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Om Swasty-Alaikum... Interpreting Religio-Ethnic Humor on the Balinese Stage¹

*I'm sure we all agree that we ought to love one another and I know
there are people in the world that do not love their fellow human
beings and I hate people like that.*

Tom Lehrer
American songwriter and mathematician

A growing scholarly literature² points to a sharp increase in religious and ethnic conflict in Indonesia following the demise of former President Soeharto's 'New Order' regime.³ This has most recently included violent assaults on Christian churches and the purportedly heterodox Islamic movement called Ahmadiya, as well as a series of attacks responding to perceived affronts to Islamic morality. Prior to this were the anti-Chinese riots of 1997-99; a string of increasingly spectacular bombings attributed to

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2. See, e.g., Anderson 2001; Columbijn & Lindblad 2002; Husken & de Jonge 2002; Bertrand 2004; Sidel 2006; Fox 2006; van Klinken 2007; Bubandt 2008; Davidson 2008; Duncan 2009.

3. The 'New Order' (I. *Orde Baru*, or *OrBa*) was the authoritarian regime led by former Indonesian President Soeharto, who resigned after 32 years in power in May of 1998.

an allegedly al-Qaeda-affiliated group now widely known as Jemaah Islamiyya; and the succession of attacks, reprisals and pitched battles fought out between ethnically and religiously differentiated groups in places such as Ambon, Sambas and Poso. Various explanations have been proffered for the growing frequency and intensity of conflict in a country formerly thought by many to have been a haven of peaceful coexistence. Some have seen the violence as an eruption of primordial passions previously held in check by an authoritarian strongman. As with Tito in the former Yugoslavia, this understanding of events would have us believe Soeharto's departure from government allowed the communalist cat out of the bag. Others have seen ethnic and religious confrontation to be local politics by other means. Still others have placed the onus on *agents provocateurs* working, perhaps in cahoots with the military, at the behest of shady political interests and crony capitalists in Jakarta. There is no self-evident reason to assume these various accounts should be mutually exclusive. Yet, given the contentious (not to mention dangerous) circumstances that often surround incidents of mass violence, it is also difficult to know how we might set about assessing the evidence for one or another of these explanations. Stepping back from the details of any particular incident, or explanation, one is inclined to ask the more general question as to why such conflicts seem to be so intractable.

On reflection there appears to be some wisdom in Lehrer's sardonic quip on *the intolerance of intolerance*. For even the most inclusive pluralism calls for certain exclusions, namely of those who would threaten or deny the legitimacy of a pluralistic society (Brown 2008). But, as the critical literature on 'tolerance' amply demonstrates, this observation gives rise to a number of rather difficult questions. For instance, what sorts of difference are acceptable? And under what conditions can these judgments be made? If even the most open of societies requires an exclusion of the intolerant, how then do we choose between rival modes of acceptance, and the exclusions they entail? In the absence of a clear answer—that is, one that transcends any and all contingently particularist commitments—how are we to justify our claims as to what constitutes the common good?⁴ Under the circumstances, these seem questions worth considering for students of contemporary Indonesian religion and society.

Taking this as my point of departure, I would like to use a series of examples from the Indonesian island of Bali to explore some of the broader theoretical problems pertaining to religious and ethnic conflict. My examples are drawn from recent theatrical performances, for the simple reason that

4. Here the underlying issue is that of *universals*, and how one can sustain the tenuous balance between the relations of identity and difference that define any articulation of community (Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Laclau 1990, 2005 etc.).

drama has traditionally provided one of Bali's premier fora for the public discussion of current events; and, not without considerable changes, this has continued to be the case to this day. The primary focus will be on how we conceptualize the relationship between rival accounts of agency, community and the collective good, as I believe such differences to be crucial for our understanding of conflicts such as those cited in the opening paragraph. As we shall see, this will give cause for reflection on the political history of Balinese dance and drama.

