayer, this relationship seems to have two facets. On the one hand, the speaker must know what the words of the mantra signify, and on the other hand, they must be able to select the mantra that is appropriate in each context (Sugita and Widia 2014: 61). Understanding, in this sense, is a matter of both comprehension and intention. The difference between the priest who ‘dare not understand’ the mantras he recites, on the one hand, and the kind of recitation advocated in the teacher’s manual, on the other, can be thought of as a difference in what Goffman has called “participation roles” (cf. Keane 2000: 272). This concept is

meant to draw attention to the fact that people can have different kinds of relationships to spoken or written language, as, for example, animator, author, principal, or some combination of these.<sup>142</sup> In the case of mantra recitation, the animator is the person reciting the mantra, while the author is the deity whose words are being recited.<sup>143</sup> This much is true for both the priest and the teacher's manual. The difference lies in the role of principal, the person (or other being) *responsible for the message contained in the mantra*. For the priest who 'dare not understand' the mantras he recites, his role is confined to that of animator. By contrast, the teacher's manual calls on people to be both animator and principal of the mantras they recite. That is to say, students must be able to use mantras in such a way that the words of the mantra correspond to their own intentions (*yang dimaksudkan*), otherwise they would be better off simply praying using the language they 'understand best.' When used correctly, a mantra is a verbal reflection of the speaker's interiority. In this view, language's power lies in its capacity to externalize the speaker's own thoughts and feelings.<sup>144</sup> Without entirely removing divine agency from the picture, the conception of mantra recitation outlined in the teacher's manual places greater responsibility in the hands of individual worshippers, whose interior alignment with the meaning of public texts is necessary for the language of prayer to be effective.

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<sup>142</sup> Keane provides a clear illustration of the distinctions between animator, author, and principal: "A press secretary may animate words whose author is a speech writer but whose principal, the person responsible for the message, is the President (who may in turn be claiming to speak in the name of the nation)" (2000: 272).

<sup>143</sup> The rsi, or prophet, who recorded the mantra is also understood to be a kind of animator, who rendered god's words in written form.

<sup>144</sup> It should be noted that the teacher's manual also gestures toward the magical power of mantras, claiming that they can produce *getaran energi Tuhan* (a vibration of Divine energy), which in turn can help people achieve goals and avoid harm.

This alignment between mantra texts and speakers' interior intentions is emphasized in Indonesian translations of the Tri Sandhya as well as the other mantras discussed in school textbooks, known as *dainika upasana* or *doa sehari-hari* (everyday prayers).<sup>145</sup> Below I've included a rendering of all six stanzas of the Puja Tri Sandhya in three languages. The Sanskrit and Indonesian were taken from a 2014 Hindu Religion and Character textbook (5<sup>th</sup> grade level) (Darta and Duwijo 2014: 6-7).<sup>146</sup>

	Sanskrit	Indonesian	English
1	Om bhur bhuwah swah Tat sawitur warenyam Bhargo dewasya dhimahi Dhiyo yo nah pracodayat	Oh ya Tuhan penguasa alam bawah, tengah, dan alam atas. Kita memusatkan pikiran pada kecemerlangan dan kemuliaan San Hyang Widhi Wasa, semoga Ia berikan semangat pikiran kita.	Oh Lord, you are the ruler of the lower, middle, and upper worlds. We focus our thoughts on the radiance and glory of Sang Hyang Widi Wasa. <sup>147</sup> May He inspire our thoughts.
2	Om Narayana ewedam sarwam Yad bhutam yac ca bhawyam Niskalanko niranjano Nirwikalpo nirakyatah Sudho dewa eko Narayano na dwitiyosti kascit	Oh ya Tuhan yang disebut <i>Narayana</i> <sup>148</sup> adalah semua ini apa yang telah ada dan apa yang akan ada, bebas dari noda, bebas dari kotoran, bebas dari perubahan tak dapat digambarkan, sucilah <i>Dewa Narayana</i> , Ia	Oh Lord, who is called Narayana is everything, everything that has been and everything that will be, free from flaws, free from dirt, free from change, which cannot be

<sup>145</sup> These prayers can be found in Darta and Duwijo 2014: 11-12.

<sup>146</sup> The English translation of the text is my own. I have tried to adhere to the meaning of the Indonesian translation of the prayer as provided in the textbook since very few Balinese readers would understand the Sanskrit. I have changed some of the punctuation for clarity.

<sup>147</sup> Sang Hyang Widi Wasa is the name given to the supreme deity in Indonesian Hinduism, who is, as far as I know, of undefined gender. My use of the pronoun "He" in the next sentence could thus be contested. The Indonesian translation uses the pronoun "Ia", which is gender neutral.

<sup>148</sup> I have replicated the use of italics in the original. The italicized terms are proper names and the non-Indonesian word *papa*, which means sin or sinful in Sanskrit, but means poor or miserable in Balinese. I have translated *papa* as sinful, in part because of the use of the Indonesian term for sin (*dosa*) in stanza 5 and 6.

		hanya satu tidak ada yang kedua.	explained. Lord Narayana, the pure God, He is only one, there is no other.
3	Om tvam Siwah tvam Mahadewa Iswara Parameswarah Brahma Wisnucca Rudrasca Purusah parikirtitah	Oh ya Tuhan Engkau dipanggil <i>Siwa</i> , <i>Mahadewa</i> , <i>Iswara</i> , <i>Parameswara</i> , <i>Brahma</i> , <i>Wisnu</i> , <i>Rudra</i> , dan <i>Purusa</i> .	Oh Lord, You are called Siwa, Mahadewa, Iswara, Parameswara, Brahma, Wisnu, Rudra, and Purusa.
4	Om papaham papa karmaham Papatma papasambhawah Trahi mam pundarikaksa Sabahnya bhyantara suchih	Oh ya Tuhan hamba ini <i>papa</i> , perbuatan hamba <i>papa</i> , diri hamba <i>papa</i> , kelahiran hamba <i>papa</i> , lindungilah hamba Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, sucikanlah jiwa dan raga hamba.	Oh Lord, I <sup>149</sup> am sinful. My acts are sinful, my person is sinful, my birth is sinful. Protect me oh Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa. Purify my soul and body.
5	Om ksama swamam Mahadewa Sarwa prani hitankara Mam moca sarwa papebyah Palaya swa Sadasiwa	Oh ya Tuhan, ampunilah hamba, Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, yang memberikan keselamatan kepada semua makhluk, bebaskanlah hamba dari segala dosa, lindungilah oh Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa.	Oh Lord, forgive me. Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, who offers salvation to all creatures, liberate me from all of my sins. Protect me oh Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa.
6	Om ksantawya kayiko dosah Ksantawyo wacikomama Ksantawyo manaso dosah Tat pramadat ksama swamam Om, Santih, Santih, Santih, Om	Oh ya Tuhan, ampunilah dosa anggota badan hamba, ampunilah dosa perkataan hamba, ampunilah dosa pikiran hamba, ampunilah hamba dari kelalaian hamba, Oh ya Tuhan damai di hati, damai di dunia, dan damai	Oh Lord, forgive the sins of my body, forgive the sins of my words, forgive the sins of my thoughts, forgive the sins of my negligence. Oh Lord, may there be peace in my heart, peace in the world,

<sup>149</sup> Throughout the Indonesian translation the word *hamba* (roughly, your humble servant) is used for all first-person pronouns (i.e. when the speaker of the prayer refers to him or herself). For the sake of clarity, I've translated these as "I," "me," and "my," which obscures the deferential character of the Indonesian version of the text.

		selamanya Oh ya Tuhan.	and peace always, oh Lord.
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As we can see, the Tri Sandhya—at least in its Indonesian translation—is a prayer addressed to god in the second person. The first three stanzas address god in various manifestations, emphasizing the monotheistic idea that although Hindus use many names for god, the divine is ultimately singular (“He is only one, there is no other”). This passage is important as it serves to insert a properly monotheistic conception of god into the thoughts and speech of each individual Hindu.<sup>150</sup> My primary interest, however, is in the final three stanzas. Here, the text shifts focus from describing god to describing the first-person speaker of the prayer, who is acknowledging their own sinfulness and seeking god’s forgiveness and protection. This passage of the prayer aligns with the ethics of *tulus ikhlas* described above, in that it constructs a relationship between worshipper and god that is based on devotion, protection, and forgiveness, rather than the bestowal of material blessings. More to the point about language, however, is the way the prayer makes use of first-person pronouns to construct the text’s meaning as an index of the worshipper’s own ideas and sentiments. Here I will refer to the constructed “I” of the prayer as the *principal* and will use the term *animator* to denote the actual living individual reciting the prayer. It will be useful to distinguish these two roles analytically, though, ultimately, I argue that part of the power of this text lies in how it collapses this distinction. Throughout the second half of the Tri Sandhya the principal

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<sup>150</sup> This passage is also noteworthy because, as noted in Chapter 1, Balinese are often reluctant to describe god.

is identified with the term *hamba*, which means servant, but which is used here as a status-differentiating first-person pronoun. Thus, rather than “Oh Lord, I am sinful,” a more accurate translation would be something like “Oh Lord, your humble servant is sinful,” with the understanding that the principal is referring to him or herself as a humble servant. This first-person term *hamba* appears thirteen times over the course of the second half of the text. Not only does this repetition highlight the deferential relationship between the text’s principal and its addressee (god), but it also establishes an intimate relationship between the language of the prayer and the individual reciting it (the animator). Through its repeated use of the first-person pronoun, the prayer constructs the animator as personally identified with the text of the prayer, and thus configures the language of the prayer as an expression of the animator’s own consciousness. (Or, to put it slightly differently, we could say that in the act of reciting the prayer, the animator in a sense takes on the constructed identity of the principal). Thus, although the prayer is a compilation of divinely authored texts, it is structured as a reflection of the reciter’s own beliefs and desires. A similar use of first-person pronouns in Indonesian translations of Sanskrit mantra appears in *doa sehari-hari*. For example, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Hindu Religion and Character textbook mentioned above includes prayers to be recited while waking up in the morning, washing your hands, beginning work, and other ordinary tasks. The Indonesian translation of the prayer for waking up reads *Om Hyang Widhi, hamba memujaMu bahwa hamba telah bangun pagi dalam keadaan sehat* (Oh Lord, I worship you because I have woken up in a healthy condition) (Darta and Duwijo 2014: 11). As with the Tri Sandhya, the Indonesian translations of these

prayers serve to configure them as expressions of the individual's wishes and intentions.

The Puja Tri Sandhya can be usefully compared to the Protestant creed as analyzed by Webb Keane (2007: 67-76). As Keane describes it, a creed is a verbalized statement of religious beliefs, which is typically formatted as a series of sentences that each begin with the phrase 'I believe.' Keane sees creeds as a significant feature of Protestant religiosity because they reinforce the centrality of personal belief in defining a person's religious identity. Through the reciting of a creed, Keane contends, external doctrine is (ideally) united with inner, personal conviction. The performative assertion "I believe," enacts an alignment between the language of the creed and the interior disposition of the person reciting it. Whether or not the reciter identifies privately with the beliefs expressed, the creed as performance nonetheless reinforces the importance of personal identification with doctrinal teachings, and it gives people a socially legible way of inhabiting that identification in daily life. "In this way," Keane writes, "semiotic form facilitates a disciplinary practice that tends toward bringing inner thoughts into line with public doctrine," while at the same time, the first-person structure of the text "offers a paradigm for being agentic toward one's own thoughts" (2007: 71-72). Thus, while Calvinists typically avoid the use of entextualized language in their worship, preferring more spontaneous (and thus apparently more authentic) forms of expression, the creed is an exceptional case where a written formula can serve as a means of performing sincerity and of embodying the interiorized, autonomous subject that the norm of sincerity presupposes and promotes.

While the Puja Tri Sandhya does not make explicit reference to the interiorized notion of belief, the first three stanzas do lay out the core theology of reformist Hinduism, a theology which many Balinese Hindus would recognize as corresponding to the *Brahma Sraddha* (roughly, “Belief in God”), one of the “Five Beliefs” (*Panca Sraddha*) of Hinduism as taught in Balinese public schools. The opening stanzas of the prayer would therefore be recognizable to many as a statement of belief, even if not explicitly labelled as such. Like a creed, the Tri Sandhya provides Balinese Hindus with a socially legible way of performing sincere belief. Moving to the latter half of the prayer, the use of first-person pronouns enacts an alignment between entextualized language and individual consciousness, similar to that which Keane describes for creeds. As I discuss later, Balinese Hindus understand that the Puja Tri Sandhya is meant to model and activate a personal, interiorized relationship with god, and furthermore, they see their own interior disposition (rather than the sonic or linguistic form of the prayer) as the crucial factor in ensuring the prayer’s efficacy as a means of maintaining a proper relationship with god.

The promotion of Sanskrit prayers in Hindu Religion and Character textbooks may seem to foster the belief that language has an agency of its own, independent from its users, a view which contradicts the ethics and semiotics of sincerity as I have been describing them. I would argue, however, that these textbooks in fact do more to support a modern language ideology than they do to undermine it. In requiring students to ‘understand’ the mantras they recite (that is, to comprehend and intend the meanings they contain) the school curriculum effectively takes the language of divine power and

makes it into a medium for self-expression. The fact that this medium is accessible to anyone acts as an additional counterweight to traditional beliefs about the power and potential danger of Sanskrit words. Rather than teaching students to attribute agency to words, the process of learning to recite these prayers functions rather to give structure and order to prayerful thoughts while at the same time normalizing the casual use of Sanskrit in everyday life.

The Puja Tri Sandhya promotes the value of *tulus ikhlas* in multiple ways. As a request for forgiveness (rather than, say, some kind of personal benefit) the prayer aligns with arguments that Balinese Hindu worship should be motivated by devotion and gratitude, not the desire for personal gain. In staging an alignment between the interior discourse of thought and the outer discourse of language, the Tri Sandhya positions the interior self as the core of personhood and the primary object of religious concern and cultivation. Just as acts of ritual devotion are useless if not backed up by sincere feeling, so prayers will be ineffective if not supported by corresponding intentions, thus worshippers should worry about their interior dispositions, not material form. (This is emphasized by the claim that if you don't understand the meaning of a mantra, then it's best to pray in your own language). While the discourse and pedagogy surrounding the Puja Tri Sandhya promote a particular way of conceptualizing prayer, the prayer, as a linguistic and embodied practice, affords concrete ways of 'being' a particular kind of Hindu. However, it does not determine that people will actually 'take up' the subjectivities it makes available. To understand how the Tri Sandhya is in fact reshaping ethical subjectivity in Bali requires looking beyond the performative and linguistic

structure of the prayer. In closing this chapter, I would like to turn to a few ethnographic examples that shed light on how the forms of subjectivity that it offers as affordances are actually taken up and inhabited in daily life.

### ***Feeling Sincerity: Narrative Re-envisioning and the Reformist Hindu Self***

In Chapter 2 I argued that the ethical relationships that my interlocutors maintain with invisible beings—and with each other by way of those beings—are not based on the norm of sincerity but derive their ethical significance from a different evaluative framework. While my interlocutors did try to peer behind the obvious surfaces of things to get at the hidden sources and causes of observable circumstances, these efforts were not aimed at seeking out individuals' intentions, the true but potentially hidden or purposefully obscured motivations that lie behind actions. Instead, in evaluating people's actions and behavior, my interlocutors tried to discern what forms of agency—human, divine, magical—were involved in creating the situation in which those people found themselves. Was a family's apparent wealth a blessing from god or the fruit of stinginess and frugality? Was an individual's illness due to black magic or shortcomings in the ritual sphere? The answers to these questions have important moral implications for the individuals' involved. Within the ethics of sincerity, the salient questions are different. Here, determining whether someone acted morally or not depends centrally on discerning the true motivations behind their actions. Are a woman's lavish offerings a sincere expression of devotion or merely an attempt to show off her family's wealth? When a student recites a prayer, does he mean it?

This plurality of ethical frameworks and dispositions within Balinese Hinduism is what I mean to capture in referring to Balinese religion as a moral assemblage. Cheryl Mattingly has suggested that the inherent pluralism of ethical life may facilitate the process of what she calls “narrative re-envisioning,” the activity of coming to reimagine oneself and one’s commitments and in doing so to become, in effect, a different kind of (ethical) self (Mattingly 2014a: 20). The reformist discourse of *tulus ikhlas*, and the embodied and linguistic practice of the *Puja Tri Sandhya*, seem targeted at bringing about just this kind of transformation. What kind of effects is this discourse having? Do Balinese Hindus ever think in terms of the norm of sincerity? Do they make evaluations in light of this norm? If so, how would we access this ethnographically?

One way to begin to get at these questions is to look at how people responded when I asked them if they perform the *Tri Sandhya*. One man laughed when I posed this question to him. He readily admitted that he never does the *Tri Sandhya*, and he said he suspects that, outside of school contexts, almost no Balinese Hindus do. But he was the only person who responded this way. Everyone else told me that they perform the *Tri Sandhya* regularly (albeit perhaps not three times each day). However, these performances did not necessarily involve reciting the entire text of the prayer. (Indeed, as noted earlier, none of the adults I interviewed claimed to recite the entire text on a daily basis). When asked if they perform the *Tri Sandhya*, a few people told me that they pray in their household temple each morning. Further questioning revealed that these daily prayers took the same basic form as *muspa* (hands in a *sembah*, holding flowers) and did not involve reciting the text of the *Tri Sandhya*. Nonetheless,

respondents equated this practice with performing the Tri Sandhya because, like the Tri Sandhya, it constitutes a daily routine of private prayer. For these respondents, the Tri Sandhya had a broader meaning than what is given in school textbooks, encompassing a variety of different ways of privately connecting with god on a daily basis. Some informants even told me that they perform the Tri Sandhya without uttering any words or adopting any particular bodily gestures or postures; the important thing, they said, is to *ingat* (remember) God. This conception of the Tri Sandhya as something that can be done entirely mentally, without having to move one's body or take time out from other activities, was supported by the elementary school teacher I interviewed. She said that the Puja Tri Sandhya—the idea of praying at fixed times every day—is really a kind of crutch to help people learn how to remember god; once a person advances beyond a certain stage, they will be able to remember god all the time, and no longer need to do anything physical in order to achieve this.

If it is true, as my interviews suggest, that few adults regularly recite the Puja Tri Sandhya, this may seem to indicate that the practice has not had a significant impact on religious and ethical subjectivity in Bali. However, even if an individual does not recite the prayer, this does not necessarily mean that they do not engage with the ideals that the prayer embodies. The norm of sincerity rests on the idea that a person's internal thoughts and feelings about god are more important than the material forms that mediate worship. Thus, to perform the Tri Sandhya through thinking alone is fully in line with reformist semiotic ideology.<sup>151</sup> The Puja Tri Sandhya provides a set of concrete,

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<sup>151</sup> We could imagine an opposite scenario in which people recite the prayer assiduously, but with the hope that it will produce magical effects. Such an outcome would run counter to the reformist project.

mediatory forms that facilitate and promote a reimagining of human-divine relations and ethical subjectivity. When my interlocutors interact with god without material mediations—without offerings, without words, without bodily gestures—they are taking on a distinctly reformist form of ethical selfhood.

I would like to suggest that the Puja Tri Sandhya, broadly understood as the practice of maintaining an interiorized relationship with god, also affords particular ways of feeling (or, as it were, not feeling) the links between human and invisible worlds. In reformist discourse, *tulus ikhlas* is often identified as a feeling (*rasa tulus ikhlas*). This feeling is described in depth in a recent book entitled *Reformasi Ritual: Mentradisikan Agama bukan Mengagamakan Tradisi (Ritual Reform: Making Religion into a Tradition is not Making Tradition into a Religion)*, a kind of reformist manifesto.<sup>152</sup> One of the book's basic arguments is that Balinese adat ritual is a product of, and most ideally adapted for, an agricultural society. When Bali's economy was still primarily agricultural, the author claims, people had plenty of time and resources to hold elaborate rituals. However, now that Bali's economy has shifted toward the tourism industry, and now that it has become integrated into the global economy, Balinese livelihoods have become more precarious. Materials that were once widely available have become scarce and expensive; people must perform wage labor to support themselves and their families,

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<sup>152</sup> I cite this book frequently in this chapter partly because it provides one of the most sustained engagements with what I am calling the ethics of sincerity, but also because it seems to have strong backing from state religious bodies, as evidenced by the number of key figures who contributed *Kata Sambutan* (prefaces) at the beginning of the text, a list which includes representatives of the Parisada (PHDI), the Balinese Provincial branch of the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, the Balinese parliament (DPRD), the National Hindu Theological Institute (IHDN), the Majelis Desa Pakraman (MDP), and the Indonesian Hindu University (UNHI), where the author of the book is also a faculty member. The back cover also includes a comment from the head of the Hindu branch of the Indonesian Ministry of Religion at the national level.

leaving less time for ritual pursuits; Balinese must now compete with migrants 'who just so happen to have another religion,' and this creates a situation where ritual risks making people unable to compete for jobs. This in turn threatens the entire island's identity (Jyoti 2012: 1-5). As a result of all of this, ritual activity has become a source of stress and anxiety (*ketakutan, kegelisahan, stres*) (*ibid.*: 30, 75). With all of these worries, the feeling of *tulus ikhlas* cannot be achieved. Since the sincerity of ritual is what matters to god, rituals performed under these conditions will be *sia-sia* (useless) (*ibid.*: 14). Due to the mismatch between ritual traditions and modern livelihoods, many Balinese have come to see their religion as expensive and difficult (*mahal, sulit, memberatkan*), and they have begun to feel burdened by it (*terbebani*) (*ibid.*: 21, 25). The author contests this idea, saying that while Balinese adat traditions are indeed burdensome, Hinduism itself is not. In other words, adat is the problem, and adat customs can be abandoned if they are no longer cohesive with the demands of the times (*ibid.*). The solution, then, is for people to reform their ritual traditions so that they do not impose an undue burden. Instead of being swayed by social pressure to perform lavish rituals that strain their time and resources, people must learn to perform ritual comfortably and confidently (*tanpa ragu-ragu*) because only then can those rituals truly be sincere (untainted by social pressure) (*ibid.*: 14).