To this end Part One begins by examining one of the more prominent articulations of the island's performing arts, namely that of the annual Arts Festival. Analysis will focus on the state bureaucratic ideal of social 'balance and harmony', understood as the product of 'tolerance' and 'mutual assistance' among groups differentiated along lines of religion, ethnicity and language. Part Two will describe a form of popular comedy that appears to fall short of this ideal, seemingly ridiculing non-Balinese Indonesians from a religious and ethnic point of view.⁵ Finally, Part Three will return to give a little more careful thought to the question of how we are to interpret this kind of humor. Is its apparent bigotry best approached with reference to ideals of tolerance and mutual respect? Or might we be missing something important by exporting these ideals to circumstances in which they may not obtain? In reflecting on these comedic performances and their interpretation, the aim will be to specify and begin addressing the problem of competing styles of social and practical reasoning,⁶ with an emphasis on the constitutive relationship between solidarity and exclusion.

The Performing Arts as Religion, Culture and Capital

Every year between June and July the Fine Arts Academy in the Balinese provincial capital of Denpasar hosts a gala event showcasing the island's leading performers.⁷ The event is known as the Bali Arts Festival, or PKB (*I. Pesta Kesenian Bali*);⁸ and with each passing year the proceedings have

5. In discussing these examples I have retained ethnographic anonymity for the actors and other commentators. This decision goes against the grain of the current literature on Balinese dance and drama. The reasons for my so doing are discussed at some length in the Preface to Fox 2011a.

6. By 'social reasoning' I mean the articulation of community engendering specifiable relations of equivalence and difference (e.g., Laclau 2005); while by 'practical reasoning' I mean to ask a somewhat wider series of questions around the constitution of agency, community and the collective good (following, in part, the later work of Alasdair MacIntyre [e.g., 1990, 1999], and his commentators, particularly Knight [e.g., 2007] and Lutz [2004, 2012]).

7. The Festival was held for the first time in 1979, under the direction of then Governor, Professor Ida Bagus Mantra.

8. I have used the abbreviations I., B. and J. to indicate Indonesian, Balinese and modern Javanese language terms respectively. It should be noted that, in addition to there being many

become increasingly international, with artists and onlookers from around the world coming to participate in the festivities. For each year's festival a theme is chosen by the organizing committee, which is reflected in the speeches delivered by dignitaries at the opening ceremony.⁹ The theme in 2011 was *Place, Time and Circumstance: Adapting Oneself in a Multicultural Context*.¹⁰ And it was the Governor of Bali, I Madé Mangku Pastika, who opened the month-long Festival with a speech linking the year's theme to the ideals of social harmony, tolerance and brotherhood. Having formally welcomed the audience to the Festival, he explained,

The basic idea behind organizing this event is to establish the function of Balinese culture (I. *fungsi kebudayaan Bali*), animated by Hindu religion (I. *Agama Hindu*), as Hindu Balinese society's cultural capital (I. *modal budaya*), remaining strong (I./B. *tetap ajeg*) and at the same time flexible in facing up to opportunities and challenges that have become increasingly complex with our ever more rapidly changing times. The Bali Arts Festival is an arena for presenting leading works of art and the grandeur of our civilization (I. *keagungan peradaban*) at the local, national and international level, leading in a philosophical sense to improvement in the quality and character-formation of our human resources (I. *sumber daya manusia*). The chosen theme — namely, *Place, Time and Circumstance: Adapting Oneself in a Multicultural Context* — is meant to indicate how important adaptation and tolerance (I. *adaptasi dan toleransi*) are in bringing about social harmony (I. *keharmonisan sosial*) in Balinese society, which today is now very diverse. This concept of diversity (I. *keberagaman*) accords with the philosophy (I. *filosofi*) of brotherhood (B. *manyama-braya*) as a way of life that has been developed by Balinese society from one generation to the next.¹¹

Both in substance and style, the Governor's opening speech was very much in keeping with established precedent (see Noszlopy 2002). Pastika

terms common to Balinese and Indonesian, these two registers are not always clearly separated in informal speech.

9. The annual themes are chosen in five-year blocks, in the early years lining up with the Five Year Plans for National Development, known by the acronym *Repelita* (Noszlopy 2002).