The feeling of *tulus ikhlas*, thus described, contrasts markedly with the feelings of relational entanglement described in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Members of the Dangin household are deeply sensitized to the ways their material action (or inaction) in the ritual sphere produce reactions in the invisible world, leading in turn to positive or

negative effects in the human sphere. They are also sensitive to how their actions will be perceived and evaluated by other people. Their relationships with invisible beings are permeated with feelings of obligation, anticipation, anxiety, and sometimes even anger. These feelings, though sometimes unpleasant, are viewed as a natural, and even a valued, part of these ethical relationships.

To feel *tulus ikhlas* is, in a sense, to learn *not to feel* this dynamic interrelatedness. In promoting a form of religiosity based on *rasa tulus ikhlas* (the feeling of sincerity), reformist discourses promote a new kind of sensory order. Rather than feel the weight of ritual obligations—the anticipation and anxiety that accompany the high-stakes ordeal of managing relationships with invisible beings, the anger and disappointment when misfortune strikes—people should instead simply feel grateful for whatever benefits god sends their way. If they choose to express their devotion through material offerings, this act must be purified of all concern regarding the expense, value, or prestige associated with those offerings. In semiotic terms, the offerings must have a purely symbolic function, not an indexical one.

Based on what I described in earlier chapters, this way of thinking about feeling, sincerity, and the value of ritual action might seem like it would be completely foreign to the Dangin household. However, this was not entirely true. Wayan, the most educated member of the family, maintained somewhat different views than the rest of his family on certain aspects of religious practice. One day Wayan and I visited a childhood friend of his so that I could interview the latter for my research. I asked the friend whether he did the Tri Sandhya on a regular basis and he told me he prays every morning in his

household temple. Wayan and his friend then got into a conversation about how much they enjoyed praying alone. They both agreed that praying in one's house temple was more pleasurable than praying in village or other public temples. The friend said that he often feels *kedinginan* (chills) when praying at home, a sensation which is commonly understood as evidence of divine presence. They said they could achieve a deeper connection with god at home than they could at public temples.

At other times, Wayan sometimes complained that he didn't feel good praying at public temples. One night I accompanied a few members of his family to watch a performance at a large odalan in a neighboring village. The temple was exceptionally crowded; the audience for the performance stood so tightly packed together in the courtyard outside the temple that even in the cool night air the space was oppressively hot. When we got home, Wayan told his family members that he would have difficulty praying at a temple that was so crowded: *sing luung bayune* (roughly, I wouldn't feel good). During ceremonies Tegal, it was not uncommon for Wayan to simply pray from home rather than actually going to the temple to pray. He sometimes said going to temple to pray was "more for women," yet he also acknowledged that people in his village would judge him negatively for failing to show up to pray.

Wayan felt that such negative judgments were unfair. As he put it, prayer is "about feeling." From Wayan's perspective, the expectation to physically show up and pray at the temple imposed an undue burden on him, a burden which he should not have to feel. To support his position on this issue, Wayan would often construct a contrasting figure, a 'diligent' villager who puts on a good show of being devout, but

whose actions in the community are “bullshit,” not underpinned by proper religious motivations. The implication here is that since feelings are true, and are what really matter to god, judgment based on actions is misplaced. Wayan repeatedly told me that people should pray in a way that feels good to them; if he feels good praying at home, then this is the best way for him to pray; if others feel differently, they should be free to pray otherwise. Along with his sense that the expectations imposed upon him are those of his community, not his religion per se, Wayan’s expectation that prayer should feel good resonates with Jyoti’s arguments in *Reformasi Ritual* about the superfluosity of ritual “burden” and the importance of avoiding the negative feelings that sometimes arise due to social pressure to uphold tradition. While Chapter 2 saw Wayan shouldering significant ritual “burdens” without questioning their religious necessity, in expressing his views on prayer he seems to align himself with the reformist argument that if religious devotion feels like a burden, there must be something wrong.

The motivation behind Wayan’s claims is not simply hedonistic. His arguments are rooted in an ethics of sincerity, which locates the value of prayer and other acts of religious devotion in the worshipper’s interior “feeling,” rather than the material matters of where and how they choose to worship. Wayan felt strongly about the validity of his arguments, and the moral superiority of his position, but he knew others would disagree. He told me that people in Tegal would dislike him if he expressed these views to them. He recognizes that his moral justifications may not be valid for many in his community; the authority of his arguments (to the extent that they have any) does not come from being embedded in communal norms, but from their association with the authoritative

religious discourses of the state and the representations of Hindu religiosity that circulate in the media. Reformist discourses, particularly those that circulate around the Puja Tri Sandhya, provide him with a means of re-envisioning his ethical responsibilities and a basis upon which to “give reasons” for his position (Keane 78-81). To be clear, I am not making a causal argument here; an ideal as pervasive as sincerity is bound to enter into a person’s awareness and self-understanding through multiple channels, and moreover, mediatory forms do not cause people to think or feel in a particular way; they merely afford certain possibilities. What does seem clear, however, is that some form of mediation is necessary for this kind of re-envisioning to take place. I would also argue that mediatory forms like the Puja Tri Sandhya are not passive participants in the social processes they enable; their sensory, affective, and semiotic affordances play a role in shaping what’s possible.

### ***Conclusion***

The Puja Tri Sandhya is a set of mediatory practices that circulates a particular vision of Hindu religiosity. Embedded in social consciousness and practice through the efforts of state institutions, the prayer is an important ideological tool of the Hindu Reform. Reverberating in the soundscape through community-owned loudspeakers and radio and television broadcasts, it instantiates a Hindu public whose addressees are presumed to identify with reformist doctrines and values. Layered over the localized acoustic communities that are activated during temple ceremonies, public soundings of

the Tri Sandhya give sonorous form to a pan-Balinese and broader national Hindu community united in the worship of a singular god.

In the context of the Hindu Religion and Character curriculum, the Puja Tri Sandhya and doa sehari-hari offer a pedagogy of sincerity which endeavors to reshape how Hindu students conceptualize and practice their relationship with god. Both the linguistic structure of these prayers and the pedagogical discourses that go along with them encourage Balinese students to not only recite Sanskrit words with their voices, but also to take personal responsibility for the meanings and intentions that those words express. In this way, these prayers provide a model of sincere expression as well as a concrete means of inhabiting and practicing an ethics of sincerity in daily life.

One of the consequences of the inherent materiality of semiotic forms is that they always retain the potential to take on new meanings. As we have seen, the Tri Sandhya's sonic materiality may function as a symbol of Balinese identity and religiosity, but it can also become an annoyance, a disruption, or simply a way of marking time. As Keane writes, "Although semiotic forms are consequential, any particular effects depend on their conjunction with social, political, and other forces. . . . Semiotic form may be powerful, but in itself it is not *automatically* efficacious in any particular way" (Keane 2007: 70).

Rather than directly causing specific changes in religious and moral subjectivity, the Puja Tri Sandhya creates spaces of possibility for new forms of subjectivity to take root. Crucially, this does not mean that the prayer is simply an empty vessel into which any possible meaning can be decanted. The various forms that the prayer takes, and

the bodies and technologies through which it circulates, are embedded in a material world, and this materiality can extend, but also limit, the prayer's capacity to take on social meaning. As we saw in the conversation between Wayan and his friend, the Tri Sandhya affords particular forms of sensory pleasure. These sensory experiences in turn depend on other material forms—the cool, quiet house yard temples in which the two men pray, and the crowded, hot public temples with which the sacred spaces of the domestic sphere contrast so favorably, are merely two examples. Operating in tandem with a host of other forces, the Tri Sandhya makes available an experience of prayer that is desirable to some Balinese Hindus: prayer not as a communal display of obeisance, but as a momentary retreat into the self, a reaching out to god through thought, and an experience of god through feeling. However, pleasure and desire are not the only reasons the Tri Sandhya has meaning for Wayan. He uses the feelings he experiences during prayer to construct an ethical argument about how to properly interact with the divine. In constructing this argument, Wayan seems to draw from the authoritative moral discourses of the state, but his ethical position also grows out of his personal efforts to grapple with the more immediate moral questions that he faces in his community. One of the ways mediatory practices like the Puja Tri Sandhya enable processes of narrative re-envisioning lies in how their material properties are taken up as ethical affordances in people's day-to-day efforts to live a good life. The ethics of sincerity that Wayan articulates was not *caused* by the Tri Sandhya in any direct way; but nor would it be the same in the absence of the conceptual, sensory, and affective resources that the Tri Sandhya provides.

## CHAPTER 4

### PEPAOSAN AND THE ETHICS OF DIVINE GUIDANCE

#### ***Voicing***

Two young women walk slowly to the middle of an outdoor stage. Wearing matching white blouses and delicate gold leaf flowers in their hair, they kneel behind a low table set with two microphones. One of the women arranges a thin blue folder on the table in front of her. With palms together and eyes closed, they recite two brief mantras in perfect unison. Then the translator executes a choreographed gesture inviting her partner, the reader, to commence the performance. Placing her hands on her lap, the reader chants a verse from the *Yajur Veda*, an early Sanskrit religious text. As the verse unfolds, her sonorous alto voice traces an austere melody. The sustained tones undulate with a wide vibrato, which varies in speed—from a slow pulsation to a rapid trill—and occasionally ceases, leaving a pure tone hanging in the air. At the ends of phrases, the melody takes on more movement, bending and softening into subtle melismatic swirls. Sometimes the reader furrows her brow or glances down at the papers in the blue folder, but most of the time she looks out at the audience, her face smooth and emotionless. At the end of the passage she gestures to the translator, who then begins to orate a paraphrase of the verse. Speaking serenely, in formal Indonesian, she asks the gods for favor, friendship, and a long life. A gentle smile enlivens the corners of her lips as she speaks, and when she addresses the gods, she places her palms together and casts her eyes upward.

These women are experts in the art of pepaosan, an Indonesian Hindu tradition of singing and orally interpreting religious texts. I recorded their performance in June of 2014, while attending a Hindu vocal competition at RRI Denpasar. In contrast with the relaxed informality of the many ceremonial pepaosan performances I had observed during my research, the performances at the competition that weekend were characterized by a remarkable degree of aesthetic refinement in terms of sound, appearance, and gesture. What the speeches that preceded the competition made clear, however, was that the values the contest's sponsors ultimately wished to cultivate and reward were not aesthetic, but rather ethical in nature.

This chapter considers the role of texts and textual knowledge in the Indonesian Hindu Reform. Focusing on pepaosan as a key site in which Balinese Hindus engage with religious texts, I show how the state is using pepaosan as a tool of ethical and religious transformation. By comparing the practices and discourses put forward in state-sponsored pepaosan competitions to those that circulate among village-based pepaosan clubs, I argue that pepaosan is enmeshed in, and helps sustain, two different religious pedagogies of voice, and that within each of these, a unique ideal of the devout Hindu self is circulated and promoted.

The aim of this investigation is not only to understand the social significance of pepaosan as part of the larger assemblage of practices, discourses, and values that is contemporary Balinese Hinduism, but also to bring ethnographic and theoretical attention to the ways ethical values and projects are manifested in musical practice.

## ***Literary Performance in Bali***

Along with its various synonyms (*mabebasan*, *mabasan*, and *mabaosan*), *pepaosan* refers to a practice of literary performance in which pairs of performers work together to create an oral interpretation of a passage of text. One performer, the *pengwacen* (reader), sings or chants a phrase of the original text in its appropriate style. Then the other, the *peneges* (clarifier), provides an impromptu spoken translation of it in modern Balinese or Indonesian. The performance then continues in this fashion, alternating between reading and interpreting.<sup>153</sup>

In Bali, most *pepaosan* performances take place in the context of Hindu religious ceremonies where they commonly serve to fill periods of inactivity between the main ritual events. These performances, which are nearly always amplified, often run intermittently for several hours a day, and may continue for several days (or even weeks) at larger ceremonies, as numerous groups take turns performing. *Pepaosan* has thus become an especially prominent feature of the contemporary Balinese soundscape.

The rich and varied body of literature used in *pepaosan* performances includes both poetic and prose works in Balinese, Kawi, and Sanskrit languages. Some of these works are newly composed, while others date back as early as the ninth century (and

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<sup>153</sup> There is no general term for literary performance in Bali. In speaking about these practices my interlocutors shifted among several terms with distinct meanings. To simplify matters for the unfamiliar reader, I mostly limit myself to the single term *pepaosan*, which I use to refer generally to the set of artistic practices in which the singing or chanting of a text is interwoven with spoken interpretation. My usage is thus consistent with Zurbuchen's (1987) and Rubinstein's (1992; 2000), but it diverges from more recent scholarship on Balinese literary performance, such as Fox 2011, Putra 2009, and Putra and Creese 2012, which use the terms *mabasan*, *mabebasan*, and *makidung*, respectively.

much earlier in the case of the Sanskrit works). These texts draw their narrative content from a range of sources, including the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* epics as well as tales and legends of local origin. Each literary genre is sung or chanted in accordance with its own unique set of melodies and its own characteristic vocal quality and ornamentation style. Each is thus a unique performance form unto itself. What unites the different practices I discuss here is the use of the pepaosan format, in which the singing of the original text alternates with spoken translation.

Throughout this dissertation I refer to the texts read in pepaosan performances as “religious texts.” This would seem to imply that they have explicitly religious content. However, this is not always the case. In labeling these texts “religious,” I mean instead to call attention to the various ways in which they are believed to form links between humans and the divine. According to Indonesian Hindu theologians, for example, the texts pepaosan performers study are derived from what they call *sruti*, the word of God as heard and documented by the *Maharsi* or Hindu prophets. In this view, the different literary genres used in pepaosan performances mark out a gradual descent, from the esoteric to the increasingly popularized, which serves as a bridge connecting ordinary people to lofty Vedic ideas. From the simple, entertaining parables of *kidung* and *geguritan*, to sophisticated *kakawin* poetry and inscrutable Sanskrit *mantra*, these different literary genres, it is claimed, present the same Vedic teachings at various levels of accessibility. In addition, the composition of *kakawin* poetry has traditionally been understood as a yogic practice in which literary inspiration comes through unification with the divine (Rubinstein 2000; Zoetmulder 1974). Indeed, contemporary

pepaosan practitioners often describe kakawin texts as products of divine inspiration. Finally, pepaosan texts are believed to be an earthly abode of the goddess Saraswati, and their sounding through oral performance is a means of partaking in Saraswati's divine power. These texts thus function both as a repository of divine teachings, communicated from gods to humans in the distant past, and also as a channel through which people interact with divine agents in the present.

Once practiced almost exclusively by small groups of elderly men, pepaosan activities have enjoyed a surge in popularity over the past few decades as the emergence of new high-profile performance opportunities has attracted new participants, including many women and youth, to the once aging and shrinking pepaosan scene. As Putra and Creese have discussed, this resurgence can be attributed in part to popular interactive radio and television programs that first appeared in the 1990s, which allow listeners to sing verses over the phone to be interpreted on air by the programs' hosts (Putra 2009; Putra and Creese 2012). Perhaps a more significant factor contributing to the recent increase in pepaosan activity, however, is the rise of state-sponsored pepaosan competitions, now known as the *Utsawa Dharma Gita* (UDG), which were introduced in the 1960s (Creese 2014: 303, Rubinstein 1992: 104). Modeled on the prestigious *Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an* Quranic recitation competitions, which have existed in Indonesia since the 1940s (Gade 2004:232), contemporary UDG events include a range of competitions in Hindu literary performance, as well as Hindu sermons and quizzes on Hindu doctrine. Under the banner of the UDG, Bali's Cultural Affairs Department holds an annual series of local, regency, and provincial competitions

for children and young adults in the reading of *kakawin*, *parwa*, *kidung*, *geguritan*, and *sloka*; the Hindu branch of the Indonesian Ministry of Religion organizes a triennial national competition in a select subset of these genres; and other state and non-state organizations occasionally sponsor their own independent competitions. In connection with the UDG contests, the state also organizes and funds training programs in literary performance for Hindu youth throughout the Indonesian archipelago (Rubinstein 1992:104-5).

Government efforts to preserve and develop Hindu traditions of literary performance are part of a broader reformist project to promote a scriptural orientation to religion in Bali in order to bring Balinese Hinduism into alignment with the state's vision of what a religion should be. Before discussing how *pepaosan* has been constructed as a form of ethical self-cultivation—both within and outside ongoing religious reform efforts—I will briefly discuss the important role religious texts have played in past and present efforts to make Balinese Hindus into national subjects.

### ***Religious Texts and National Modernity in Bali***

In the eyes of Europeans at least, Bali's identity as a Hindu society has long been bound up with its textual traditions. Metal and stone inscriptions indicate that both the Sanskrit language and Hindu religious and philosophical ideas have been present in Bali since at least the 9<sup>th</sup> Century (Zurbuchen 1987: 8). Another place where early foreign visitors found evidence of Indic influence on Bali was in the island's palm leaf manuscripts. Painstakingly recopied over hundreds of years, these texts' fragile pages

preserved a literature dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, or possibly earlier, which was written in a language (Kawi) that drew heavily on Sanskrit vocabulary, and included localized versions of Indian texts (*ibid.*: 82).<sup>154</sup> Generations of scholars have framed these texts as a medium of religious and cultural continuity linking contemporary Bali to India by way of ancient Java, where many of the classical Kawi texts are believed to have been composed (Friederich [1850] 1959; Zoetmulder 1974).<sup>155</sup>

Given the important mediatory role attributed to these texts early on, perhaps it is not surprising that they were later incorporated into colonial efforts to “traditionalize” the Balinese. When Dutch colonial authorities sought to strengthen Bali’s traditional Hindu culture—in hopes that it could serve as a bulwark against the spread of Islamic radicalism, nationalism, and communism in the Indies—they implemented programs to familiarize the populace with this ancient literature (Picard 1999:18-22). These programs included courses in Balinese language and literature, introduced as part of the *Baliseering* (Balinization) policy of the late 1920s, and the founding of a public library of palm-leaf manuscripts in 1928 (*ibid.*:22; Bakker 1993:36).

For Balinese living during the 1920s and 30s, however, studying religious texts had as much to do with becoming modern as it did with preserving tradition. As Dutch-educated Balinese intellectuals began to imagine a place for the people of Bali within the expanded world to which colonial rule had connected them, studying religious texts came to be seen as a way of achieving *kemadjoean* (progress). As evidenced in local

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<sup>154</sup> This body of literature includes some of the *kakawin* and *parwa* texts read by pepaosan performers today.

<sup>155</sup> For a critical perspective on these claims of continuity, see Fox 2011.

Malay-language journals from this period, the Hindu religion represented both an essential part of Balinese identity, which must be preserved, and a potential source of outdated beliefs and customs, which should be abandoned (Picard 1999). Among the traditions that came under scrutiny at this time were beliefs about the magical powers of written language and associated taboos restricting the study of religious texts to members of particular castes or people who had undergone ritual purification (Rubinstein 1992: 90-91; Zurbuchen 1987:60-61).<sup>156</sup> As these and other Balinese customs were being called into question, religious texts emerged as the key to cultivating what these journals' authors imagined as a properly modern form of Balinese religiosity. In the November 1925 issue of the journal *Surya Kanta*, for example, authors advocated religious textual study as a way of ridding the populace of *tachajoel* (superstitions) so that they too could join the ranks of the *madjoe* (advanced) nations.<sup>157</sup> *Surya Kanta* also regularly included quotations and translated excerpts from kakawin and other religious texts, as a way of engaging its public in this modern religious practice.<sup>158</sup>

After Indonesia gained independence in 1949, religious texts became an important marker of national belonging for Balinese Hindus. In order for Balinese ritual customs to qualify as a religion in the eyes of the Indonesian state, it was necessary to

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<sup>156</sup> The journal *Surya Kanta*, published in Bali in the 1920s, includes allusions to the secrecy surrounding the religious knowledge contained in texts while specifically encouraging its low caste readers not to be afraid to pursue this knowledge (See *Surya Kanta* 1925 1/3:7, and 1925 1/2:3).