10. 'Traditional' practices in Bali—from making offerings to slaughtering pigs—vary greatly from one community to the next. This principle is recognized by Balinese themselves in such common phrases as *désa, kala, patra* and *désa mawa cara*—both *mutatis mutandis* acknowledging the specificity of place, time and situation as determining the character of a given ideal or practice. The phrase *désa mawa cara* has been said to be of Javanese provenance (see, e.g., Hefner 1985: 39); while the phrase *désa, kala, patra* likely dates to the late 1950s (see Warren 2000: 6).

11. The original Indonesian runs as follows: *Idé dasar penyelenggaraan kegiatan ini menempatkan fungsi kebudayaan Bali, yang dijiwai Agama Hindu, sebagai modal budaya masyarakat Hindu Bali, tetap ajeg sekaligus fléksibel dalam menghadapi berbagai peluang dan tantangan yang semakin kompléks sejalan dengan dinamika jaman yang semakin cepat. Pesta Kesenian Bali sebagai wadah untuk mempresentasikan hasil karya seni unggulan dan keagungan peradaban dengan ruang lingkup kegiatan yang berskala lokal, nasional dan internasional. Secara filosofis pemaknaan yang mengarah pada peningkatan kualitas dan pembentukan karakter sumber daya manusia. Tema yang diangkat — yakni 'Desa Kala Patra, Adaptasi Diri Dalam Multikultur' — mengandung makna betapa pentingnya adaptasi dan toleransi dalam mewujudkan keharmonisan sosial masyarakat Bali yang saat ini sudah sangat beragam. Konsep keberagaman tersebut sejalan dengan filosofi manyama-braya sebagai perilaku hidup yang sudah dikembangkan oleh masyarakat Bali secara turun-temurun.*

called for the protection of the island's artistic heritage, articulating the national imperatives of development and social harmony in the localizing idiom of 'Hindu Bali'. More specifically, he linked the ideals of tolerance and cultural flexibility to 'the Balinese philosophy of brotherhood', suggesting the Arts Festival itself might foster these ideals; and this, in turn, would help Balinese to meet the demands of modern-day life. Here the island's future and the well-being of its people were tied explicitly to an abiding relationship between religion, culture and capital. The message was clear, if not entirely new: Balinese society is now irremediably diverse; but its unique culture will remain strong, infused, as it is, with Hindu religion. In the managerial language of Indonesian officialdom, the Arts Festival would further this end by establishing the island's culture as an asset—quite literally a form of 'capital'—for the development of its 'human resources'.

In touting the benefits of brotherhood, the Governor was drawing on the now commonplace assumption that religion forms the animating core of Balinese society and culture. Owing much to a series of important publications by James Boon (1977), Adrian Vickers (1989) and Michel Picard (1990, 1996 etc.), we now recognize this to be an idea with a history closely tied to relations of power and governance.¹² Without wishing to oversimplify, one might summarize roughly the findings of the current scholarship as follows. In the early years of Dutch suzerainty political power was wrested from its traditional seat in the Balinese royal courts, which had previously commanded substantial resources and labor. This left the aristocracy to display their preeminence largely through the performance of pageantry and ritual, giving the appearance of an insular society preoccupied with ceremony and mesmerized by spectacle.¹³ During the subsequent inter-war years, prominent artists and anthropologists, such as Walter Spies, Miguel Covarrubias and Margaret Mead, did much to develop and disseminate a vision of Balinese society as an island paradise teeming with artists, and steeped in an exotic religiosity that combined tropical sensuality with the revered religious traditions of India. This was the image that would serve as a foundation for the 'cultural tourism' developed in the early years of the New Order. The Arts Festival itself emerged out of this milieu, in

12. More recent work has drawn selectively on these early publications to represent the island's recent history in terms of a tripartite periodization, encapsulated in the series 'colonization, Indonesianization and touristification'. See Fox 2010 and 2011a for discussion of this periodization and some of the difficulties it entails. As Henk Schulte Nordholt (1999) noted, this scholarship has tended to overlook the importance of the colonial government in the emergence of 'traditional Bali'.