<sup>157</sup> See the article entitled "Ngaben" (*Surya Kanta* 1925 1/2:7-8).

<sup>158</sup> See the articles entitled "Poerana" and "Pemandangan" in the July 1925 issue (*Surya Kanta* 1925 1/1:3-5), and the serialized translation of the *Kakawin Sutasoma* that begins in the November 1925 issue and continues for more than a year (*Surya Kanta* 1925 1/2:13-5).

demonstrate that they were rooted in a sacred scripture. Kawi and Sanskrit texts were instrumental in establishing the legitimacy of Balinese Hinduism as a religion that could stand alongside Christianity and Islam, and ongoing efforts to "convert" the populace to the state-approved version of Hinduism have continued to draw guidance and validation from these texts. For example, the textbooks used in the Hindu Religion and Character curriculum are full of quotations from indigenous and Sanskrit religious texts, as are most books on Hinduism for a general Balinese audience. Like the journals of the 1920s, these publications promote and exemplify the idea that the foundations of Balinese religion can be found in ancient texts. Hindu events organized by the Ministry of Religion, such as the Utsawa Dharma Gita and Jambore Pasraman competitions, similarly foreground texts and textual learning as central to what it means to be Hindu in Bali, and in Indonesia more broadly. Both before and after state recognition then, religious texts have played an important role in legitimizing the inclusion of Balinese Hindus within the Indonesian national imaginary, and in shaping efforts to make Balinese religiosity conform to the state's vision of what a religion should be.

Finally, and most importantly for my purposes in this chapter, the reformist effort to promote the study of religious texts has introduced new ways of thinking about religious devotion and ethical cultivation among Balinese Hindus, which have contributed to the broader reformist effort to circulate a modern conception of the ideal Hindu self. Pushing against longstanding habits of treating textual study as an elite and specialized practice, proponents of reform now claim that being a good Hindu requires

personal familiarity with the contents of religious texts. Studying these texts is thus the responsibility of every Balinese Hindu, not just priests and literati.

This emphasis on personal engagement with textual knowledge is part of the larger reformist project to position the interior self as the primary object of religious and ethical cultivation, which I discussed in the previous chapter. In contrast with the action-focused and communal character of even most contemporary Balinese religious practice, Hinduism textbooks and other reformist Hindu media posit an individualized religious subject whose behavior is regulated less by community-imposed obligations and sanctions than by personal qualities such as “character” (*karakter* or *budi pekerti*). Religion, in this view, is not just about fulfilling shared obligations to gods and spirits; people must work to cultivate the interior dispositions that are said to motivate and sustain their religious practices. In Chapter 3 I showed how proponents of the Hindu reform promote the ethics of sincerity, encouraging Balinese Hindus to monitor and manage their thoughts and feelings, so that the devotion expressed in their actions are underpinned by authentic intentions and sentiments. In this chapter I bring attention to another aspect of the interiorized Hindu self promoted in reformist discourse: the expectation that each Balinese Hindu must study, understand, and internalize the moral guidance contained in religious texts and use this guidance in their daily lives.

Given the crucial role attributed to texts as a means of cultivating a properly modern religious self, it is not surprising that *pepaosan* has been incorporated into reformist programs. However, it would be a mistake to presume that this art form is inherently supportive of the kind of ethical subject the state wishes to promote. I show

instead that the ethical dimensions of pepaosan are constructed differently across different discursive contexts. That is to say, pepaosan affords a variety of different paths of ethical striving, which do not necessarily align with a single underlying set of values or ideals. By analyzing the different ways pepaosan performers are invited and compelled to work on themselves in order to become subjects of divine guidance, I show how pepaosan both supports and diverges from the Hindu Reform's ethical and political project.

One key point of divergence between different approaches to literary performance in Bali has to do with how practitioners imagine the relationship between the ethical and aesthetic aspects of pepaosan practice. For many pepaosan practitioners, ethical and aesthetic matters are deeply intertwined. Meanwhile, state-sponsored pepaosan programs like the UDG work to separate the properly ethical from the aesthetic aspects of performance. By encouraging practitioners to approach pepaosan not as *seni semata* (mere art), but as a means of cultivating a *sikap mental* (mental attitude) that disposes the practitioner to implement Vedic teachings in his or her daily life, spokespersons for these programs seek to marginalize the aesthetic and material aspects of pepaosan while prioritizing those aspects most closely related to the performer's interiority: meaning and understanding. This emphasis on the practitioner's interior relationship to the text is consonant with the broader reformist effort to promote an interiorized form of ethical subjectivity, as discussed in Chapter 3. Ironically, however, at the same time that UDG spokespersons disavow what they see as the

excessive focus on form and aesthetics in traditional pepaosan practice, the adjudication process incentivizes careful attention to performance aesthetics.

In the sections that follow, I compare the discourses and practices of various participants in the contemporary pepaosan scene. I begin by discussing the official speeches that take place at UDG events, then turn to the adjudication and training practices that surround the UDG. Finally, I discuss the activities of *sekaa santi*, pepaosan clubs whose artistic endeavors are supported not by the Indonesian state but by *desa adat*, *puri* (noble houses), *gria* (priestly houses), and other customary institutions.

### ***Pepaosan in Context: The Utsawa Dharma Gita***

I was fortunate to undertake fieldwork during a year that coincided with the largest and most prestigious of all UDG events, the triennial UDG Tingkat Nasional, sponsored by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion. More than any other UDG competition, this national event locates pepaosan performance firmly within a national Hindu imaginary. The competition was held at a large conference hotel in Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta, during the second weekend of July, 2014. On Friday evening, contingents from each of the nation's 33 provinces gathered in the hotel's largest ballroom for a spectacular opening ceremony featuring speeches, dance performances, a group prayer, and a closing *tableau vivant*, in which representatives from each province arranged themselves on stage in a display of the "unity in diversity" of the Indonesian Hindu community. Throughout the weekend, hundreds of young competitors

and middle-aged chaperones filled the hotel.<sup>159</sup> Recognizably dressed in the ethnic costume of their province, or matching safari shirts of a distinctive regional fabric, they wandered in and out of conference rooms to watch and perform. Participants competed in two styles of *pepaosan* (the reading of *sloka* and excerpts of *parwa* literature), as well as *kidung daerah* (regional religious songs), *dharma wacana* (sermons), and *dharma widya* (quiz competitions).<sup>160</sup> Between events, they mingled in the lobby, browsed among the vendors selling Hindu books along the hotel's entryway, and piled into vans in the parking lot for outings to one of Jakarta's shopping centers. On Sunday afternoon, interested attendees were treated to a symposium discussing the merits of UDG activities as a means of inculcating Hindu values. The weekend ended with a closing ceremony in which the winners of each contest were announced.

Although only the national competition in Jakarta included a symposium, speeches explaining the purpose and value of UDG competitions were a mainstay of all UDG events I attended during my research. In these speeches, UDG spokespersons simultaneously address, imagine, and constitute a national Hindu public (Warner 2002) bound together not by communal or ethnic ties, but by a shared attachment to the "universal" values contained in Hindu religious texts.<sup>161</sup> As addressees of these

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<sup>159</sup> All competitors appeared to be under the age of twenty-five with the vast majority aged somewhere between ten and twenty.

<sup>160</sup> *Sloka* are Sanskrit verses drawn from ancient Indian texts such as the *Yajur Veda* and the *Bhagavad Gita*; *parwa* refers to a body of indigenous prose literature composed primarily of Kawi translations of the *Mahabharata*.

<sup>161</sup> The "universal" character of these values was repeatedly emphasized, both in UDG speeches and in interviews I conducted with UDG organizers. This idea of a universal set of values underlying the nation's diverse religions is captured in an Indonesian saying that I heard repeatedly throughout my research: *caranya beda, tujuannya sama*, which can be roughly translated as "different practices, same goal."

speeches, who are presumed to identify with these values, competitors and other UDG attendees are encouraged to work on themselves, in an ethical sense, by studying and performing religious texts. UDG speeches thus circulate a particular ideal of the devout Hindu self that can be achieved through participation in *pepaosan*.

Perhaps the most striking and consistent feature of the many speeches I recorded is their emphasis on ethical cultivation over and above artistic development. During the opening speech at a national UDG competition held at RRI Denpasar in the summer of 2014 for example, the station's director, Made Ardika, listed the eight official *tujuan* (goals) of the UDG. This list of goals, which is printed in official UDG materials and often cited in speeches at UDG events, emphasizes the cultivation of qualities like *sraddha* (faith), *bhakti* (devotion), and *akhlak mulia* (noble values). Given the central place that artistic performance occupies in UDG competitions (the vast majority of the prizes being awarded to competitors in *pepaosan*-style literary performance and regional religious song) it is remarkable that only the seventh goal makes mention of artistic ability. This focus on moral cultivation rather than artistic development is typical of the broader discourse emerging from the UDG. In a later speech at the same event, RRI's director of development, Hasto Kuncoro, said that the motivation for organizing the competition had been a desire to uphold RRI's mission to "preserve and develop the nation's culture" as a tool for "character formation" (*pembentuk karakter*). He said he believed the competition would contribute to this mission by providing *pembinaan moral* (moral cultivation). In a similar vein, a large banner displayed during the closing symposium at the UDG in Jakarta read as follows: "By way of this symposium we

strengthen our synergy in order to intensify the implementation of Vedic values in everyday life.” Statements like these frame the UDG as a forum for personal transformation that makes participants more likely to live in accordance with Hindu values.

Further investigation of these speeches demonstrates that the transformative potential attributed to *pepaosan* lies in the contents of the texts performed, and specifically in the important moral teachings these texts are believed to contain. These moral teachings are posited as ethical affordances, which provide models and guidance that people can apply to their own lives. UDG spokespersons often refer to this guidance as *tuntunan*. Derived from the root word *nuntun*, which means to guide or lead, the word *tuntunan* encompasses the examples of virtuous conduct provided by the heroic characters in stories, as well as the many explicitly didactic passages contained in these texts, both of which are supposed to serve as a guide for human action. Since the texts are believed to be of divine provenance, these *tuntunan* are understood as divine moral guidance.

Within the informal discourses of many *pepaosan* practitioners, the word *tuntunan* is used to denote not only the moral guidance contained in texts, but also the ways in which the divine, in the form of the goddess Saraswati, participates in and guides *pepaosan* practitioners as they perform, enhancing their performances aesthetically. However, within the discursive context of the UDG, *tuntunan* is only used in its narrower meaning as information embedded within the contents of texts. For example, in his speech at RRI Denpasar, discussed above, Mr. Kuncoro stated “the

themes and lyrics [of the texts performed in UDG competitions] generally contain religious and ethical teachings, guidance (tuntunan) for living a good life.” Unlike Saraswati’s tuntunan, which work directly on and through the performer during the moment of performance, the divine guidance discussed in official speeches must be actively taken up and “implemented” (i.e., put into practice in daily life) in order to be effective in guiding the practitioner. As was stated several times during the aforementioned symposium, the hope is that the passages of text performed in these competitions are “not merely sung,” but are also “turned into behavior” (*menjadi prilaku*). They ought to become, in the words of Ida Bagus Yudha Triguna, Director of the Hindu branch of the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, “a basis for our thoughts, our words, and our actions.” The understanding of divine guidance promoted at UDG competitions thus foregrounds human over and above divine agency, and, as we have seen, the enhancement of ethical, as opposed to, and distinct from, aesthetic values.

What ensures that this guidance will be effective, according to official discourses, is the faculty of *pemahaman* (understanding). A noun form of the verb *memahami*, which means to grasp or comprehend, *pemahaman* appears frequently in discourses about religious textual performance. For example, in the printed version of his symposium paper, the prominent Hindu scholar Ketut Wiana urged that “singing religious texts cannot be done on the basis of a beautiful voice alone. The understanding (*pemahaman*) and mental attitude that form the background for a performance must be our primary focus” (Wiana 2014:11). As with the requirement that Hindus understand the meaning of Sanskrit prayers, which I discussed in Chapter 3, the

focus on pemahaman in UDG discourses targets the performer's interior relationship to textual meaning as a site of moral evaluation and striving.

The idea that understanding religious teachings is fundamental to ethical cultivation and conduct is common throughout reformist Hindu discourses in Bali.<sup>162</sup> As noted in the Introduction, reformers often claim that the average Balinese Hindu is insufficiently knowledgeable about the teachings of their own religion. This alleged ignorance is blamed for a range of moral failings, including criminality and social unrest.<sup>163</sup> As a corrective, Hindus are admonished to practice *introspeksi diri* (self-reflection).<sup>164</sup> As explained to me by an IHDN faculty member, this practice involves reflecting on one's own actions and conduct and determining which are good and which are bad in order to improve one's moral conduct in the future. In contrast to the usage of *introspeksi diri* that we encountered in Chapter 1, which relied on direct communication between human and invisible beings, the form of self-reflection promoted in reformist discourses is a kind of personal moral accounting that aims to bring individual conduct

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<sup>162</sup> Helen Creese has shown that the Indonesian government's concern with promoting comprehension of religious teachings is not limited to Hinduism but extends to all religions (2014: 301-2).

<sup>163</sup> To give just one example of this argument, in an article describing a 2011 riot between two banjar, in which one man was killed, the author cites the following response from Dr. Made Titib, then-rector of IHDN. "*Prof. Made Titib menilai munculnya kebringasan di kalangan masyarakat disebabkan karena internalisasi ajaran agama belum maksimal. Rektor IHDN ini mengharapkan. . . tokoh agama. . . tak henti-hentinya turun ke tengah-tengah masyarakat untuk melakukan pembinaan tentang nilai-nilai moral agama* (Prof. Made Titib believes the emergence of this kind of communal violence happens because the internalization of religious teachings is not yet maximal. This rector of IHDN hopes that religious figures will ceaselessly descend into communities and offer guidance about religious moral values)." "Warga Bali Mulai Beringas: Hilang, Sikap Toleransi Krama Bali" (The People of Bali Are Becoming Violent: The Tolerant Attitude of the Balinese People is Disappearing), *Bali Post*, July 20, 2011.

<sup>164</sup> During the sermons broadcast on Bali TV, the Balinese version of this phrase (*mulat sarira*) often appears in the titles at the bottom of the screen. One common statement used in these titles is *semua umat harus mulat sarira* (the entire religious community must engage in self-reflection).

into line with the teachings contained in religious texts. Understanding these teachings is a crucial part of this ethical project.

Not surprisingly, official representations of the UDG also foreground the moral effects of understanding religious texts. For example, the first of the eight official goals of the UDG states that the competition aims to “increase religious feeling as an outcome of understanding religious teachings.” Given the important role often attributed to aesthetic performance in cultivating shared sentiments—including religious sentiment—it is particularly striking that this statement attributes the development of religious feeling (*rasa keagamaan*), a term that implies emotional attachment, not to the unique powers of music and oratory, but, rather, to the seemingly cognitive process of understanding religious teachings.<sup>165</sup> If understanding is the key to what the UDG hopes to achieve, then the question arises as to why the texts are performed at all. What role if any does oral performance play in the UDG’s ethical project? Or, to put it somewhat differently, what are the ethical affordances of singing?

The chair of the organizing committee for the National UDG provided a partial answer to this question in his speech at the opening ceremony of the Jakarta competition. He stated that the texts are realized artistically so that they can be “easily understood and internalized” (*muda difahami dan dihayati*). How the act of singing contributes to this accomplishment was further elaborated in interviews I conducted with a man I’ll call Pak Sujana, a professor at the National Hindu Theological Institute who

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<sup>165</sup> Examples of works that explore the role of musical and/or oratorical performance in cultivating shared sentiments include Feld 1990, Fox 2004, and Hirschkind 2006.

has been involved with the UDG for decades. As an expert in Sanskrit and an accomplished pepaosan performer, Pak Sujana is flown all over Indonesia to train UDG competitors in preparation for national competitions. Comparing singing to ordinary speaking, he said that when you sing, “all of the senses are involved.” Singing, unlike speaking, produces a “vibration” (*vibrasi*), he said. In bringing up the senses and this idea of vibration, Pak Sujana seems to gesture toward the cultivation of a pious sensorium, a process akin to that which Charles Hirschkind’s informants in Egypt attributed to sermon audition. According to Hirschkind, practitioners of the pious listening practices he studied believed that a pious self was achieved not simply through processing linguistic information, but through regular immersion in the kinds of emotional and bodily sensations experienced in listening to powerful oratory (Hirschkind 2006:70-6). According to his informants (as he represents them), cassette sermons make people more likely to follow Quranic teachings by training the body to feel in appropriate ways, creating what Hirschkind calls the “affective conditions of virtuous conduct” (ibid.:74). However, whereas pious listening transforms the self by tuning the senses, Pak Sujana went on to frame singing’s effect on the senses as merely an aid to the process of internalizing information. Later in our conversation he compared the singing of religious texts to the singing of the days of the week in kindergarten class. Just as young children can quickly learn the days of the week through song, he argued, so religious teachings can more easily be learned through the practice of singing religious texts. Pak Sujana thus likens the process of ethical cultivation to the process of memorizing information. According to this view, it is this information (the meaningful

content of the texts), rather than the aesthetic, sensory, or karmic effects of singing, which plays the most significant role in forming the virtuous Hindu self. Vocal performance, understood in this way, is merely an especially effective means of delivering and absorbing information.

Pak Sujana's arguments exemplify a particular semiotic ideology, characteristic of reformist discourse, which sees the referential contents of texts as ethical affordances that provide opportunities for individuals to engage in the ethical practice of introspeksi diri, evaluating their own conduct in light of divine moral guidance. This semiotic ideology is linked to an interiorized and cognitive conception of ethical selfhood, which is quite different from the embodied, affective self described by Hirschkind. With regard to the ethical affordances of singing, Pak Sujana seems to equivocate. While he ultimately privileges the cognitive dimension—singing as a means of internalizing information—his reference to “vibration” also gestures toward the possibility that the body and the senses may play a role in ethical development. This suggests a more complicated view of ethical selfhood than the one typically promoted by the Hindu Reform. Whatever Pak Sujana's personal beliefs about the ethical benefits of singing may be, by turning our conversation back to the topic of information he replicates the reformist view of religious ethics, which he, as an IHDN professor, is expected to teach and defend.

As evidenced in the belief that religious teachings ought to be “not merely sung,” but also “understood,” and “turned into action,” UDG speeches define the goal of the UDG in relation to virtues that exceed and are distinct from aesthetic value. And yet, the

practice of evaluating competitors on the merits of their performances seems to encourage the cultivation of artistic ability rather than ethical virtue. This apparent inconsistency—between the values that the competition wishes to promote and the criteria it uses to reward competitors—was not lost on those in attendance at the Jakarta symposium. During the lively question-and-answer session that followed the formal presentations, a male audience member made the following sardonic remark about the UDG’s champions: “Whether they buy coffee in the morning I don’t know sir. But if they’re buying *bubuk* coffee in the evening, then what’s the connection between these prizes and day-to-day implementation?” Cleverly addressed to the third presenter, Dewa Komang Tantra, whose talk made repeated reference to coffee, the joke is a speculation about what might happen after the winners return to their home provinces. Exploiting the double entendre of the term *bubuk*, which in Indonesian means ground or powdered, but in Balinese can be a slang term for sex, the joke asks sarcastically whether they might spend their evenings with prostitutes, and if so, what does winning have to do with Vedic values? This man’s remark questions the correspondence, presumed in much of the discourse about the UDG, between successful performance in the competition and the successful cultivation of Hindu virtues.

To explore this question, it will be useful to consider the problem of adjudicating these competitions. How do officials suture the divide between vocal performance and virtuous conduct that this man’s question reveals? That is, how do they substantiate the claim that what these competitions are ultimately rewarding, is *ethical*, and not merely *aesthetic*, cultivation? In a speech at the UDG competition I attended at RRI Denpasar

in June 2014, an assistant to the mayor of that city, Anak Agung Ngurah Iswara, stated that in order to ensure that what is sung “has meaning in life” he would urge juries and coaches not to focus exclusively on the voice. “If only [the voice] is trained, then we’re only at the level of form (*bentuk*), the function (*fungsi*) isn’t there yet.” He said that in addition to training the voice, trainers must stress the meaning of the texts. This, he said, would contribute to the UDG’s goal of “making Indonesia more harmonious” (*meningkatkan harmoni Indonesia*). Iswara’s distinction between the form and function of pepaosan performance can be usefully analyzed using Goffman’s concept of participation roles. If trainers and juries focus narrowly on form, then they encourage competitors to be mere animators of the texts they perform. However, in order for the ethical affordances of these texts to bear fruit, competitors must also take on the role of principal. That is to say, they must identify with, and take responsibility for, the messages these texts contain. Juries, for their part, must find a way of evaluating competitors with respect to both of these roles.