13. In his review of Clifford Geertz's *Negara*, Schulte Nordholt suggested that the 'theatre state' was not so much an accurate portrayal of the pre-colonial Balinese polity, but rather an account of what the Balinese courts may have looked like following their subjugation to the Dutch (1981: 474).

which culture (I. *budaya*) had become “at once a ‘value to defend’ ... and a ‘value to market’” (Picard 1990: 74).

Through the 1970s and 80s the commodification of Balinese culture was closely tied to transformations in the wider Indonesian political economy. In the first of several Five-Year Development Plans (*Repelita I*, 1969-74), the island was targeted for the development of tourism, as part of a wider-reaching strategy aimed at paying down the country’s growing balance-of-payments deficit (Picard 1990: 41). In support of its drive toward modernization and economic self-sufficiency, the New Order state worked vigorously to articulate a vision of national unity that would at once *recognize* and at the same time *transcend* the particularist solidarities of religion, ethnicity and language. Central to this articulation was the model of five (now six) discrete religious communities (I. *Umat Agama*) that, taken together, were seen to make up the organically integrated nation.

The original five *Agama* included Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and both Catholic and Protestant forms of Christianity (see Kipp and Rodgers 1987). The Indonesian Ministry of Religion (*Départemén Agama*) has officially recognized and administered a Hindu form of *Agama* since 1958 (Picard 2011). However, official recognition came only after several denied petitions. Freedom of religion is guaranteed under the original 1945 Constitution (Article 29). But, as Pitana has noted, for a religion to gain formal recognition, ‘it had ... to be monotheistic; it had to have a unified holy book, a codified system of law for its followers, and a prophet; and its congregation had to extend beyond a single ethnic group’ (1999: 183). It was only once such criteria were met that Hinduism gained formal recognition from the state.

With varying degrees of success, this new and modernizing form of Hindu religiosity has been actively promulgated both in Bali and other parts of the archipelago. Beginning in elementary school, Balinese children are instructed—through classroom lectures, textbooks and other media—in the rudiments of a version of Hinduism that conforms to state monotheism and the imperatives of national development. This is a form of Hinduism expressed, and expressible, predominantly in the national language of Indonesian, as opposed to the older registers of Balinese or Kawi.¹⁴ It is a spiritualized religion of personal morality centered on the individual adherent (I. *penganut*) and her or his salvation and relation to God (I.

14. Kawi is a broadly classical register that is primarily associated in the scholarly literature with Old Javanese (*Jawa Kuno*). However, it would be misleading to draw a clear distinction—particularly in spoken language—between what most speakers of Balinese would consider ‘Kawi’, on the one hand, and literary Balinese or other forms of Javanese and Sanskrit on the other. There is a great deal of overlap between these linguistic registers. For an insightful discussion of these issues as they pertain to Balinese literary practices, see Rubinstein (2000: 25–38); for broader treatment see Wallis (1980) and Hunter (1988).

Tuhan). On this account, the common good is understood in terms of social ‘balance and harmony’ (I. *keseimbangan dan kerukunan*)—both within the Hindu Community (I. *Umat Hindu*), as well as between the various other Religious Communities that together make up the organically integrated nation (Fox 2011a). Crucially, for our purposes, the appropriate orientation toward the religious Other is an ‘attitude of tolerance’ (I. *sikap toléransi*), understood as an individual recognition of another’s ‘beliefs’ and way of life.¹⁵

As a call to tolerance and brotherhood, then, the ideal of social harmony extolled by the Governor in his opening speech to the Bali Arts Festival was very much rooted in a version of this state bureaucratic understanding of religion. He extrapolated from the Festival’s annual theme to suggest that the primary challenge facing contemporary Balinese was that of a ‘multicultural society’ (I. *masyarakat multikultur*). Although the Governor did not specify the elements he saw as making up the island’s newly ‘diverse’ situation, there was arguably no need for him to do so. If foreign influence had been a perduring anxiety in the early years of tourism (Picard 1990: 42), the emphasis in public debate has shifted in more recent years, at least in part, to those domestic Others—the so-called ‘newcomers’ (I. *penduduk pendatang*) from Java, Madura, Lombok and ‘the Outer Islands’—who have become increasingly visible in Bali’s urban centers and tourist resorts, and who, it is feared, are a drain on the Balinese economy.¹⁶

Here what is often called ‘coded speech’ may have played a part. Without wishing to overinterpret, the Governor’s reference to Balinese culture remaining ‘strong’, or *ajeg*, appeared to be a nod in the direction of *Ajeg Bali*, a catchphrase associated with the jingoistic call to tradition championed by the island’s leading media mogul, Satria Naradha, and the various publishing and broadcasting organs of his Bali Post Media Group.¹⁷

15. Here it is worth noting the emphasis in the Constitution of 1945 (Article 29) on the individual adherent and her or his form of worship and personal belief (*Negara menjamin kemerdekaan tiap-tiap penduduk untuk memeluk agamanya masing-masing dan untuk beribadat menurut agamanya dan kepercayaannya itu*).

16. Western scholars have made much of these fears, perhaps drawing as much as anything on their prominence in local media. Discussion in the newspaper (see, e.g., Bali Post 2011a, 2011b) and on both TV and radio (Gumi Radio 2011), frequently centers on the influx of ‘newcomers’ to the island, and what is taken to be their deleterious impact on the Balinese economy. Yet, forging the theoretical link between ethnographic dialogue and scholarly readings of ‘media discourse’ is not always as straightforward as the scholarly literature would suggest (see Fox 2010, 2011a).

17. Naradha’s organization, the Bali Post Media Group, controls several newspapers, radio stations and television channels both in Bali and other parts of the archipelago. It would appear that the call to defend tradition under the rubric of *Ajeg Bali* was formally inaugurated in May of 2002 at the launch of BaliTV, the BPMG’s flagship television station (Schulte Nordholt 2007: 55–6; Picard 2008: 113). The emphasis on regional identity resonated with

Comparing *Ajeg Bali* with another slogan, *Bali Lestari*, which was promulgated in the 1980s and '90s by the Balinese provincial government, Degung Santikarma has noted that

Ever since the October 2002 Bali bombings and the subsequent trials of Islamic radicals, many Balinese have turned from talking about 'Bali Lestari' or 'Preserved Bali' to calling for 'Ajeg Bali'. 'Ajeg' is a Balinese word meaning hard or stable or fixed. It has, to the ears of many Balinese, a distinctly macho sound, resonating with military bravery, unbroachable (sic) barricades, and unflagging erections . . . If Bali Preserved was a sweet village girl being harassed by tourist men, Bali Erect is the urban inhabitant of places like Denpasar and Kuta, overrun by non-Balinese Indonesians who would steal their jobs, undermine their culture or even blow up their guests. (2003: 14–6)

Both Naradha himself and the slogan *Ajeg Bali* figured prominently in local politics and public debate following the decline in the tourism market that came in the wake of the nightclub bombings of 2002 and 2005 (see, e.g., Suryawan 2004, Allen and Palermo 2005, MacRae and Darma Putra 2007).¹⁸ To be sure, the electoral appeal of *Ajeg Bali* waned as quickly as it arose. But, at the opening ceremony for the Arts Festival, the slogan itself may have offered the Governor some cover for an otherwise potentially controversial call to cultural 'flexibility' and 'tolerance'. It was as if to say that, despite the growing number of non-Balinese Indonesians living and working on the island, adapting to the exigencies of a 'multicultural society' was no act of appeasement. Balinese culture would remain strong—not despite flexibility, but *because* of it. And, on this account, the virtues this would require were exemplified by the very epitome of the island's cultural tradition—namely, the performing arts.

But is it Art?

This vision of a traditional commitment to brotherhood and tolerance lines up neatly with the ideals of the state-run Indonesian Fine Arts Academy in Denpasar (see Wakeling 2010, Heimark 2003). It also accords well with certain strands of western scholarship that have relied heavily on official sources (for a discussion of which, see Fox 2011a and 2011b). Yet

broader developments in Indonesia that had been underway since the introduction of new decentralization laws (numbers 22 and 25/1999) conferring greater autonomy on provincial government (Rawski and MacDougall 2004). However, the slogan took on additional significance in the wake of the Kuta nightclub bombings later in 2002, in which 202 people were killed and many more were seriously injured.