That these assumptions and priorities actually inform the practices of UDG juries and coaches was revealed in my interviews with Pak Sujana, who, in addition to his role in training UDG competitors, also developed the scorecard used by juries, and regularly serves as a jury member himself.<sup>166</sup> In our conversations, Pak Sujana stressed that

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<sup>166</sup> Both readers and translators receive points for four aspects of their performance: appearance (including posture, facial expression, and gesture), voice (timbre, ornamentation, and intonation), pronunciation (including prosodic correctness), and expression. In addition, translators are evaluated on the accuracy of their translation. These categories are differently weighted, with appearance and expression counting for less than voice, pronunciation, and translation. Competitors are scored as a pair (reader-translator), but the reader’s performance is weighted more heavily, accounting for 60 percent of the total score. This weighting arguably contradicts Pak Sujana’s claim that juries’ primary concern is with competitors’ ability to express a text’s meaning. Interestingly, Creese claims that for UDG competitions in Bali “contestants are judged against 17 expressive modes (*raras*) drawn from the traditional Balinese

having a beautiful voice does not score many points in UDG competitions. Instead, he said that a competitor's success depends first and foremost on her ability to *maknai* or express the meaning of the text she's performing. This, he claimed, means that a successful performer must *mendalami* or internalize the text's message. When I asked how juries evaluate this he said "we focus on their expression when they're singing a particular phrase. When the expression isn't correct, it's apparent." According to Pak Sujana, the expressive inflections of a performer's voice, face, and body must correctly correspond to the meaning of the text; when they do not, this is seen as a deficiency in the performers' comprehension and internalization of that meaning—a failure to move beyond simply being an animator.<sup>167</sup> In explaining juries' evaluative practices, he frames these expressive elements as visible and audible indexes of the effect the performed text has had on the performer. He posits these indexes as ethical affordances, which allow him to, in a sense, judge the performer's moral character. (Thus, while religious texts afford opportunities for practitioners to cultivate knowledge and understanding that will enable them to live ethically, oral performances of these texts afford opportunities for UDG juries to evaluate the extent to which these texts have actually had a meaningful moral impact on the performer). In this idealized scenario, a competitor's score is a direct reflection of the degree to which he or she has internalized Vedic

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dance form of *gambuh* [while] in the national competition expression is reduced to a single criterion (*ekspresi*)" (2014: 314-15). This raises interesting questions about Pak Sujana's statements.

<sup>167</sup> In discussing expression, Pak Sujana used the words *ekspresi* and *menjiwai*. These terms are often used interchangeably to denote the subtleties of a performance that make it exceptionally beautiful or affecting. In our interviews, he stressed that if a performer is able to successfully *menjiwai* a text it means she has full mastery over it, including mastery of its meaning, because only then could she have both the accuracy and the confident demeanor essential to a powerful performance.

teachings. In such cases, the *form* that the text takes in performance stands as proof that its ethical *function* has been achieved. This rationalization of the UDG adjudication process seeks to coordinate the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of pepaosan without collapsing the distinctions between them. According to Pak Sujana, a successful performance is not in itself a form of virtue, but it can serve as evidence of the seriousness of the performer's engagement with the ethical content of texts.

Taken together, the discourses of UDG officials present a particular conception of the devout Hindu self as constituted through the study and performance of pepaosan. First and foremost, it is a self formed through coming to understand and internalize religious teachings. Importantly, although this transformation may be aided by oral performance, it does not (according to these ideologies) depend on it. Rather, what effects ethical change within the performer is not the specific form in which the text is encountered, but the information that the text contains—its function, in Mr. Iswara's terms. In other words, the devout Hindu self, as understood and promoted through the UDG, is defined by an interior relationship to the teachings contained in religious texts, and the sensuous, aesthetic aspects of textual performance merely index this relationship. According to this view, the sonorous and bodily materiality of pepaosan performance is an external representation of Hindu virtue, not a constitutive part of it. By drawing this distinction between the ethical and aesthetic value of pepaosan performance, the UDG contributes to the circulation of a conception of ethical selfhood that accords with modern (and national) religious ideals. By rewarding certain values and qualities over others (ethical over aesthetic, textual content over sound,

understanding over beauty, etc.) the UDG directly encourages pepaosan performers to imagine and work on themselves in relation to these ideals.

### ***Embodying Ethics: Pepaosan Pedagogy in Practice***

As was just described, UDG juries view the performances they evaluate as a window through which a competitor's inner relationship to religious teachings can be seen, heard, and evaluated. According to Pak Sujana, the expressive aspects of performance index this relationship. My experience participating in and observing pepaosan training, however, suggests that pepaosan pedagogy does not always support Pak Sujana's interpretation. In my own lessons, for instance, discussion of *penjiwaan* (the ability to *menjiwai* or perform expressively) was never linked to the meanings of texts.<sup>168</sup> In fact, although my teachers would occasionally translate a particular word or phrase, they did not expect or require me to understand the meaning of the texts I studied with them. At most, a teacher might indicate that a particular text was sad and should thus be sung in a sad manner. More commonly however, such affective terms were linked not to texts, but to melodies, which can be used to sing any number of texts. Derived from the root word *jiwa* or soul, *menjiwai* implies imbuing one's performance with the proper spirit. In attempting to explain how to *menjiwai*, my teachers said things like "you have to feel [it] in [your] heart," or simply "you have to feel

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<sup>168</sup> While I don't presume that my lessons reflect common pedagogical practice, I do believe they provide insight into my teachers' understanding of the relationship between expression and textual meaning. Whether or not these teachers discuss meaning with their Balinese students, their interactions with me suggest that they believe it is at least possible to learn to *menjiwai* a text without understanding its meaning.

[it],” without specifying what it was that I was supposed to feel. In demonstrating *menjiwai* they sometimes closed their eyes or gestured toward the heart. Often their singing would become slower and more legato, the volume swelling and diminishing with each breath. These observations suggest that, for my teachers at least, performing a text in an expressive way is a matter of producing a particular affective experience, which doesn’t necessarily require understanding its meaning.<sup>169</sup>

Likewise, even when I observed training sessions in which students were preparing for UDG competitions, teachers invariably focused on sound and gesture rather than text and meaning. Generally, the teachers sat directly in front of their students, singing and performing the appropriate inflections and gestures as the students imitated their sounds and movements. Sometimes teachers would grip their students’ arms and heads with their hands, molding their bodies into the correct posture. In this mimetic form of training, the ability to *menjiwai* a text is transferred to the student through the teacher’s voice and bodily movements, without reference to the text’s content. The focus on mimetic techniques in the training sessions I observed suggests that although the expressive aspects of *pepaosan* performance may derive in part from students’ engagement with textual content, this isn’t their only or even their primary source. There thus seems to be a disjuncture between official ideologies about the process *pepaosan* performers must go through in order to learn how to successfully

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<sup>169</sup> My interlocutors in Bali often described a powerful performance as one which caused them to experience chills (*merinding*), a sensation which is also believed to be an indication of spiritual and divine presence. It’s possible, therefore, that when teachers ask their students to “feel it,” the goal is not to feel and express the text’s meaning, but to engage in a kind of mystical connection through vocally sounding the text, which, as I discuss in the final section of this chapter, is a different kind of ethical project.

menjiwai a text and the actual training they receive. Whereas Pak Sujana assumes a causal, indexical link between correct penjiwaan and inner understanding, the teachers with whom I worked cultivated penjiwaan by working directly on outer form and inner sensation, without reference to textual meaning.

This disjuncture raises questions concerning the effectiveness of the UDG's ethical program. If we assume, following official UDG discourses, that pepaosan achieves its ethical purpose when performers' "understanding" and "mental attitude" are changed by the texts they perform, then these teachers' engagements with their students' bodies and voices would seem to be overly concerned with aesthetic values and unlikely to bring about a meaningful ethical transformation. This is because, within the ethical framework promoted at the UDG, the material dimensions of pepaosan performance are not, in and of themselves, believed to have ethical value. In fact, this separation of the ethical domain from the material world is central to the UDG's reformist project and, as we saw in Chapter 3, it is characteristic of the Hindu Reform more broadly. In the next section of this chapter, however, I argue that, for some practitioners at least, the sensuous, embodied aspects of pepaosan performance do have ethical significance. This claim raises the possibility that, rather than representing a general disregard for pepaosan's ethical potential, the pepaosan training practices I observed were enacting a different ethical project.

### ***Pepaosan in Context: Sekaa Santi***

Most pepaosan activity in Bali takes place not in connection with the UDG, but in the context of what are known as *sekaa santi*, clubs that gather semi-regularly to study pepaosan-style literary performance under the guidance of a master performer. During my research in Bali, I studied and performed with three *sekaa santi* over a period of approximately eighteen months. In the clubs I worked with, all members were middle-aged or older, and women slightly outnumbered men. While all three clubs performed actively, only two of them met to practice together; the third gathered only for performances. During the *sekaa santi* rehearsals I attended, members practiced singing through texts, either individually or as a group, as the teacher provided corrections and guidance. Translation was not done during these rehearsals. Instead, the focus was on "reading," which in this context denotes the technique of correctly vocalizing the text's syllables, a complex skill that requires honing the appropriate vocal timbre, memorizing numerous melodies, mastering the complex rules that govern how texts are set to these melodies, and also (for those practitioners who chose to do so) developing fluency singing from *aksara* script.<sup>170</sup> In addition, rehearsal time was sometimes spent making audio recordings of the material under study.<sup>171</sup>

Nearly all of these clubs' performances took place in the context of religious ceremonies, wherein they functioned as a form of ritual service. To give a sense of what

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<sup>170</sup> Most of the older texts read in pepaosan performances were originally written in a syllabic script known colloquially as *aksara Bali*. Modern print editions of these texts include versions in aksara, Latin print, or a combination of both. Although rudimentary training in reading aksara script forms part of the Balinese public school curriculum, performing pepaosan from aksara is considered quite difficult and only a minority of the practitioners I observed were comfortable performing without the aid of a Latin transcription.

<sup>171</sup> Members would record the teacher's singing on their mobile phone so that they could practice along with the recording between rehearsals.

ceremonial sekaa santi performances are like, I will discuss one group's participation in a large odalan ceremony, which took place at Gunung Lebah temple in Ubud over the course of several weeks in the fall of 2014. The group was given a slot to perform every evening for the duration of the ceremony.

Each night the club's members would trickle in one by one, pushing their way up the crowded steps to a semi-enclosed space near the top of the temple structure, which served as a performance area. Small doorways along the staircase afforded views of the temple's main sanctuary, a large open space lined with massive stone shrines, where throngs of worshippers took turns praying and presenting offerings to visiting deities. Compared to the outer areas of the temple, which were richly decorated with brightly colored fabrics and gold leaf, the space where our performances took place was unadorned and rather cluttered, giving it the quality of a backstage area.

Like all ceremonial pepaosan activities I observed during my fieldwork, these performances were quite informal, often attracting almost no immediate audience beyond the members of the club, and they involved at least as much socializing as they did focused engagement with texts. Upon arriving, each member was served coffee or tea and a small basket of sweets. Then, after drinking and relaxing for a while, he or she would be invited up to the microphone to perform. Between turns at the microphone, performers passed the time chatting and casually listening to the others take their turns, slipping off to the main sanctuary to pray, or watching the television set that had been set up a few yards away from the performance area.<sup>172</sup> At the end of each performance

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<sup>172</sup> It may seem unusual that there would be a television playing right next to a pepaosan performance, but in the context of a Balinese temple ceremony this arrangement is perfectly logical. When a ceremony

the club was served a meal, which was either eaten together at the temple or distributed in boxes for the members to take home.

During a typical performance, each member would take the mic for about five to ten minutes to read a passage of his or her choosing. Since the club studied together, and many members had only limited experience, it often happened that the same few passages were performed repeatedly over the course of an evening. Within the three *sekaa santi* with whom I worked, the vast majority of the members were only trained in the technique of reading (i.e., singing) texts.<sup>173</sup> This meant that a small minority of more experienced (and almost exclusively male) performers bore the responsibility of translating for the others. Thus, while each reader would perform only a single passage, the translators would take much longer turns, accompanying several readers in succession.

When I first started observing and performing with *sekaa santi* in Bali, I assumed that these groups' *raison d'être* was to study and interpret the religious teachings contained in *kakawin* and other texts. What I found as I spent time participating in these clubs' activities, however, was that verbal engagement with textual meaning rarely extended beyond the formal act of translation during the moment of performance. Although the performers I worked with would occasionally comment upon the meaning of a particularly beautiful or didactically significant passage, this was not a topic that

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lasts multiple days it is customary for a group of men to *makemit*, or guard the temple overnight. Both *pepaosan* and television are common ways of passing the time while fulfilling this duty.

<sup>173</sup> Only a few members of these clubs had much familiarity with Kawi vocabulary, which meant that, in the two clubs that performed *kakawin* literature, most members did not understand the meaning of the words they were reading.

aroused much conversational interest among the clubs' members. Nor was textual content discussed during the sekaa santi rehearsals I observed, which, as noted above, focused exclusively on teaching members to vocalize texts correctly. Over time I became convinced that understanding and interpreting religious teachings was not in fact the driving force behind sekaa santi activities, at least not for the majority of the practitioners I was observing.

Based on these observations, we might be tempted to conclude that sekaa santi do not concern themselves with pepaosan's ethical potential, focusing instead on aesthetic matters. By extension, we might suggest that the UDG, with its emphasis on understanding, serves to elevate the ethical dimension of pepaosan practice. However, these claims are inaccurate for several reasons. For one thing, the most advanced sekaa santi members do engage with texts at the level of meaning, and they do revere their contents as a source of ethical teachings. This was apparent in my private lessons with Gusti Wedana, an elderly sekaa santi club leader with whom I studied the technique of *mawirama*, the singing of Kakawin poetry. Mawirama is a semi-improvisatory technique for setting Kakawin texts to melody, which involves elaborate rules (*uger-uger*) regarding when and how the singer may make use of melisma in his or her vocalization.<sup>174</sup> Most of the time I spent with Gusti Wedana was taken up with learning to vocalize texts in accordance with these rules. The text that formed the basis for our lessons was the *Kakawin Ramayana*, a 9<sup>th</sup> Century Kawi-language version of the

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<sup>174</sup> Kakawin texts are organized in accordance with fixed metrical patterns consisting of long syllables (*guru*) and short syllables (*laghu*), which are called *wirama*. Only long syllables may be sung with melisma; short syllables must be sung on a single pitch. For a detailed discussion of the musical aspects of mawirama, see Schumacher 1995 and Wallis 1980.

Indian epic, which covers a rich variety of *wirama* (metrical patterns). Our focus was almost exclusively directed to how the text should sound in performance, in terms of melodic contour, pronunciation, phrasing, and timbre. Only occasionally would my teacher turn his attention to the narrative content of the text, which was entirely opaque to me since I was unfamiliar with the Kawi language. Sometimes he would, in passing, note the meaning of a single word. Other times he would pause to discuss a particular phrase, contextualizing it within the overarching narrative. These discussions could become quite lengthy, leading into tangents about Balinese religious beliefs or other matters. I always enjoyed these discussions; Gusti, however, would usually apologize for diverting time away from what he considered to be the appropriate focus of our lessons: practicing *mawirama*. These digressions into the terrain of textual content revealed Gusti Wedana's detailed knowledge of Kakawin literature and his deep interest in the moral complexities of the Ramayana story. Yet, unlike our engagement with the sonic aspects of performance, which we covered in a systematic and detailed way, mastering one *wirama* before moving onto another, our discussion into meaning was intermittent and infrequent, providing only a fragmented understanding of the story and its broader philosophical and ethical significance. Only after many years, or even decades, of such study could I possibly reach a point where I would be able to interpret the text on my own.

Within *sekaa santi*, the role of interpreting texts is reserved for advanced practitioners, a very small minority within the membership of the clubs I studied.<sup>175</sup> Thus, it's not that *sekaa santi* focus only on the voice while ignoring the meaningful content of texts, as Mr. Iswara seemed to suggest in his speech at the RRI Denpasar competition. Rather, these groups believe that vocal technique must be mastered first, while interpretation should be reserved for a much more advanced stage of learning (a stage that many practitioners never reach). The UDG promotes a kind of short-cut, replacing decades of slow absorption with a more direct approach: rather than listening to the Kawi or Sanskrit and producing a translation on the spot, UDG competitors memorize their translations, which are, in my observation, provided for them by their teachers. This obviates the need to master an archaic language, enabling novice practitioners to take on the role of interpreter. In their effort to instrumentalize religious texts for political ends, proponents and spokespersons for the UDG treat these texts' complex contents as though they amounted to a kind of catechism—a straightforward set of instructions for how to live a virtuous Hindu life. Meanwhile, *sekaa santi* members, adhering to an older set of beliefs about the obscure and esoteric nature of religious knowledge, treat these contents as something too ambiguous and obscure for any but the most advanced practitioners to properly comprehend.

The tendency among *sekaa santi* members to treat Kawi and Sanskrit religious texts as demanding objects of study, rather than transparent containers for moral

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<sup>175</sup> This is especially true for groups that study Kawi texts. I worked with one group that studied Balinese-language *geguritan* literature. In their case, the meaning of the texts was clear to everyone in the group, but nevertheless, the role of translator was performed by a small minority of more advanced performers.

teachings, stems from a broader set of beliefs about the nature of literary texts. This alternative textual ontology underpins a form of ethical-textual practice that differs from the one promoted at the UDG. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the texts read in pepaosan are believed to be material embodiments of Dewi Saraswati, and the act of sounding a text is a means of partaking in the goddess's divine power. A text, in this sense, is not a passive object waiting to be interpreted and understood, but a lively and dynamic medium linking human and divine agency.<sup>176</sup> According to the sekaa santi members with whom I worked, it is Saraswati who enables pepaosan performance to happen, and she can also prevent it from happening. This means that successful pepaosan performance requires a certain amount of divine participation

One way pepaosan practitioners locate divine agency within their artistic practice is through the stories they tell about Saraswati. Like the acts of myth-making discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, these stories narrate, and thus enact, an intimate and dynamic relationship between the sekala and niskala realms, and they also activate and circulate particular forms of sensory attunement whereby pepaosan practitioners attend to Saraswati's active presence. As revealed in sekaa santi members' stories, this presence can be sensed in various ways. For example, practitioners often attribute performance ability to Saraswati's guidance. In October 2014 one of the clubs I studied with was invited to perform at a lakeside temple located over an hour's drive from the Ubud area where they lived. I rode along in one of the cars that took the group to the temple. During the drive one of the club's members, a beginner, complained that he was

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<sup>176</sup> For more on Balinese beliefs about the efficacy of written texts, see Fox and Hornbacher 2016, Lansing 1983:75-92, and Zurbuchen 1987: 41-81.

struggling to get the hang of pepaosan technique. A more advanced member encouraged him to perform as often as possible; whenever there's a ceremony, go to the temple and perform. The beginner then said that he prefers to practice at home, to which the more advanced performer replied that he would learn faster performing at temple. "If you sing at the temple, there's something that will help you; you can feel it," he explained. Sekaa santi groups perform as an act of devotion to god (*ngayah*). Like the material offerings that accompany them, these performances are a medium of ritual exchange between the performers, the ceremony's hosts, and divine beings, whether the latter are understood to be Saraswati, the supreme god Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa, or the deities being honored at a specific ceremony. Although the advanced practitioner in this conversation did not mention Saraswati by name, it was clear that the "something" to which he referred was a divine being whose presence could be sensed in the enhanced performance ability which, he contended, could be achieved by performing pepaosan as *ngayah*. A few weeks later, I attended a social event with one of my teachers, Dayu Widya. She introduced me to an acquaintance of hers, telling him that I performed pepaosan and extolling my singing and how quickly I was learning. Embarrassed by her flattery and anxious to direct attention away from myself, I told the man that she was my teacher. Dayu Widya skillfully deflected this comment, saying *gurunya Sang Hyang Aji Saraswati* (Saraswati is her teacher). In both of these conversations, Saraswati is identified as the source of pepaosan skill, her presence made known in moments of improved ability.

Sekaa santi members also evoke Saraswati's presence to explain difficulties or mishaps that happen in reading literary texts. At a temple performance in Ubud, for example, after I finished reading my passage an elderly male member of Gusti Wedana's sekaa santi group complimented me on my accurate rendering of aksara script. He confessed that he himself was unable to perform from aksara, despite having studied for many years. "*Mungkin tidak dikasih* (maybe it's not allowed)," he suggested. When I looked puzzled he clarified: "*tidak dikasih sama yang diatas*" (it's not allowed by god [literally, the one above]). During a sekaa santi rehearsal I attended in Denpasar, Dayu Widya told some of the women she trains a story about a male member of their group whose voice had suddenly frozen at the beginning of a performance. "He couldn't make a sound," she said seriously, her voice hushed as the others listened with rapt attention, "his voice was *katos* (stiff). Then he prayed to Sang Hyang Aji Saraswati," she continued, "and his voice immediately returned to normal. She [the goddess Saraswati] must have been giving him a test," she concluded. In this case the bodily sensation of having one's voice freeze is taken as a sign of breakdown in the relationship between the performer and the goddess who animates his performance. A simple prayer is sufficient to repair the relationship, allowing the performance to proceed.

A few weeks later, at an evening temple performance with an Ubud-based club, the topic of tests came up again. After my turn at the microphone, the group's teacher, Nyoman Budi, came and sat next to me. Speaking through a wad of tobacco tucked in his lower lip, he advised me politely that I needed to sing a bit louder. Having received this comment before I gave him my usual excuse, explaining that I never practiced with

a full voice because I didn't want my Balinese housemates to hear me. He nodded sympathetically and then said: "It's a test, a test of will to see if you're really going to devote yourself to the vocal art in this literature. But it's not [your housemates] who are testing you," he added. "The one who's testing you is the goddess who's manifested in this literature." I asked what he meant. "According to our beliefs there is a God," he said, "and the God who resides in and animates (*bersemayam*) this literature is, this manifestation of God, is Sang Hyang Aji Saraswati, the goddess of skill and intelligence (*kepintaran*). She's materialized in the form of this literature that we're studying, and she tests us." He then explained that Dewi Saraswati's tests can take many forms. "We may be laughed at or someone may insult us," he said, "but ultimately it's she who is testing us." Acting both through the challenges literary texts present in the context of oral performance, and through the people who critique, mock, and insult performers' efforts to render those texts orally, in these stories Dewi Saraswati actively intervenes in pepaosan practice. Although her interventions may appear to be designed to obstruct or hamper, ultimately the purpose of her tests is to help performers advance, as Nyoman Budi explained. "We have to gain the strength to confront these tests," he said. "The more we're able to do this, the more we will progress."

Through these stories, sekaa santi members represent pepaosan performance as an example of what Karen Strassler has called "auratic indexicality" (2014). Strassler uses this term to distinguish between two semiotic ideologies pertaining to the indexicality of photography, one which sees the photograph as "a trace of a *past but now absent* presence," and another which sees the photograph as "a medium for

transmitting an *ongoing but otherwise invisible* presence” (2014: 123, emphasis in original). Auratic images, such as the “authentic photographs” of spirits that Strassler analyzes, are images that bridge the ontological gap between visible and invisible realms, “acting as a conduit across the line of the supernatural and the worldly” (*ibid.*). Extending Strassler’s idea of the auratic image, I propose that these sekaa santi members enact what we might think of as an auratic voice. This is distinct from the indexicality of the voice as imagined in the UDG speeches quoted earlier. Within the semiotic ideology espoused by Pak Sujana, the voices of UDG competitors index their engagement with the knowledge and moral teachings contained in religious texts. Because these texts are believed to be products of divine revelation, these voices carry the traces of that revelation into the present. The auratic indexicality described in sekaa santi members’ stories is of a different order. Here, the sounding of a text acts as a direct conduit between two worlds, allowing those worlds to intermingle in the present.

For sekaa santi members, the ethical project of pepaosan practice is not simply about coming to “understand” the referential content of religious texts. Rather, it requires the practitioner to cultivate a relationship with Saraswati. In this sense, it resonates with the ethics of divine blessing discussed in Chapter 2. In their practices of myth-making about Saraswati, sekaa santi members highlight the role of divine agency in making pepaosan performance possible. In doing so, the narrators of these stories represent their artistic ability as a kind of divine blessing: a material manifestation of their relationship with Saraswati.

To put it in Goffman's terms, we might say that the auratic indexicality attributed to sekaa santi performances confers ethical value on the act of animating the text, whether or not the performer understands and internalizes the text's message (i.e. takes on the role of principal). Instead of signaling a narrow concern with the aesthetic aspects of pepaosan, as UDG spokespersons suggest, sekaa santi members' concerns over correct vocalization are part of the ethical project of seeking Saraswatis' blessings.

The high value attributed to these blessings was evident in the sense of accomplishment that accompanied many stories about Saraswati. For many of the pepaosan practitioners with whom I worked, the ability to forge mystical connections with Saraswati was a source of profound fascination and pride. Alongside the opportunities for ritual service and social interaction that participation in a sekaa santi provides, I believe these connections are among the primary motivations for practitioners' involvement in these clubs. In my conversation with Nyoman Budi, for example, he told me of all the ridicule he'd had to endure when he was first learning to sing. Over time, he assured me, he was able to overcome these "tests" and, with the goddess's guidance, become a respected pepaosan master. I encountered a similar narrative of accomplishment during one of the evening performances at the odalan ceremony described above. While I was awaiting my turn at the microphone, one of the male members of the group told me about an unusual experience he had had during a late-night performance at Pura Lempuyang, a large mountainside temple in the forests of Eastern Bali known to be especially spiritually potent. As he sat in the dark temple, singing a passage from a kakawin text, he was approached by two demons in the form

of monkeys. Although this would have terrified him under normal circumstances, on this occasion he was emboldened. The reason for his unusual bravery, he explained, was that he could feel Saraswati's presence in the text as he was vocalizing it. Knowing that he was within the goddess's protection, he struck the two demons with his arms, whereupon they immediately fled. This image of Saraswati as a source of both protection and enhanced ability resonates with some of the moral discourses we encountered in Chapter 2, in which members of the Dangin family attributed their prosperity, ability, and good fortune to the participation of divine agents in their lives. In both contexts, accomplishments are especially valued when they are the result of divine intervention. Thus, both among *sekaa santi* members and in the Dangin household, my interlocutors play up the role of divine agency in enabling their achievements. In Chapter 2, I argued that this kind of myth-making reflects positively on the recipient of divine aid, whose accomplishments and wellbeing are represented as manifestations of divine blessing, and thus as a form of virtue. A similar dynamic seems to be at play among *sekaa santi* members, whose musical and literary abilities are likewise a form of divine blessing.

Pepaosan performers actively seek out such blessings by making obeisances to Saraswati. Indeed, compared to other Balinese performing arts, the art of pepaosan is surrounded by a particularly conspicuous amount of prayer and ritual. Even during private lessons, my teachers nearly always instructed me to state two brief mantras—*om swastiastu* and *om awignamastu*—before beginning to sing, and another mantra—*om santi santi santi om*—before ending the lesson. At the *sekaa santi* rehearsals I

attended, the members always recited these prayers in unison at the beginning and end of the meeting, and during on-air interactive programs, callers invariably do the same at the beginning and end of each call. During the numerous ceremonial pepaosan performances I participated in, each performer prayed silently before picking up the microphone at the beginning of his or her turn reading or interpreting and again before moving away from the reading table at the end of the turn.

Pepaosan practitioners also interact with Saraswati through physical offerings of various kinds: a large basket of offerings is always placed on the reading table during ceremonial performances, and during group rehearsals, a single small offering is often presented. In addition, pepaosan clubs occasionally organize rituals to ask for blessings from Saraswati. Often these are simple and last only a few minutes, but they can also be elaborate ceremonies lasting a couple of hours and involving numerous offerings.

As I was generally presumed to be unfamiliar with the prayers and rituals that accompany pepaosan performance, I received instructions and explanations from various practitioners throughout my fieldwork. Often, I was simply told to *berdoa dulu* (pray first) before beginning to sing, but on other occasions my interlocutors were more specific. As I was about to pick up the microphone at a cremation ceremony at one of Ubud's palaces, for example, a male performer stopped me: "Ask for tuntunan here first," he said, as he tapped the basket of offerings on the reading table in front of me. At my first rehearsal with the Denpasar sekaa santi mentioned above, Dayu Widya performed a brief ceremony for the members of the club and as she was reciting

mantras one of the men in the group quietly explained what was going on: “We’re asking for tuntunan,” he said, “so that we’ll quickly become capable [performers].”

It should be clear from these examples that what is meant by tuntunan in these statements is something quite different from the moral lessons that are the focus of the UDG. In asking for tuntunan, pepaosan performers are asking Saraswati to guide them as they sing and interpret a text, to offer them spiritual protection, and to inspire and animate their performance, making it affecting and beautiful.<sup>177</sup> What is being guided in this case is the performance itself, not the performer’s moral character. However, this guidance is not merely aesthetic; as a form of divine blessing, it also has ethical value. As we saw in Chapter 2, members of the Dangin household engage in a form of ethical cultivation that centers not on a person’s inner character, but on their relationship with god, a relationship that takes the material form of divine blessings. Although wealth is the most typical form such blessings take, I argue that the divinely guided performances that emerge through Saraswati’s tuntunan are also manifestations of this same ethically significant relationship. Within the discursive context of sekaa santi then, pepaosan is enacted as a form of ethical self-cultivation that differs from the one promoted at the UDG. As described above, the performances imagined in UDG speeches index virtues believed to reside elsewhere: not in the sounds and gestures of the performance, but in the immaterial space of an interiorized self. Sekaa santi participants, by contrast, adhere to a different semiotic ideology. For them, the materiality of pepaosan

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<sup>177</sup> Saraswati’s guidance is related to the Balinese concept of *taksu*, the divinely bestowed charisma attributed to great musicians, puppet masters, and dancers. Interestingly, however, my interlocutors in Bali rarely used the word *taksu* in reference to pepaosan performance.

performance possesses an auratic idexicality. As an index and conduit of divine agency, the embodied act of sounding a text is a manifestation of virtue in its own right. Understood in this way, virtue is constituted not individually (as personal character), but relationally, through the material forms that mediate human relationships with the divine; it is a product of both human and divine agency, at once material and immaterial, aesthetic and ethical. The self that is imagined and inhabited through the pursuit of Saraswati's blessings thus represents an alternative to the interiorized version of ethical selfhood promoted by the UDG and the ongoing Hindu reform effort in Bali and Indonesia more generally.

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter I have shown how the Balinese art of pepaosan is at the center of two distinct religious pedagogies of voice. In its guise as an event at state-sponsored UDG competitions, pepaosan serves as a way of training practitioners to internalize the moral teachings contained in religious texts. According to UDG spokespersons, the pedagogy surrounding these competitions should foreground comprehension and expression over and above the narrowly aesthetic aspects of vocal performance, though, as we saw, UDG trainers do not always adhere to this expectation. In the context of sekaa santi, by contrast, slow mastery of vocal technique precedes deep engagement with textual meaning. Particularly because the clubs I studied included many novice practitioners, the pedagogy enacted in these clubs focused primarily on learning the rules for correctly rendering texts as vocal sound (*uger-uger*), while

engagement with textual content and meaning was postponed for a more advanced phase of study.

In addition to teaching practitioners to use their voices in particular ways, religious pedagogies of voice also provide practical means by which particular conceptions of selfhood are imagined, inhabited, and rendered socially meaningful. While the UDG circulates a conception and practice of the self that emphasizes interiority, individuality, and human autonomy vis-à-vis the material world, sekaa santi members are engaged in an ethical project rooted in a very different way of imagining and working on the self, which embraces materiality and the distribution of agency beyond the human. The case of pepaosan thus reveals how the affordances of vocal traditions can be taken up in different ways toward different paths of ethical striving, and may therefore support divergent forms of ethical subjectivity.

## CHAPTER 5

### SINGING ROHANI AND THE ETHICS OF SENSORY PURIFICATION

#### **Noise**

In February of 2014 Wayan invited me to perform with him in a shadow puppet play at a temple ceremony in Nyuhkuning, a village just a few kilometers from Tegal. It was raining that day, so a member of the committee responsible for organizing the performance picked us up in his jeep. I climbed into the back seat with Wayan, while his brother Kadek, the puppet master, sat up front. "*Ilang carike*" (the rice fields are gone), Kadek said wistfully as we passed one of the few rice fields that remained visible along Ubud's roadways, which had recently been labelled with a sign advertising a forthcoming housing development.

Among my Tegal friends, the village of Nyuhkuning was known for implementing a somewhat more modernized approach to traditional ritual. While Tegal villagers might spend weeks preparing the offerings for a ceremony, Nyuhkuning residents would quickly throw things together in a day or two, or so it seemed. The Nyuhkuning area, home to several ashram, meditation centers, and alternative healers, also had a reputation as a hotbed for new religious and spiritual movements, catering to both local residents and foreign tourists.<sup>178</sup> Jostling along the road between the two villages, we

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<sup>178</sup> Throughout the Ubud area, centers and organizations that offer alternative forms of spirituality primarily to local residents exist alongside, and to some extent overlap with, spiritual tourism activities, which cater primarily to Western tourists.

passed billboards advertising *Meditasi Tertawa* (Laughing Meditation) and *Olahraga Hidup Baru* (New Life Exercise), a combination of meditation, prayer, and aerobics.

As we pulled into the muddy parking lot beside the temple, I could hear the slightly distorted sound of a male voice emanating from a speaker somewhere inside the temple walls. My ears were immediately captivated by the chanting, the melodic contour of which was unlike anything I had ever heard at a Balinese temple ceremony. For a brief moment I thought I was hearing Quranic recitation, but I quickly realized that the sequence of pitches more closely resembled an Indian scale, familiar to Balinese listeners through imported recordings of Gayatri Mantra and other forms of Indian devotional singing, but highly unusual in the context of a traditional temple ceremony. I continued listening. I noticed that the chanting followed the call and response format typical of *pepaosan*, but the responses were in Indonesian rather than Balinese. As we walked through the stone gate and into the temple's outer courtyard, the amplified voice was submerged among the sounds of gamelan music and the chatter of the crowds who had gathered to pray. Once inside the temple, I spotted the chanters, two middle aged men in Balinese temple dress seated in a small *bale* to the left of the temple gate. We set up in a larger bale about a dozen yards away and were quickly surrounded by a tightly packed group of worshippers, who crowded onto the bale to avoid the rain. Although the ceremony was just beginning, the chanters wrapped up their performance shortly after we arrived.

Once the ceremony was over we piled back into the jeep for the ride home. The moment the car doors slammed shut, our driver started complaining angrily about the

unusual chanting. He imitated the Indian-sounding melody and muttered something about Sai Baba, an Indian devotional movement that has been gaining adherents in Bali. Speaking in a mix of high Balinese and Indonesian, he told us that he'd done some investigating during the ceremony and found out that the chanters had not been invited, whereupon he had informed the village head and suggested they be removed. This plan, however, never materialized. He said he didn't think such singing belonged in a Balinese temple. He felt it clashed with the other sounds. "If people sing kidung, I'll give them rice," he said emphatically, implying that the chanters did not deserve the same level of respect as performers of traditional Balinese songs. "Indeed, it all comes from the Vedas," he admitted, but he was worried that people were becoming "confused" (*bingung*). "There are all sorts of *aliran* (sects) here now, and everything's starting to get mixed up," he said.<sup>179</sup>

Devotional religious movements occupy a marginal position in contemporary Balinese religious life, vastly overshadowed by indigenous forms of religiosity. But like an occasional off-key note in an otherwise comfortably familiar tonal field, their subtle dissonance with mainstream religious practice is making itself felt, in moments like the one just described. For many of my friends in Bali, the singing associated with groups like Sai Baba, ISKCON, and their localized variants, prompted laughter and ridicule. For others, like our driver, such singing inspired revulsion and anxiety about the loss of a traditional social order, to which many Balinese Hindus are deeply committed. As I will

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<sup>179</sup> The word *aliran* has a negative connotation that is not quite captured by the words 'sect' or 'cult.' To call something an *aliran* is to suggest that it is not a legitimate religion.

discuss later on, however, for many participants in these movements, devotional singing is a source of intense pleasure and profound religious feeling.

As these descriptions demonstrate, music affects us in visceral and embodied ways. Perhaps to a greater degree than any other art form, it insinuates itself into the body, affecting our heart rate and breathing, making us feel comfortable, moved, or irritated, leaving our mood lifted or dampened. Following Patrick Eisenlohr (2018) and Charles Hirschkind (2006), I understand these affects to be dependent on innate bodily capacities as well as personal and social histories of listening and the cultivated sensibilities to which they give rise.<sup>180</sup> To borrow a phrase from anthropologist William Mazzarella, we might say that music, like other publicly circulating mediatory forms, “solicits us as embodied members of a sensuous social order” (Mazzarella 2009: 299-300). By the same token, music also contributes to producing and transforming the sensuous social orders within which it is experienced.

Scholars across the humanities and social sciences have recently begun to hone in on affect as an important dimension of people’s sense of the world and its possibilities. In light of this work, this chapter considers the self- and world-making potential of musically-mediated affect, focusing in particular on vocal performance and vocal sound. Although I admit that music’s strange power often seems to operate independently of thought and interpretation, my interest is not in affects as external to

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<sup>180</sup> Eisenlohr argues against affect as a concept, citing the problematic ways the term has been used in some recent sound studies scholarship; he advocates ‘atmosphere’ as an alternative framework for thinking about the ways music acts on what he calls the “felt-body” (the body as experienced phenomenologically). While I agree with most of Eisenlohr’s argument, I think the concept of affect remains valuable for thinking about sound’s effects on bodies, partly because of the productive ways affect is being conceptualized and used *outside* sound and music studies. See Eisenlohr 2018: 48-51.

symbolic mediation (Massumi 1995). Instead, following Eisenlohr, Mazzarella, Navaro-Yashin, and others, I am interested in how affect and signification feed into one another, generating and sustaining people's aspirations, anxieties, desires, and values. Taking inspiration from Mazzarella's claim that a social project "must be affective to be effective," I consider how music might operate within this nexus of the meaningful and the feelingful to open up new social possibilities (Mazzarella 2009: 299).

I consider this question by examining fieldwork I conducted at an ISKCON temple on the outskirts of the city of Gianyar in central Bali. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or ISKCON, is a devotional movement based on the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and popularly known as 'the Hare Krishnas.' Founded in New York city in 1966 by a Bengali Vaisnava renunciate named Srila Prabhupada, the movement now has adherents throughout the globe, with especially large numbers in India and the former Soviet Union. Though banned in Indonesia until 1998, ISKCON has had a following in Bali since the late 1970s (Howe 2001: 184).

Like other proselytizing religious movements with global aspirations, ISKCON centers around a set of highly mobile practices and media, including texts, iconography, liturgical and devotional practices. Perhaps the most iconic among these is a form of devotional singing known as *sankirtana yajna*, or simply kirtan. Both among my interlocutors in Bali, and in ISKCON's global online sphere, kirtan is widely represented as a musical practice that affords ecstatic spiritual experiences. We might therefore claim that kirtan circulates affect on a global scale. This accomplishment, however, cannot be attributed to music alone. The specific forms of kirtan that I discuss here

circulate within a structured assemblage of other practices and forms, which mutually inform and reinforce one another. Furthermore, as ISKCON communities work their way into a population, their music and other mediatory practices collide with existing sensory orders (sets of embodied sensibilities, which may, for example, make people more likely to be repelled than attracted). Looking at music as it operates within the ready-made package of a mobile religious movement highlights the ways that music's affective and social efficacy depend on its embedding within assemblages of discourses, practices, and other mediatory forms.

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, I briefly outline the history of the ISKCON movement. Next, I discuss some of the inherent tensions between ISKCON and Balinese adat. In the third section, I explore the set of practices that Balinese ISKCON devotees call singing *rohani*, particularly the singing of kirtan. I show how ISKCON's religious pedagogy of voice tethers musical affect to a specific ethical project, one which diverges from both the ethics of divine blessing and the reformist Hindu ethics discussed in earlier chapters. In the final section, I consider the personal conversion narratives of two accomplished singers and show that musical feelings are central to how they understand, value, and become attached to ISKCON. In conclusion, I suggest that if ISKCON provides a compelling basis for new religious subjectivities in Bali, this is due in no small part to the efficacy of its music.

### ***A Brief History of ISKCON***

Due in part to George Harrison's well-known involvement with the movement, ISKCON is often associated with the historical moment of the 1960s and the youth counterculture movement of that period. Indeed, the first ISKCON temple, founded on Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1966, was very much a product of this cultural milieu. It is important to recognize, however, that the movement has its roots in a much longer history of cross-cultural exchange dating back to the colonial period in India, and even earlier.

ISKCON's basic teachings and practices grew out of the tradition of Bengali Vaisnavism in which the movement's founder, Srila Prabhupada, had been trained. ISKCON's earliest direct antecedent is a 15th century devotional movement known as the Caitanya Movement, named for its founder Sri Krsna Caitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533), who promoted *sankirtana yajna*, the singing of Krishna's names, as the means of salvation during the Kali Yuga (the present age).