18. On the twelfth of October, 2002, a car bomb was detonated in the nightclub district of Kuta, together with two smaller bombs—one in an adjacent bar, the other in the Renon administrative district. Almost three years later, on the first of October, 2005, several smaller bombs were detonated in Kuta and Jimbaran, killing some twenty people. These bombings were attributed to an 'al-Qaeda affiliated' group that authorities and the press called 'Jemaah Islamiah' (see Fox 2006).

such an idealized portrayal of the arts nevertheless sits incongruously alongside what we are now coming to know of the history of dance and drama in Bali. Hildred Geertz (1991), for example, has told the harrowing tale of a masked dance-drama performed in the midst of Indonesia's struggle for independence. Following World War II the Dutch had hoped to reoccupy their former colony, and met fierce resistance on the heavily populated islands of Java and Bali. When a small cadre of pro-independence guerrillas were captured in the Balinese countryside, one of the island's loyalist regents took the opportunity to demonstrate his mastery of the realm by punishing the recently captured fighters. He organized a dance-drama depicting the fate of an insubordinate brahmin to set the stage for their punishment. The performance culminated in a brutal beating with thorny branches, after which the captives' wounds were smeared with red-hot chili paste and other irritants. It was, as H. Geertz put it, a rather different take on the 'theatre of cruelty'.

John Emigh (2008) has developed a related theme in a more recent publication documenting the political uses of the arts in the run-up to the Indonesian anti-communist pogroms of 1965-66, which saw somewhere between 80- and 100,000 people massacred in Bali alone (see, e.g., Dwyer and Santikarma 2003). A disproportionately large number of those killed were actors and other performing artists; and it seems this was owing at least in part to the political nature of their vocation. More generally, theatrical performance has long provided an important arena for social and political commentary in Bali.¹⁹ Both on stage and in the shadow theatre (*wayang kulit*) Balinese find the issues of the day discussed from a variety of perspectives. And it is in this regard that performing artists have traditionally been among the island's foremost public intellectuals (Hobart 2000: 83).

Given the politically-engaged character of the performing arts, it was no mere coincidence that the Fine Arts Academy in Denpasar was established in 1967, less than a year after the killings had stopped. At the national level, it was hoped the arts of Bali might be deployed as a 'showcase of Indonesia'

19. Scholars of Balinese culture and society often use the term 'theatre' as if it were unproblematic. However, it is worth noting that, like so many other terms that have been taken up enthusiastically by Balinese (usually Malay terms aligned with notions of art, culture dance, religion etc.), there is no single term in Balinese that corresponds to the broadly European notion of theatre. *Ngigel* and *sasolahan* are two of the most commonly used terms (in the low and high registers respectively) for the kinds of disciplined movements that characterize what we might conventionally call Balinese dance and drama. There are also numerous more precise terms for its various styles or genres (*arja*, *prémbon*, *legong* etc.), which, as in English, tend to be lumped together in Indonesian as *seni pertunjukan*, or 'the performing arts'. A former student of mine, Natalia Theodoridou, is currently addressing these and related issues in her doctoral research on the position of 'the audience' in the practices of Balinese drama.

(Picard 1996), perhaps helping the international community to forget the recent massacre. Meanwhile, at a more local level, Bali needed to begin training replacements for the actors who had just been slaughtered (Hough 2000, Emigh 2008). Here the point is not so much to emphasize the link between art and violence. It is rather to highlight the extent to which Balinese theatrical practice has been rooted in whatever issues are seen to be of primary concern to the wider community. Quite apart from revolutions and massacres, this has more generally tended to put Balinese actors on the front lines of politics.²⁰

In a recent article on the history of dance in Bali, Hobart (2007) observed that Balinese have often developed new performative styles in response to wide-reaching crises. He proposed the following as a provisional schematic in order to stimulate discussion:

“In the late 17th century, any remaining semblance of stable government collapsed, life became anarchic. Balinese developed *Gambuh* and *Wayang Wong* celebrating a noble ordered world.