In the late 19th century a Bengali religious reformer and former colonial magistrate named Srila Bhaktivinode Thakur (1838-1914) sought to revitalize the Caitanya Movement, founding the Gaudiya Math sampradaya (school) for this purpose (Haddon 2014: 145-46). Bhaktivinode prophesied that Caitanya's message would appeal to "people of all nations," and that printed texts would serve as the medium for circulating it (*ibid.*: 146). Bhaktivinode's son, Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, went on to become a prominent figure in the Gaudiya Math school, and he later bequeathed his father's mission to his disciple Srila Prabhupada by assigning him the task of translating the *Srimad Bhagavatam* into English and spreading its message to the Western world.

Prabhupada travelled to America for this purpose in 1965 and founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in 1966.

While figures within ISKCON tend to trace its origins back to ancient times, it also has roots in a more recent historical moment when Hindu “tradition” was being revived in the search for national identity in India’s struggle against colonial rule. At the time when Bhaktivinode was preaching Caitanya’s message, a number of other religious reformers in India were developing their own outward-looking versions of Hindu doctrine and practice.<sup>181</sup> Though these reformers took different approaches, they shared the common aim of revitalizing and reforming specific Indian religious traditions to create a properly modern form of spirituality that would appeal to Westerners and Western-educated Indians alike (Van der Veer 2009: 1107-08). These same reformist strands of Hinduism impacted the development of the Hindu Reform in Bali through the influence of Pandit Shastri as well as Balinese religious reformers who studied in India in the 1950s.<sup>182</sup> Thus, although ISKCON did not arrive in Indonesia until the 1970s, elements of the broader reformist movement out of which ISKCON ultimately developed had

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<sup>181</sup> These include Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who was originally associated with the Brahmo Samaj movement (one of the first Hindu reform movements in India) and then went on to found the Vedanta Movement. Also among the early religious reformers in India were Keshabchandra Sen and Sri Ramakrishna. According to Partha Chatterjee, they rejected the “rationalist ideal” of the Brahmo Samaj and looked instead to popular religious practices, including collective singing, as a more authentic source for a modern Indian religion, and a way out of the “inherently oppressive” discourse of reason, which posited colonized subjects as dependent on colonizers to raise them out of unreason (Chatterjee 1993: 35-75). Another Indian religious reformer was Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), founder of the Arya Samaj movement with which Pandit Shastri—a religious reformer who took up residence in Bali in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century—was allegedly associated.

<sup>182</sup> During the mid-1950s several Balinese intellectuals accepted scholarships from the Indian government to study in India (Bakker 1993:36, 102, 198, 227-228, Ramstedt 2004: 10, Somvir 2004: 257).

arrived much earlier. To this day there is significant overlap between reformist Hinduism in Indonesia and the basic teachings of ISKCON.<sup>183</sup>

While Indians were reorganizing and modernizing Hindu traditions in the subcontinent, European and American orientalists were becoming interested in 'Eastern' religious ideas and practices. In 1875 Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott created the Theosophical Society, a movement which combined elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other ancient religious and philosophical traditions. Though founded in New York City, the movement eventually relocated to India and went on to influence religious reform movements in both India and Indonesia.<sup>184</sup> During the 1950s and 60s, youth interest in alternative spirituality expanded, giving rise to an efflorescence of New Religious Movements and alternative spiritualities that came to be known as the New Age. Although many New Age spiritualities began as Western appropriations of religious traditions from Asia, some were later exported back to Asia where they found a congenial home among people who had been raised in the traditions on which they were based. ISKCON, which now has its largest following in India as well as substantial numbers in Indonesia, Singapore, and elsewhere in Asia, is one example of this pattern.<sup>185</sup> In the case of Bali, the doctrinal affinity between ISKCON and the Hindu Reform provide devotees with a strong basis on which to defend the movement against its critics. However, Balinese adat poses significant obstacles to more widespread acceptance of ISKCON.

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<sup>183</sup> For example, the "Five Beliefs" (*Panca Sraddha*) of Agama Hindu generally align with ISKCON doctrine.

<sup>184</sup> On the role of the Theosophical Society in the Dutch East Indies, see Tollenaere 1999.

<sup>185</sup> On ISKCON in Singapore, see Sebastian 2010. On ISKCON in India, see Fahy 2017.

### ***ISKCON in Bali***

As discussed in the Introduction, social and political life in Bali is characterized by an unresolved tension between the secular state and the religious authority of the *desa adat*. This means that although Balinese Hindus are citizens of a secular nation, they are nonetheless required to uphold their religious obligations or face harsh sanctions.<sup>186</sup> This situation poses unique obstacles to a movement like ISKCON, which represents an alternative source of Hindu doctrine, practice, and affiliation.<sup>187</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 1, much of the *desa adat*'s power stems from the social bonds that unite its members, bonds which are established, in large part, through the shared experience of participating in communal ritual. The solidarity uniting a *desa adat*'s members takes the form of a shared aesthetic sensibility as well as affectively charged social bonds, the latter of which is manifest both in the strong sense of mutual obligation that members share, and in the collective outrage that sometimes erupts when an individual, family, or other segment of the community is seen as having offended the sanctity of the *desa adat*.

Predictably, these shared aesthetic and social bonds sometimes take the form of strongly negative perceptions toward groups like ISKCON, which represents an

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<sup>186</sup> Following Talal Asad (2003:4–5), I define secularism as the condition in which the state bases its authority to regulate religious life not on the tenets of a particular religion, but on a supposedly universal set of values that transcends and overrides those of individual religions. One example of this overriding authority can be seen in the Indonesian state philosophy of *Pancasila*, which requires belief in *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (the Almighty God), a designation that simultaneously transcends and encompasses the particular theologies of the six officially recognized religions.

<sup>187</sup> While ISKCON does not officially consider itself to be a branch of “Hinduism” or a “religion,” Balinese devotees tend to see it as such.

alternative religious community with its own very distinct aesthetic. We saw one example of this in the Nyuhkuning man's viscerally negative response to the sound of devotional chant at his village temple. I encountered a similarly derisive attitude toward devotional movements in the Dangin household. Wayan and Kadek had played music for a meditation group in Nyuhkuning, and Kadek would often entertain family and friends by mimicking the group's leader. He would chant in a vaguely Indian-sounding way and sway from side to side with his eyes closed, his head loosely lolling back and forth as though he was intoxicated. His movements, albeit exaggerated, were reminiscent of the ways Balinese ISKCON devotees would sway while singing kirtan at the ashram, and they differed dramatically from those of traditional Balinese religious arts, such as the energized poses of Balinese dance and the highly refined gestures of Balinese priests. These impersonations never failed to provoke hearty laughter from Kadek's audience. The loosely choreographed, emotional appearance of devotional song and dance struck Wayan and Kadek as ridiculous, and they described participants as looking like crazy people (*seperti orang gila*). The sensibilities and attachments that make ISKCON's aesthetic ridiculous and even repugnant to many Balinese Hindus are, therefore, an obstacle that ISKCON has to overcome when attracting adherents in Bali. I argue that it is by instilling new aesthetic sensibilities and feelings that ISKCON is able to pose a significant challenge to traditional ways of life.

New religious movements like ISKCON provide a way of organizing religious practice that diverges significantly from the system of communal institutions that organizes religious practice in the adat sphere. Unlike village and descent group

temples, to which people are bound through birth and marriage, ISKCON temples or “ashram” are voluntary associations to which people can attach and detach themselves at will. Furthermore, while village temples impose mandatory contributions of labor and money, ashram survive on voluntary contributions. At the ashram I attended in Bali, donations were collected in a donation box in the main prayer room. Contributions of labor (e.g. cooking *prasad*, caring for the temple grounds, decorating for ceremonies, etc.) seemed to primarily fall to a core group of especially active devotees; a larger group of peripheral devotees would only show up for worship. In this sense the ashram was closer to a modern church than a traditional Balinese temple congregation.<sup>188</sup>

Due in part to the voluntary nature of ISKCON worship, ISKCON ashram create social networks that cut across family and village ties. Many of the ISKCON members I met had close family members who were not part of the movement. Sometimes a wife would attend but not her husband, young adults would join but not their parents, or a nuclear family would participate without the support of their extended family. In addition,

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<sup>188</sup> In an article about the rise of modern spirituality in India and China, Peter Van der Veer has noted that the periods of economic liberalization in these two countries have witnessed an increase in specific forms of “spiritual” activity (2009). In India, for example, spirituality was initially linked to the anti-colonial struggle, but in recent decades, spiritual practices have become commodified and tied to efforts to produce more productive and competitive laborers. Addressing middle class anxieties about globalization, these emerging spiritual movements serve to accommodate people to the disciplinary regimes of late capitalism. According to Van der Veer, “it is really the liberalization of the Indian and Chinese economies under the impact of global capitalism that frees the energies of spiritual movements to organize civil society” (2009: 1116). Indonesia’s period of economic liberalization did not get underway until the late 1990s, whereas the country’s first Sai Baba and ISKCON centers were founded by the early 1980s. Nonetheless, it is still interesting to speculate about the possible affinities between these movements’ teachings—which focus on the individual, inviting him or her to cultivate and desire a direct experience of, and an intimate relationship with, the divine or spiritual power, however conceived—and the demands of a liberalizing economy, which, as noted in the Introduction, are often understood to be in tension with the demands of adat religiosity in Bali, which center around collective religious obligations. For a similar argument about Sai Baba’s affinity with the needs of Indonesia’s middle class and state development agendas, and more broadly, with Weber’s “spirit of capitalism,” see Howe 2001: 143, 172, 180-81.

many devotees lived more than an hour's drive from the ashram, so unlike much of traditional Balinese worship, where people walk to their village temple with family and neighbors, devotees arrive at the ashram by motorbike, alone or in small groups, and many are, at least initially, strangers to one another.

Many New Religious Movements that have taken root in Bali, such as Sai Baba, present themselves as complementing, rather than supplanting, traditional forms of worship (Howe 2001: 176-178). ISKCON, however, takes a somewhat more oppositional stance. Sermons at the ashram often highlighted the "errors" of traditional Balinese beliefs and practices, which the speakers saw as being overly-focused on material rather than spiritual matters, and, for this reason, ethically and spiritually ineffective. One particularly contentious matter is the killing of animals. Whereas ISKCON requires strict vegetarianism, nearly all Balinese rituals involve the slaughter of animals as well as the ceremonial sharing of cooked meat, practices which ISKCON doctrine sees as highly offensive to god.

Despite these tensions, adherents at the ashram still identified as Balinese Hindus, and, with few exceptions, they remained active members of a *desa adat*. Yet, in conversation, Balinese devotees often expressed ambivalence about participating in *adat* activities. I first encountered this sentiment while chatting with a female devotee named Malini.<sup>189</sup> Malini struck me as one of the more studious women at the ashram, always deeply attentive during the sermons and especially skilled at chanting in

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<sup>189</sup> Upon initiation, ISKCON devotees adopt a new name. At the ashram in Bali, these initiated names were often of Indian origin (e.g. the names of rivers in India or characters from the Mahabharata or Ramayana). I have tried to replicate this in choosing pseudonyms.

Sanskrit. As I would discover later, she was the sister of one of the ashram's most respected teachers, a *brahmacari* (celibate monk) who had studied in India and was a frequent guest at ISKCON communities elsewhere in Southeast Asia. I asked her if she'd been coming to the ashram for a long time. "Yes," she said, "but I'm still ignorant (*masih bodoh*). I told her that it didn't seem that way, and I suggested that perhaps the learning process was unavoidably long. "It's because I live in the *desa*," she countered, explaining that this left her with little time for ISKCON-related activities. I asked her if she "ikut adat" (participated in the activities of her *desa adat*). "We have to tolerate," she said.

This phrase "we have to tolerate," (*kita harus toleransi*) was a common refrain in devotee's discussions of their relationship to Balinese adat. In order to remain on good terms with their *desa adat*, while still upholding ISKCON teachings, devotees must be cautious and avoid causing offense. Thus, although proselytizing is strongly encouraged within ISKCON generally, devotees at the ashram I attended were discouraged from being too forthright in discussing their beliefs with non-devotees. This caution was apparently warranted: Malini told me that she and her brother had almost been banished from their village over their involvement with ISKCON. It was common for devotees to conceal or downplay their affiliation with ISKCON when interacting with outsiders to the movement. One female devotee told me how she would *aluskan* (refine) her language when declining to eat meat in her village: instead of admitting to being vegetarian, she would tell her fellow villagers that eating meat made her ill. Many devotees would drive to the ashram dressed in street clothes and change into their

worship attire on the ashram grounds. They would change back into street clothes and wipe their *tilak* (mark made of sacred soil) off their foreheads before driving home. Not wanting his fellow villagers to suspect my involvement with the movement, Wayan suggested I change into my long skirt after exiting the village, a request I initially fulfilled by changing in a gas station bathroom and later by dressing in the ashram's guest bedroom.

Sermons at the ashram would sometimes drift into utopian images of a life beyond these kinds of struggles and compromises. In some of these narratives, the entire island of Bali had become followers of ISKCON. Or, more modestly, the speaker might express the aspiration that the ashram would one day establish its own *desa adat*, which would operate in accordance with ISKCON teachings. At the time of my fieldwork, however, even this latter option seemed like a distant fantasy, as establishing a new *desa adat* is an extremely contentious matter in Bali today. Thus, although several families had constructed homes on the ashram grounds, they continued to maintain ties with their *desa adat*, returning regularly to fulfill their religious obligations. Using the same epithet he attached to the 'separatist' contingent in his own *desa* (a group of Tegal residents trying to establish a new *desa adat*), Wayan compared ISKCON devotees to GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, a separatist group in western Indonesia). "Why can't they just follow everyone else?" he asked. "Why do they have to take the difficult way (*jalan yang susah*)?"

As can be seen from these examples, ISKCON proposes a radical reform of Balinese society and religious subjectivity. Given the powerful bonds that link Balinese

Hindus to their desa adat, how is it that ISKCON devotees come to desire an alternate mode of organizing religious and social life? Why do they choose “the difficult way,” as Wayan asked? In this chapter I investigate the intimate processes by which people become attached to this movement, focusing in particular on the ways singing contributes to these processes. I argue that the devotional singing practiced at the ashram plays a crucial role in training devotees to feel in a new way, and that this new way of feeling underpins an alternative ethical project and strengthens individuals’ attachment to the movement.

### ***Singing and Chanting in ISKCON Practice***

My encounter with ISKCON was linked, by a circuitous route, to the strange chanting I described at the beginning of this chapter. By the time I performed at the ceremony in Nyuhkuning, I was already taking lessons in several traditional Balinese vocal arts, and I had also begun to become aware of other less common forms of religious chant on the island. A month earlier I had attended an event at the National Hindu Theological Institute, which included a brief performance of what they called “Vedic chant.” Like the chanting at the Nyuhkuning ceremony, it followed the format of traditional Balinese pepaosan performance, but the melody was distinct from anything I had heard during traditional performances. My curiosity was piqued. What was this chanting? Where was it coming from? How and why were people learning it? And most importantly, why did the man from Nyuhkuning have such a viscerally negative

response to it? I soon began attending classes at the Institute and looking around for answers to these questions.

One sunny morning I was chatting with some students at the Institute's Bangli campus, located in the relatively cool foothills of Bali's eastern mountains. I told them I was doing research on religious uses of sound in Bali and asked them if there were any classes on Vedic chanting at the institute. As I said the word "suara," which means "sound" or "voice," one female student became visibly excited. She told me she attended an ashram where people practiced Sanskrit chanting every night, and she invited me to visit and perhaps do research there. This place, it turned out, was an ISKCON temple, and I soon became an occasional participant at its weekly meetings and ceremonies.

As I would come to learn over the next few months, singing and chanting are not only central to ISKCON worship, but also constitute the primary form of *bhakti*, or devotion, that devotees engage in. A practice called kirtan, the collective singing of Krishna's names, is the centerpiece of all ISKCON gatherings. Among Balinese ISKCON devotees, kirtan is understood to belong to a broader category of activity, which they call singing *rohani* (spiritual singing). As used by devotees, this term served as a way of distinguishing ordinary singing from the devotional forms of singing practiced at the ashram. "Here, we sing rohani," I was often told. As I spent more time with devotees, it became clear that what distinguished rohani singing was both its feelingful and its ethical dimensions.

Another form of singing rohani, apparently unique to Indonesian ISKCON, involves singing the Bhagavad Gita in pepaosan style. As in traditional pepaosan, one performer sings a line from the original text while another provides an impromptu spoken translation in Balinese or Indonesian. The singing of the original text can be done using Balinese melodies (such as the *sronca* melody used in the reading of kakawin poetry, or *reng sruti*, as used in *membaca sloka* competitions at the UDG). It can also be done using Indian or other melodies. Only a few of the ashram's congregants were skilled in this practice, and it was rarely performed in the ashram context. More commonly, devotees would perform this style of chant at traditional Balinese ceremonies, including temple and cremation ceremonies. Because it uses the pepaosan format, this practice was seen by devotees as an aesthetically appropriate way to bring the karmic benefits of the Bhagavad Gita to a broader Balinese public. I believe it was a performance of this kind that I heard at the Nyuhkuning ceremony described earlier.<sup>190</sup>

The other forms of chant practiced at the ashram form part of the global ISKCON liturgy. A typical weekly service at the ashram involves at least three distinct forms of chant. These meetings begin with an hour or two of kirtan as the devotees arrive.<sup>191</sup> Next, the congregation conducts a reading from the *Bhagavad Gita Menurut Aslinya*,

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<sup>190</sup> I inquired about the Nyuhkuning chanters among devotees at the ashram and none of them were familiar with them. This leads me to believe that they were not ISKCON devotees. Most likely, they were affiliated with another devotional movement, such as Sai Baba or one of the local new religious movements that center on the Bhagavad Gita, such as Nyoman Dharmayasa's Paramadhama Center in Denpasar or Ashram Anas in Ubud.

<sup>191</sup> Prior to the reading from the Bhagavad Gita, the congregants would recite a lengthy Sanskrit text in unison following a simple, repetitive melody. Most congregants had the text memorized; those who did not would read from a small photocopied book called the *Buku Saku*, which is discussed later in this chapter. I do not know the title or original source for this recited text.

the official Indonesian translation of *The Bhagavad Gita as It Is*, ISKCON's primary sacred text. *The Bhagavad Gita As It Is* includes the original Sanskrit verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*, as well as an English translation and extensive English-language commentary for each verse, both prepared by the movement's founder Srila Prabhupada. This commentary outlines the core beliefs of the ISKCON movement. The *Bhagavad Gita Menurut Aslinya*, or BGMA, follows this same format but with all of the English material translated into Indonesian. Readings from the BGMA generally focused on a single verse. First, the congregation would sing through the verse in call and response format. A designated leader would sing through one line and then the congregants would repeat it; then individual congregants would take turns serving as the leader, reading through the verse line by line, alone, while the other congregants repeated the lines back. These readings always followed the same simple melody. After completing the process of chanting the text, the leader would read through the "synonyms" (the Sanskrit words of the text paired with their Indonesian equivalents) and the translation of the verse, and the congregation would repeat these. Finally, the leader would read through Prabhupada's commentary on the verse (*penjelasan*) and then give a sermon related to the verse. Not uncommonly, devotees would pass the time during the sermon engaging in a fourth form of chant, a meditative practice known as japa. Here, Krishna's names are spoken or whispered repeatedly in cycles of 108 repetitions using a string of tulsi beads to aid with counting. Each devotee is expected to do at least 16 cycles of japa every day. While not otherwise engaged, devotees at the ashram would often seize the moment to do a few rounds of japa.

Kirtan is perhaps best known in its guise as a public form of evangelizing. Many readers have probably seen bands of Hare Krishnas dressed in pale orange dhotis walking down the streets of Berkeley, New York, or other American cities, singing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. My focus in this chapter, however, will be on kirtan as performed within the ashram where it forms a central component of liturgical practice. As noted above, regular services at the ashram generally begin with an hour or so of kirtan. On holy days, the congregation often performs kirtan for much longer stretches of time, and the celebration commonly ends with a highly energetic kirtan session.

In the temple context, kirtan is often done in conjunction with another practice called darshan, in which devotees gaze at statues of deities, known as arca. As described in more detail below, both kirtan and darshan are modes of connecting with Krishna and “purifying the senses.”

The core text used in kirtan is known as the Mahamantra.<sup>192</sup> It reads as follows: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. According to ISCKON’s interpretation of the text, Krishna and Rama are names for the supreme deity (most commonly known as Krishna), and Hare refers to Krishna’s divine energy.

Kirtan follows a call-and-response format, in which a solo singer and a group of percussionists set the melody and tempo, and the congregation follows their lead. Congregants at the ashram in Bali would sing kirtan with a seemingly endless variety of

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<sup>192</sup> This is the same text used in japa.

melodies, including Balinese melodies as well as melodies that sounded distinctly Indian or Western.

### ***Feeling, Ethics, and Devotion***

During the collective meal after one of the weekly services at the ashram, I got to chatting with the elderly man who'd delivered the sermon and another middle-aged male devotee, whom I shall call Prabu Abhimanyu. I told them I enjoyed participating in the singing they did at the ashram, and that I was interested to learn more about it. "And you feel something?" (*dan merasakan sesuatu?*) Prabu Abhimanyu asked. Upon hearing this question other devotees sitting nearby leaned in and looked at me, waiting to hear my answer.

The field notes I wrote after visits to the ashram were indeed sprinkled with descriptions of mysterious bodily sensations and unexpected emotional stirrings. For example, on one early visit, a female devotee invited me to accompany her as she did darshan a few feet in front of the arca. I followed her to the front of the prayer room, doing my best to mimic her posture as she clasped her hands together in front of her heart and fixed her gaze on the elaborately dressed figures on display. As we stood together quietly, while a small group of devotees were singing kirtan behind us, I felt a vibration traverse my body. I experienced this sensation with greater levels of intensity on subsequent visits to the ashram. For example, at one of the group's regular Sunday services, the congregation did a workshop on japa recitation, reciting 108 repetitions of the chant in unison while seated on the temple floor. Gazing at the arca during the

recitation, I felt the same vibratory sensation, but stronger, and accompanied by an involuntary quickening of my breath and a slight pressure behind my eyes. Although these sensations were almost overwhelming at times, I found I could easily control them, because if I averted my attention or gaze from the arca, the sensations quickly diminished.

These pleasurable vibrations were not part of my initial visits to the ashram. At first, I felt uneasy and slightly embarrassed, unsure of how to act in this unfamiliar context. When Santi, the IHDN student, first told me about the ashram, I was unaware that it was an ISKCON organization. All I knew was that it was a place where people practiced Sanskrit chant. A few days after we met at IHDN, Santi invited me to an *acara* (event) at the ashram. I followed her text-messaged directions to an area on the outskirts of the city of Gianyar. As I was circling around on my motorbike, trying to locate the ashram among strips of recently-constructed homes, shops, and warehouses scattered between rice fields, I was imagining I would soon find myself sitting in a chair and listening to a sermon, as in the many 'modern' Hindu gatherings I had seen on TV.

After a few wrong turns I finally found the unmarked driveway that led to the ashram. It was a narrow dusty road lined on one side by a cluster of buildings and on the other by a row of coconut trees and a rice field. About a hundred meters from the main road I encountered a group of small children dressed in long skirts or pants made of bright yellow, pink, and green fabric. One of the girls had two pale lines painted down the center of her forehead. I asked them if they knew where find the ashram. The girl

with the mark on her forehead, who was probably about 8 or 9 years old, directed me in perfect Indonesian.

As I approached the building I suddenly became viscerally aware that this was not the kind of event I had been imagining. A handful of adults were milling around casually, as though nothing much was happening. Many had marks on their foreheads like the little girl. Their clothing looked distinctly Indian; the women wore saris and some of the men wore dhotis. They look like Hare Krishnas, I thought to myself. Having no intention of studying this group, and not wanting to be subjected to proselytization, my first impulse was to turn around and drive away. After hesitating for a moment, I heard an amplified voice coming from inside the building. Reassured that there was in fact some sort of 'event' taking place, I approached one of the women and asked if she could help me find Santi.

A moment later Santi came running toward me dressed in a silk sari of brilliant green, gold, and pink. She told me that at the ashram people call her Lalita. We chatted for a few minutes, then she asked me if I would like to do research or simply enjoy the evening's event. When I chose the latter she looked pleased and suggested I change into more appropriate clothing. Unsure how I wanted to define myself vis-à-vis the other attendees, I resisted, but she assured me that I would be more comfortable if I dressed like them. I was skeptical, but I eventually relented, whereupon she laughed giddily and then whisked me off to a small fluorescent-lit bedroom where she and a female friend wrapped and pinned me into a bright yellow cotton sari. I then spent the next several hours doing my best to follow along as the people around me sang, danced, shouted,

gazed, and prostrated themselves before a collection of doll-like figures with gold skin, which they called *arca*.

This and other early visits to the ashram were shot through with uncomfortable sensations. This was due in part to my perception of ISKCON as a proselytizing movement and my anxiety about becoming the object of that kind of attention and pressure. However, my uneasy feelings were linked not only to these kinds of thoughts, but also to specific bodily gestures. Performing *sujud* (prostration), for example, was deeply embarrassing to me at first. I would like to suggest, therefore, that my initial discomfort also had to do with the ways that ISKCON practices clash with the bodily habits and affective sensibilities not only of my own upbringing, but also of other spheres of Balinese religious practice. In this sense, my own initial encounter with ISKCON may shed light on some of the things Balinese Hindus experience as they observe, or begin participating in, ISKCON activities.

Much of my initial discomfort in the ashram setting stemmed from a sense of dissonance between my bodily performances and my internal 'piety.' Interestingly, I do not recall experiencing this tension to the same degree when I first began participating in traditional Balinese Hindu ceremonies. Whether I was helping to construct the intricate offerings for an upcoming ceremony or kneeling on the ground in a temple's inner courtyard to pray, my internal thoughts and feelings about god never seemed to become an object of other worshippers' attention or concern. The fact that I reproduced the appropriate external signs of obeisance always seemed sufficient in itself. This apparent nonchalance regarding personal belief resonates with a description by Clifford

Geertz. He writes that within Balinese religion: ““You can believe virtually anything you want to actually, including that the whole thing is rather a bore, and even say so. But if you do not perform the ritual duties for which you are responsible you will be totally ostracized, not just from the temple congregation, but from the community as a whole” (Geertz 1973a: 177). This attitude was echoed in a conversation I had with a friend from Buleleng during one of my first trips to Bali. He told me about a time when a Muslim tourist visited a Hindu temple in his village. During the collective prayer, the Muslim man sat motionless. My friend was deeply offended by this and described the man as a “fanatic.” In explaining his anger, he stressed that it was fine for the man to hold different beliefs about god, and to pray in accordance with those beliefs. The man’s internal relationship to Balinese Hindu deities was not at issue; rather, it was his failure to engage in the outward gestures of prayer that my friend perceived as disrespectful. Conversations like this led me to believe that my Balinese Hindu acquaintances did not hold a strong expectation that embodied religious practice must index a particular interior religious orientation: the two do not need to align in any particular way in order to be considered morally acceptable.

At the ashram, by contrast, I had the distinct sense that my outward gestures of piety ought to spring from a more fundamental inward piety. This sense was fueled in part by my interactions with Prabhu Abhimanyu, who, in addition to asking about the feelings I experienced while singing at the ashram, would also sometimes question me about my eating habits and other matters relating to my personal commitment to ISKCON teachings. However, I had this sense even before Prabhu Abhimanyu put

these questions to me, simply because of the ways people comported themselves in the ashram context, and specifically how they wove individualized gestures of devotion into their repertoire of bodily performances. During Balinese Hindu temple ceremonies, worshippers generally pray in unison, following the amplified instructions of the *penginter* (M.C.). When I first began participating in these prayers I was instructed to simply *ikut* (follow along). I have often been complimented for properly replicating the actions of receiving *tirta* and *bija* (holy water and rice grains placed on the forehead after prayer); very rarely did anyone question or comment upon my interior relationship to these gestures. In fact, people typically assumed that I was Christian, based on my race, even if they were aware of my participation in Balinese Hindu rituals and prayer. Engaging in these acts thus felt less like a personal expression of religious piety than a willingness to go along with the group, and a gesture of respect for Balinese culture. To 'follow along' at the ashram, however, was different, because ISKCON devotees display devotion in individualized ways. Sujud, for example, was often performed individually. Ordinarily this act involves kneeling down and leaning forward, placing one's head and forearms on the ground. Sometimes male devotees would go a step further, straightening their legs so that their entire body lay flat on the floor. These gestures initially appeared to me to be purely spontaneous displays of religious feeling. I later learned that this is only sometimes the case. When people perform sujud individually, they typically do so upon entering and exiting the prayer room; only occasionally does the act arise from a spontaneous impulse. Nevertheless, the simple fact of having to perform this gesture alone (not in unison with other devotees) made me feel self-

conscious about its significance. The gesture seemed to stand for 'me' in a way that differed from the gestures of traditional Balinese prayer. Moreover, like other gestures of devotion performed at the ashram, *sujud* can be performed with varying degrees of intensity: the posture can be held for longer or shorter periods of time and for male devotees, as noted above, the body can be bent forward or fully lowered to the floor. These degrees afford a more personalized form of religious expression than what is available in *muspa* and other traditional Balinese forms of worship.<sup>193</sup> Another individualized display of devotion performed at the ashram was *japa*. As noted above, devotees would often do *japa* during sermons and during spare moments between other activities. Sometimes they would even do *japa* while chatting with me or with other devotees, quietly whispering the words of the *mahamantra* between turns in the conversation. Of all the ISKCON devotional practices, *japa* is probably the most individualized, given that each devotee is individually responsible for reciting 16 rounds each day. The prominence of individual gestures of devotion at the ashram meant that, in order to convincingly 'follow along,' I had to participate in personalized forms of religious expression, practices which felt radically different from the Balinese forms of worship to which I was accustomed.

As I continued to visit the ashram, however, engaging in the requisite displays of piety became habitual and ceased to arouse as much anxiety.<sup>194</sup> As I became less self-

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<sup>193</sup> This is not to say that Balinese Hindu ritual does not allow for any individual variation. There are, of course, variations in how people dress, what offerings they present, whether they mutter words during prayer or pray silently, and so on.

<sup>194</sup> I never became accustomed to doing *japa* at the ashram. I tried a couple of times but did not feel comfortable. When I did do *japa*, I did it at home, but I kept the practice secret from the Dangin family, who did not approve of ISKCON. I did not do it every day, and I certainly did not do the full sixteen rounds, which takes around four hours.

conscious in the ashram context I began to experience the more enjoyable affective sensations mentioned above. My interlocutors at the ashram never spoke to me in detail about the specific bodily or emotional sensations they experienced while engaging in kirtan or other devotional practices. However, Prabu Abhimanyu's question about 'feeling something,' alongside the other devotees' apparent interest in my answer, suggests that "feeling" (*rasa*) is an acknowledged, and valued feature of their experiences. Other things I saw and heard at the ashram further support this conclusion. One phrase I heard repeatedly while spending time with devotees was "When you sing, you will surely feel happy." Stated in sermons, circulated in pamphlets, and quoted in informal conversations, this claim was ubiquitous in ashram discourse. The particular kind of happiness associated with singing is called *kebahagiaan rohani* (spiritual ecstasy). Both in sermons at the ashram and in Prabhupada's commentary in the BGMA, the *kebahagiaan rohani* experienced while singing kirtan is described as far exceeding the sensual pleasures of eating and sex. This spiritual ecstasy was particularly palpable during the longer kirtan sessions that often took place on holy days. On such occasions, the music would sometimes become frenzied, at which point the more energetic members of the congregation would often dance wildly, laughing and shouting, male and female bodies intermingling in ways I never saw elsewhere in Bali. Other devotees preferred to enjoy these moments in a more reserved, but no less intense way. Standing near the front of the prayer room, in close proximity to the arca, they would sway gently from side to side, or stand immobilized, singing and gazing at the deities with an expression that can only be described as rapture. Sometimes

devotees would spontaneously prostrate themselves or throw their arms in the air and scream “Hare Krishna.” It was not unusual to see tears in their eyes. While participating in these more energetic kirtan sessions, I experienced a kind of sensory contagion as the visible feelings of the people around me resonated in my own body. These feelings seemed to grow particularly strong if I focused on the people closest to the arca; at moments when their feelings appeared to intensify, a wave of feeling would swell up within me.

As defined by anthropologist Danilyn Rutherford, affect is “a bodily capacity that is generalizable. As what passes between participants in scenes of interaction,” she continues, “affect is the stuff of new forms of life, new ways of being in the world” (Rutherford 2016: 288). In the context of an ISKCON temple, music works in tandem with other material forms, such as iconography and the organization and movement of bodies in space, to create intense and structured sensations. However, the movement’s transformative potential stems not only from these sensory experiences. Equally important, I would argue, is the way ISKCON doctrine harnesses these sensations to a particular ethical project, one in which singing and other forms of bhakti play a key role.

### ***The Ethics of Sensory Purification***

Central to ISKCON’s ethical project is a representation of human-divine relationships as mediated, predominantly, by feeling. This image of the devout self as ‘feelingful’ is represented in the Bhagavad Gita through the character of Arjuna. Two iconic scenes in the narrative portray Arjuna overcome with feeling. In Chapter 1, Arjuna

is described as trembling and weeping, his hair standing on end, as he surveys the Pandawa and Kurawa armies arranged on the battlefield (Prabhupada 2000: 54-55). A parallel scene occurs in Chapter 11, when Krishna reveals his true form to Arjuna; again, Arjuna is described as experiencing trembling and chills, but this time, we are told, he is seeing the world with “spiritual eyes” (*ibid.*: 555-560). In his commentary, Prabhupada explains that sensations of trembling and hair standing on end have two causes: fear (rooted in worldly attachment) and spiritual ecstasy (which occurs when one sees beyond the illusory material world) (*ibid.*: 55). He stresses that these feelings are not a sign of weakness; on the contrary, they show that Arjuna has the character of a true devotee of Krishna (*ibid.*: 54). Indeed, throughout Prabhupada’s commentary, Arjuna is held up as a model of the ideal ISKCON devotee, whose progress from fearful attachment to spiritual consciousness mirrors the devotee’s own ethical development. When Arjuna is overcome with feeling in the climactic scene of the text, this is also the turning point in his spiritual journey. Through seeing the cosmos as it really is, in a moment of profound feeling, Arjuna is able to move past his worldly attachment and fulfill his duty as a warrior (*ibid.*: 849-851). Feeling, then, marks both the beginning and the culmination of Arjuna’s spiritual journey.

Within ISKCON, ethical practice centers on teaching the soul to feel in an appropriate manner. ISKCON devotees believe that the human soul is a fragment of the divine soul, which has become entangled in an illusory material world. Forms of bhakti, such as kirtan and japa, are a way to reconnect the soul with its divine origins. The goal of these techniques, and of ISKCON as a whole, is to liberate the soul from the cycle of

death and rebirth, allowing it to be reunited with Krishna. To achieve this goal, the devotee must release herself from earthly attachments, which is accomplished by learning to experience ethical forms of pleasure.

As explained in the BGMA, the basic purpose of kirtan is to bring pleasure to Krishna, to “satisfy the divine sensorium,” to approximate the text’s own wording. Because the human soul is part of the divine soul, Krishna’s pleasure creates a kind of resonance within the singer’s body. As stated in the BGMA, “*Kalau kita berusaha memuaskan indria-indria Sri Govinda, maka dengan sendirinya indria-indria kita dipuaskan*” (when we work to satisfy Govinda’s senses, our own senses are automatically satisfied) (Prabhupada 2000: 59).<sup>195</sup> To experience pleasure while singing kirtan is thus, in a sense, to feel Krishna’s sensorium inside oneself, a sensation which provides a foretaste of the soul’s liberation from material desires.

This idea is elaborated in a discussion of kirtan in the *Buku Saku* (pocket book), a small photocopied prayer book sold at the ashram and owned by most devotees. Here, kirtan is described as “an ocean of spiritual ecstasy, which enables us to taste the sweetness of the nectar (*amrita*) that we are always seeking” (*Buku Saku*: 15-16). Kirtan, the text claims, has the power to “extinguish the flame of the life of attachment,” thereby releasing the soul from the cycle of death and rebirth (*ibid.*: 15). In other words, the pleasure experienced while engaging in kirtan marks the shift from worldly attachment to other-worldly or spiritual attachment, a process which devotees sometimes referred to as “purifying the senses” (*sucikan indria*). To taste the

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<sup>195</sup> In the BGMA Krishna is referred to by many names, of which Govinda is one.

“sweetness” to which the text refers, is to glimpse the world that lies beyond the suffering of earthly life, and the very practice that affords these glimpses—the singing of kirtan—also brings the soul closer to its goal. If the practice is successful, the devotee will come to desire nothing except to serve Krishna.

In a slightly later passage in the *Buku Saku*, the quality of these pleasurable feelings is described. The text reads: “Oh Lord, when will my eyes be adorned with tears of love, which flow eternally if I say your sacred name? When will my voice falter and my hair stand on end each time I say your sacred name?” (*ibid.*: 17). In this passage, the same language used to describe Arjuna’s feelings when he sees Krishna’s true form is used to describe the desired experience and ethical status of the devotee: to be full of feeling while vocalizing Krishna’s names, and thus, to be purified of harmful material attachments.

### ***Singing, Feeling, and Conversion***

I would like to end this chapter by taking a closer look at how my interlocutors spoke about singing. As noted earlier, Balinese devotees describe the distinctive forms of singing they do at the ashram as being “rohani.” Derived from the Arabic word *roh*, which means soul, this Indonesian term is roughly equivalent to the English words “spiritual,” or “sacred.” Thus, to say “we sing rohani” is roughly to say “we sing in a spiritual way.” Among the ashram’s members, however, the term had a somewhat more specific meaning. Rohani is one of the most common words in the BGMA, appearing over 400 times in the first 300 pages of the text. It is used as a translation for the

English words spiritual and transcendental, and it is listed as a synonym for numerous Sanskrit terms. Rohani is most commonly used to describe knowledge (*pengetahuan rohani*), ecstasy or pleasure (*kebahagiaan rohani, kenikmatan rohani*), and actions (*kegiatan rohani*), and in the noun form it is often used describe a spiritual master (*guru kerohanian*). It is used as an antonym for *material* (material, earthly), as in the phrases *dunia rohani* (spiritual world) and *dunia material* (material world). To sing “rohani,” then, is to produce effects—including feelings—that are in the spiritual rather than the material realm.

The contrast between singing “rohani” and other kinds of singing was clarified in a conversation I had with Prabu Abhimanyu, the man who first asked me if I “felt something” while singing kirtan. Prabu Abhimanyu was known as the ashram’s most accomplished performer of pepaosan. When I told him that I studied pepaosan as well, he warned me to be careful about choosing a singing teacher in Bali, hinting that many Balinese vocalists have incorrect religious beliefs. “I studied for twenty years, but I still didn’t understand anything,” he said, prompting a laugh from the other devotees sitting around us. He then explained that it was only after coming to the ashram that he began to learn. He said that many Balinese pepaosan performers are only concerned with sounding good. “All they talk about is uger-uger,” he said, referring to the complex rules governing how literary texts are set to melody in Balinese oral literary performance. As discussed in Chapter 4, for many pepaosan practitioners, concerns over the correctness and beauty of a performance are not superficial matters, but are linked to the ethical pursuit of divine guidance. According to Prabu Abhimanyu, however, this focus on the

aesthetic aspects of vocal performance, as codified in the uger-uger, revealed an excessive concern with material form, which made their singing ineffective for achieving ethical progress. By contrast, he described the singing at the ashram as being “rohani.” To some extent, Prabu Abhimanyu’s comments echo those of UDG spokespersons discussed in Chapter 4. Like them, Prabu Abhimanyu sees traditional pepaosan performers as missing the ethical point of religious textual performance. However, whereas people like Pak Sujana and Ketut Wiana emphasize mental transformation through pemahaman (understanding), the purpose and goal of singing rohani is to purify the senses and, in doing so, to transform the soul. Understanding and internalizing meaning, while not without value in ISKCON, is nonetheless peripheral to devotees’ primary ethical goal.

Lalita, the IHDN student who first invited me to the ashram, was also a pepaosan performer and I took a few lessons from her during my research. We would sit on the floor in a small cement room that served as the ashram’s female dressing room and occasional guest bedroom, which was perpetually strewn with saris, veils, and long skirts in brightly colored fabrics. During our first lesson Lalita described how she sings with feeling. “When I sing, I feel it in my heart,” she said, narrowing her eyes and tapping a hand to her chest. Then suddenly growing more animated, she picked up a worn copy of the Bhagavad Gita in one hand, a photocopied book of Balinese *gaguritan* literature in the other and announced: “I’m going to reveal the secret to you. The essence of all this,” she said, pointing to the gaguritan book as well as other Balinese books scattered around us on the floor, “is here.” She held up the BGMA. “You

understand right?" she said, laughing. I shook my head. She then opened the gaguritan book. "People who study this, they just learn this only," she said, pointing to a line of text. Her point echoed what Prabu Abhimanyu had said: that when people study traditional pepaosan they just learn the text, the melody, and how to follow the uger-uger. "But when we study the Bhagavad Gita," she continued "whether we're conscious of it or not, we gain energy (*energi*) or spiritual radiance (*pancaran spiritual*)." She told me that when she'd first started studying pepaosan she focused only on the method for correctly singing the text, but when she started studying at the ashram something changed. She could feel a kind of energy entering her body, which then came out in all of her singing. "This is called taksu," she said, using a Balinese term for divinely bestowed charisma. In this narrative of personal transformation, Lalita draws a connection between musical feeling and divine efficacy. Like the sekaa santi members described in Chapter 4, who feel Saraswati's guidance as they sing, Lalita experiences her voice as an auratic index of her relationship with Krishna. As she begins to cultivate this relationship, by participating in activities at the ashram, she becomes a better singer, and also begins to *feel* differently when singing. Lalita attributes these changes to Krishna's agency; it could also be the case that the sermons and readings that she hears at the ashram made her attuned to her voice in a new way, introducing her to a new semiotic ideology and altering how she interprets the sensations she experiences while singing.

Later in our conversation she explained how the feelingful effects of singing improved other aspects of her life and deepened her attachment to ISKCON.

“Sometimes our thoughts get lost and this makes us suffer,” she said. “If I have a problem, especially a problem at home, a money problem, because my parents are farmers, you know, I get confused and don’t know what to do.” Expressing a sentiment I heard frequently among Balinese ISKCON devotees, she said everyday life in Bali, including religious life, raises all sorts of questions without providing answers. The Bhagavad Gita, by contrast, gave her “instructions on how to live,” and by following these instructions, she was able to get past her bad thoughts. “If I feel bad, I know I have to sing,” she said, “and if my bad feelings come back, I know I have to sing again.” Giggling, she confessed that that was why she spent so much time at the ashram. “I’ve seen many positive changes in my life since I started coming here,” she said.

For Lalita, the feelings she experiences while singing at the ashram are a rationale for her involvement in the movement and a motivation for her to continue. They provide solace during difficult times and reassure her that she’s following a proper religious and ethical path. Prabu Abhimanyu made similar claims about his own experiences singing the Bhagavad Gita. One afternoon following a ceremony at the ashram, I was in the dressing room and heard a sound like *pepaosan* coming from somewhere nearby. I followed the sound to the prayer room where I found Prabu Abhimanyu and another male devotee seated on the floor in front of the arca. They were singing from a thin, photocopied book. It was a version of the Bhagavad Gita formatted for *pepaosan* with the original text interspersed with a provisional translation. I sat listening for a few minutes. Prabu Abhimanyu pointed to the place in the text so I could follow along. “Now I’m going to sing *sronca*,” he said, referencing a melody used

in the singing of Kakawin, which he knew was familiar to me. Although I recognized the basic contour of the melody, I could not figure out how he was placing the long and short syllables. When Prabu Abhimanyu asked me if I would like to try, I told him I didn't know how to fit the melody to the text because I couldn't determine which were long and which were short syllables. He said this didn't matter, which seemed to imply that his style of singing did not adhere to a system of uger-uger like kakawin singing does. We then got to chatting about performing at traditional Balinese ceremonies. He urged me to try singing the Bhagavad Gita, instead of traditional Balinese literature. "You can sing the Bhagavad Gita in pepaosan style," he said, "it's better [than using other texts.] "Radiusnya lebih tinggi" (roughly: its radius is higher). I asked what this meant. "It's more powerful," he said, explaining that it could purify the senses of the worshippers who hear it, whether or not they are active devotees of Krishna. He then told me how he used to be a drinker and gambler. "But since I started singing the Bhagavad Gita, I've been able to overcome all of that," he said. Like Lalita, Prabu Abhimanyu attributes positive changes in his life to singing "rohani." His statement echoes the central ISKCON tenet that devotional practice can weaken one's sensuous desires by offering an infinitely more attractive form of pleasure. Through their involvement with ISKCON, these two singers come to link affect with ethical progress, progress which then leads to concrete improvements in their everyday lives. The affective pleasure of singing is crucial to how they come to understand themselves and their place in a social and cosmic order.

## ***Conclusion***

ISKCON presents Balinese Hindus with a way of being in the world that diverges significantly from that of Balinese adat. Organizing religion around voluntary bonds of affinity, rather than kinship and communal obligation, it pushes toward a more secular social and political order. My interest in this chapter, however, is less in the new institutions and structures that ISKCON introduces, and more in the intimate, sensuous processes by which people become attached to this movement, processes which I believe are an equally crucial component of the movement's social efficacy.

Focusing on the practice of singing rohani, I have shown how devotional singing provides Balinese Hindus with novel sensory experiences as well as new ways of imagining the world and their place within it. By analyzing the narratives of two accomplished vocalists who are also ISKCON devotees, I've shown how singing informs their experience of personal transformation. As revealed in their allusions to "energy" and "feeling," affective sensations are central to how these singers understand and value their attachment to ISKCON. These feelings, and the positive changes that come in their wake, mark their transition into the movement and serve to deepen their attachment to it. Musically-mediated affect, then, would seem to have substantial power, power which operates in intimate and personal ways, to at least make possible the more widespread forms of social change to which ISKCON, as a proselytizing movement, aspires.

My purpose in highlighting ISKCON's transformative potential in this chapter is not to predict the demise of traditional Balinese Hinduism, but rather, to explore the

ever-emergent sensuous social orders taking shape in Bali today, and to consider the role that music plays within them. While I see musical affect as one of the sources of ISKCON's allure, music's capacity to insinuate itself into the body is also its weakness. The very same sensory qualities that make the movement, and its music, so attractive and profoundly transformative for some, prompt discomfort, anxiety, and laughter in others.

## CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have brought ethnographic attention to the ethical dimensions of religious life in contemporary Bali. By analyzing three religious pedagogies of voice alongside the everyday religious practices of the Dangin family, I have shown how Balinese Hindus seek to live ethically by interacting with invisible beings, and how the mediatory practices that make invisible beings present in human lives inform and shape ethical practice. Over the course of this ethnography, I have discussed three distinct forms of ethical striving that take shape through vocal performance: an ethics of sincerity, which is materialized through state religious pedagogies like the Puja Tri Sandhya and the UDG; an ethics of divine guidance, which emerges in the activities of sekaa santi, and an ethics of sensory purification, which is embodied through singing rohani. By comparing several religious pedagogies of voice that circulate in Bali today, this ethnography reveals that people's creative engagements with the ethical affordances of vocal expression—including linguistic form, vocal sound, and embodied feeling—are a key site in which ethical subjectivities are imagined and constituted.

In this conclusion I seek to bring together the independent case studies presented in the forgoing chapters in order to draw out and clarify some of my overarching arguments and their contributions to relevant bodies of scholarship across the fields of Balinese religion, anthropology, and ethnomusicology. In closing, I briefly mention some possible directions for future research.

This dissertation proposes a conceptual reframing of contemporary Balinese religiosity. Whereas previous scholars have suggested that ethics is something that enters Balinese religious life by way of the Hindu Reform, the case study of the Dangin family illustrates that ethical values and concerns are an integral part of adat religious practices, which are rooted in bodies of religious knowledge other than those that were brought in with the Hindu Reform. I argue, therefore, that state efforts to reform and modernize Balinese religiosity, which have been characterized as creating a clash between a 'ritual' and an 'ethical' orientation to religion, can be more usefully and more accurately conceptualized as a struggle between two competing forms of Balinese Hindu ethics: between an ethics of divine blessing—which attaches ethical value to the semiotic forms that mediate divine agency—and an ethics of sincerity—which posits the interior aspects of the self as the proper locus of ethical value.

This conceptual reframing brings attention to two aspects of Balinese religiosity that have been overlooked in previous scholarship. First, it points to the often subtle and indirect ways that reformist interventions shape religious subjectivity and practice in Bali, which have been underappreciated in prior research. While many scholars have acknowledged the state's role in promoting 'ethicized' reinterpretations of Balinese religious traditions, less attention has been paid to how Balinese people strive to navigate and negotiate competing ethical ideals and demands. This has led scholars to overlook some of the subtler ways that reformist discourses influence contemporary religiosity. While scholars have often looked at the continuity of Balinese adat institutions and rituals as evidence that the Hindu Reform has had only a superficial

impact on Balinese religious life, attention to the various paths of ethical striving that Balinese Hindus pursue suggests that reformist ideologies may be transformative without necessarily being fully adopted or implemented. For example, although people may not recite the Puja Tri Sandhya in the way that state religious doctrine recommends, my interviews reveal that the prayer nonetheless makes certain forms of religious expression and selfhood imaginable and inhabitable in everyday life. It is my contention that the semiotic work of making particular conceptions of selfhood available to reflection and experience in this way plays a crucial role in the processes by which new subjectivities emerge and gain currency and legitimacy, a point to which I will return shortly.

Second, this reconceptualization also highlights the forms of ethical striving that take shape through adat traditions of ritual exchange, revealing that these traditions have reproductive as well as transformative potential. Rather than simply being an obligation that people must fulfill in order to maintain the existing social order, the need to manage human-niskala relationships creates spaces of possibility for personal and social change. The creative, world-making potential of Balinese adat ritual is vividly illustrated in the Dangin family's efforts to maintain their position of moral and social superiority vis-à-vis the Dauh family. Traditions of ritual exchange similarly inform and enable sekaa santi members' practices of ethical and aesthetic self-fashioning through the pursuit of Saraswati's tuntunan. In these and other examples, Balinese adat provides semiotic resources through which individuals' moral agency is constituted and expressed.

This dissertation's inquiry into religious agency in Bali responds to ongoing anthropological debates about the place of agency in ethical life. Scholars such as Saba Mahmood, James Faubion, and James Laidlaw have adopted a Foucauldian approach to the study of ethics, which highlights the ways that people create and govern themselves in the process of striving to live an ethical life. Cheryl Mattingly claims that this approach places too much emphasis on the ethical process of assimilating models, and she has argued for greater attention to the kinds of experimentation and creativity that emerge when such models fall short. While this dissertation has employed a broadly pedagogical approach to the study of ethics, which is deeply indebted to the work of Mahmood and Laidlaw, I have sought to reconcile this with Mattingly's call to attend to the "situated character" of ethical life (Mattingly 2014b: 479). Mattingly's image of models falling short resonates especially well with my own research on the Hindu Reform. While reformers claim that religious texts provide a comprehensive guide for living an ethical life as a Hindu in Bali, it is not to texts that members of the Dangin family would turn when called upon to make and justify moral judgments. The ethical models furnished by the Hindu Reform apparently 'fall short' of providing them with compelling answers to the questions and dilemmas they face, pushing them to look elsewhere. Drawing on Mattingly's work, this dissertation suggests that we need to attend to what happens when ethical models are only intermittently, partially, or half-heartedly 'actualized,' as is the case with some of the religious pedagogies of voice that I have examined here. However, whereas Mattingly's approach seems to sidestep the

issue of mediation, I am especially interested in how moral consciousness and agency take shape through mediatory practices.

Taking inspiration from the work of Webb Keane, I propose that one way to move this conversation forward is by bringing attention to the representational economies that underpin forms of ethical life, and specifically, to the role that affordances play in ethical practice. While the representational economies that I explore in this dissertation are linked to, and serve to underwrite, particular ethical orientations, they do not function as ethical *models*. Rather, they provide semiotic resources through which such models take shape and become available for reflection and circulation, and inhabitable in everyday life. This is clearly illustrated in my study of the Dangin family. In the everyday activity of striving to be a worthy person, members of the Dangin family make use of a range of semiotic forms. Rather than being oriented around an explicit moral code or exemplar, their ethical practices are creative struggles at self-making that draw from and are rooted in the signifying practices that make the invisible world present in social life, and in the semiotic ideologies that give those practices moral significance and weight. While this dependence on semiotic form may be particularly apparent within the ethics of divine blessing, since the latter revolves around people's inherently mediated relationships with invisible beings, I would argue that all forms of ethical life take shape within representational economies.

As a consequence of their materiality, the affordances of semiotic forms can be engaged in different ways toward a variety of different ends. This means that practices associated with one form of ethical striving may end up being incorporated into other

sorts of ethical projects. This was illustrated in my investigation of pepaosan. While state programs like the UDG and its associated training programs have resulted in a significant increase in the number of people who participate in pepaosan, this has not necessarily resulted in wider adoption of the ethical models that the state is seeking to promote by way of these programs. I show instead how sekaa santi members take up the affordances of pepaosan practice to pursue forms of ethical striving that run counter to reformist ideals. This example suggests that while religious pedagogies of voice may be geared toward promoting a particular model of ethical selfhood, they may also afford other possibilities for self-making.

However, even if pepaosan's ethical affordances are being taken up in divergent ways, this does not necessarily mean that the state's ethical pedagogy is simply ineffective. In Chapter 4, I argued that the ethical practices of sekaa santi members resonate with the ethics of divine blessing. Here I would like to complicate that claim by noting that although the ethical pursuit of Saraswati's guidance, as practiced by sekaa santi members, is similar to the kinds of ethical practices I described in Chapter 2, it is also much more individualized than those practices. This may be because the embodied experience of singing—particularly solo singing—affords a more personalized encounter with the divine than do the kinds of material exchanges I discussed in Chapter 2. This example suggests that the material properties of particular practices—vocal or otherwise—may subtly guide people toward certain ethical possibilities more than others. Solo singing, for example, may be particularly coherent with an individualized conception of ethical selfhood. To be clear, I am not claiming that

mediatory forms play a determinative or predictable role in these processes; my point, rather, is that their material properties actively contribute to shaping ethical life. Thus, rather than being incorporated into vastly divergent ethical projects, it may be more likely that the semiotic affordances of religious pedagogies of voice will be taken up in forms of self-making that share at least some common ground with the model of selfhood being directly promoted through the pedagogy.

While mediatory practices like *pepaosan* are able to take on a range of different meanings, by virtue of their material properties as well as the semiotic ideologies that regulate their capacity to take on meaning, their affordances are not limitless. This suggests that in the process of incorporating semiotic forms into the day-to-day activity of ethical life, people end up adopting the possibilities for selfhood that these forms make available. As we saw in the case of *pepaosan*, this does not mean that they necessarily ‘actualize’ the ethical model that these forms happen to be attached to. Yet, since semiotic forms make certain ethical possibilities available and not others, they may contribute to forming ethical subjectivities in ways that a straightforward pedagogical model is unable to capture. Wayan’s engagement with the *Puja Tri Sandhya* provided the clearest illustration of this. While Wayan does not perform the *Tri Sandhya* in the prescribed manner, the prayer’s sensory and semiotic properties allow him to experience prayer in a particular way, and he draws on these affordances in justifying his personalized approach to prayer. The *Tri Sandhya*’s existence as a religious pedagogy of voice promoted by the state created a space of possibility for Wayan to imagine and, to some extent, legitimize a form of prayer that diverged from

the norms of his community. His practice resonates with, without completely 'actualizing,' state religious ideologies.

Looking at how the affordances provided by representational economies both enable and constrain people's efforts to fashion themselves as moral persons may provide a new way of approaching questions about how ethical subjectivity takes shape in and through engagements with the ethical pedagogies that are furnished by a particular cultural or social environment, a way that gets beyond some of the shortcomings of a narrowly pedagogical analysis while at the same time keeping mediatory practices (and the disciplinary work they make possible) as a central object of analysis and an active player in ethical life. Such an approach, which I have tried to model here, attends closely to the ways people use the resources of material forms in their practices of ethical self-making, thus allowing for a more complex and nuanced view of the role of agency in ethical life.

My argument about ethical affordances has important implications for ethnomusicology as it suggests that music, along with other mediatory practices, may play a crucial role in the shaping and reshaping of ethical subjectivities. This claim resonates with the work of Aaron Fox, who has highlighted music's ability to put particular conceptions of selfhood into circulation, making them available as models against which actual selves can be evaluated and cultivated (2004: 107-151). Like Fox's study of country music in rural Texas, my inquiry into religious pedagogies of voice in Bali highlights the bodily and sonic materiality of voice, as well as linguistic and textual factors, as sites where moral selves are imagined and produced. Across the various

religious pedagogies of voice that I have discussed here, vocal expression serves as a means by which abstract ideals of selfhood that circulate through religious discourse and doctrine are, in a sense, 'fleshed out' and imbued with affective resonance.

This study builds on Fox's work by bringing attention to the transformative possibilities of these processes. While Fox emphasizes the reproductive capacities of musical models of selfhood embedded in country music, crediting them for their role in sustaining a distinctive working-class culture, I have tried to show how these kinds of models participate in the historical processes by which new subjectivities are constituted, taken up, and become widespread. In the case of ISKCON, for example, I have argued that feelings experienced through singing rohani serve to establish, deepen, and sustain Balinese devotees' commitment to the movement's ethical project, thus enabling their transition to a new form of religious selfhood. In highlighting the transformative potential of vocal expression, this study parallels the work of scholars such as Anaar Desai-Stephens (2017) and Nicholas Harkness (2014), who have studied vocal performance and training as sites for the coming-into-being of new subjectivities amidst changing political and economic conditions. Complementing these scholars' emphasis on the role of power and aspiration in these processes, I bring attention to ethics as both a source and site for the creation of new subjectivities, which may be entangled with, but is not simply reducible to, power (Lambek 2000: 313).

By organizing this dissertation around individual case studies, I was able to highlight several ways that religion, ethics, and vocal expression intersect in contemporary Bali. However, taking this approach also meant that many interesting and

relevant paths of inquiry had to be left unexplored. One fascinating sphere of activity, which only receives brief mention here, is the world of *dharma wacana* (Hindu sermons). With its lively presence on television, at UDG competitions, and in Balinese communities, *dharma wacana* could be the subject of an entire ethnography on its own.

One advantage of the case study approach was that it allowed for close investigation of several Balinese artistic practices that have been understudied in existing scholarship. A possible avenue for expanding this research would be to explore the ethical questions I have pursued in relation to *pepaosan* and the *Puja Tri Sandhya* in connection to other, more widely studied, Balinese artistic traditions. The *wayang* tradition, for example, is widely understood as an important source of moral teachings that are rooted in Balinese religious literature and beliefs. Like *pepaosan*, *wayang* is embedded in Balinese ritual practice and also targeted as a tool for circulating state religious doctrine. But whereas traditional *pepaosan* performances tend to be made up of textual fragments, presented in no particular order, *wayang* has a narrative structure, which would seem to afford different ethical possibilities. Another Balinese art form that would be relevant to consider in this regard is *gamelan*. What kinds of ethical values and commitments come into play in rehearsals and performances of this quintessentially collective musical art form? As Balinese are increasingly called upon to imagine and work on themselves as individuals, are the demands and affordances of the *gamelan* tradition becoming more or less relevant to social life on the island? How are its meanings changing amidst shifting political and economic conditions?

Organizing this dissertation around the voice and vocal expression provided valuable insights into the relationship between ethics and mediation. However, the portrait of ethical life that emerged from this ethnography is somewhat limited due to being compartmentalized around specific vocal practices. A more comprehensive study of Balinese Hindu ethics would reveal the central place that collectivist values and demands play in Balinese social life. In addition to feeling pressure to pull of lavish rituals, as described in Chapter 2, members of the Dangin family also felt a strong sense of obligation toward others in their community. Kompiang in particular seemed to always be busy helping friends and relatives prepare offerings for their rituals. Wayan sometimes complained that Kompiang exhausted herself with this work, and he often urged her to turn down her neighbors' requests. Yet, when he himself was called to *makemit* (stand guard overnight) during temple ceremonies in Tegal, he found these calls difficult to turn down, even on nights when he wasn't technically obligated to be present. This struggle to be an active and helpful member of one's community is aptly captured in the Balinese phrase "learning how to die" (*melajah mati*). This phrase neatly encapsulates the sense of mutual obligation shared by members of a single banjar: because families require banjar cooperation and assistance in order to complete necessary death rituals, learning how to die refers to the steady and ongoing contributions of time and labor that individuals must make in support of collective rituals, in order to prove themselves worthy of the banjar's aid when their turn comes to be buried and cremated.

The crucial importance of these contributions was clarified for me after I performed *gender wayang* with Wayan and his brother at a mass tooth-filing ceremony in Tegal. When we arrived at the ceremony we discovered that another musician from the village had made plans to perform with some of his students. When these students failed to show up, Wayan, Kadek, and I proceeded to play instead. During the walk home after the ceremony, however, it became clear that Wayan and Kadek felt that this musician was usurping a role that their own family had traditionally filled. “*Dia membunuh saya* (he’s killing me),” Wayan said angrily. When I asked what he meant by this, Wayan explained that this man had stolen what he believed was his own rightful opportunity to contribute to his community.

How do people navigate between the kinds of ethical striving embedded in collective religious activity and the more individualizing ethics that is being promoted through state religious ideologies and New Religious Movements like ISKCON? How do people reconcile the demands of ‘learning how to die’ with the need to avoid becoming ‘onlookers on their own island’? Will the ethics of divine blessing, with its focus on wealth as a sign of divine approval, create spaces of possibility for greater participation in capitalist forms of labor and consumption, or will the practices of ritual exchange in which this ethics is grounded continue to sustain the communal bonds and commitments that, today, rub uncomfortably against economic pressures to escape the ‘burden’ of Balinese adat? Whatever the outcome, we can be certain that mediatory practices like those I have examined here will play a critical role in materializing the ethical possibilities that Balinese Hindus imagine and pursue.

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