“In the latter part of the 19th century, upstart rulers claimed fabulous genealogies (*babad*), while masked *Topèng* subsequently legitimised such rampant status-climbing.

“With the collapse of royal power, after 1915 popular dance-opera *Arja* promptly began to flourish, which celebrated the lives of ordinary Balinese.

“Simultaneously a spectacular new musical and dance style, *Kebyar*, sprang up in precisely the village in North Bali, Jagaraga, where the Dutch had first set foot to conquer Bali.

“After 1910, as the Dutch established their administration and tourism gradually began in earnest, Balinese suddenly (re)discovered dance. *Lègong*, seemingly moribund, was created in a recognisable form, and *Jangèr* was created.

“In 1942, as Dutch colonial rule collapsed before the Japanese invasion, cross-dressing dance, *bebancihan*, which has since become a major genre in its own right, suddenly came into vogue.

“In 1965, following a supposed communist coup and the execution of some 100,000 people in Bali alone, *Derama Gong*, spoken theatre in ordinary Balinese, burst into fashion.” (2007: 123-4)

Hobart was scrupulous in acknowledging the uncertainties entailed in dating events so ephemeral as the ‘invention’ of an artistic form. Yet, when taken together with the positioning of Balinese drama as an arena for political commentary and self-examination, the chronology is highly suggestive.

It is hopefully unnecessary to belabor the point that such a politically charged history would sit somewhat uncomfortably alongside the aestheticized image now promulgated by the Fine Arts Academy and the

20. As one of the island’s leading forms of traditional intellectual, Emigh’s example rightly suggests this made actors at once both powerful and vulnerable (see Hobart 2007).

PKB. Yet, turning our attention to the contemporary scene, this image is also at odds with at least some of the more recent dance dramas that were being performed beyond the purview of the Festival. For example, in the semi-rural community where I was conducting research at the time of PKB, one of the more popular characters on the Balinese stage was that of a hare-lipped Muslim ‘buffoon’ (B. *bondrés*) purporting to hail from the Central Javanese cultural center of Yogyakarta. As is often the case with such comedic figures, this character was imitated by younger and less well-known actors in the community, with their humor usually turning on the perceived idiosyncrasies of non-Balinese Indonesians, and especially of Javanese Muslims. Juxtaposed with the opening speech to the PKB, these performances seemed to offer a somewhat less rosy view of the island’s ‘multicultural’ situation.

An illustrative example may be seen in the improvisational comedy routine that was performed at the inauguration ceremony for the new officers of a local youth group, which had taken place but some months prior to the Arts Festival. The growing number of resident non-Balinese was addressed right from the outset, even before the comic ‘Yogyanese’ character had taken the stage. The issue was first broached in the opening dialogue of the clown servants, who act as important mediating figures in several performative genres in both Java and Bali (Catra 2005). These characters are generally cast as retainers to the court, and their commentary helps to link the central plot to local issues and events on the contemporary scene. In this case, a play was made on the term *aman*, which in Indonesian is generally used in the sense of ‘safety’ or ‘security’; while in Balinese the (almost) homophonic *amahan* means ‘eaten’, and is commonly used of rotten wood, as in ‘eaten by worms’.²¹

The dialogue began with a brief exchange on the government-sponsored family planning program, KB, or *Keluarga Berencana*. The younger clown servant had suggested that the local ward assembly (B. *banjar*) was running low on members, and they could rectify the situation by having more children. His older counterpart feigned surprise at the suggestion, and carried on as follows.²²

21. Such deliberately ambiguous double-meaning, in this case a pun, is what Balinese often call *raos ngémpélin*.

22. The following transcript and translation are the outcome of ongoing conversations with several actors, musicians and others. For reasons I have addressed elsewhere at some length (Fox 2011a), I believe transcription and translation are often best understood as themselves comprising a sort of performance.

Excerpt One: The Clown Servants (*Panasar*)

Character	Transcript	Translation
Panasar:	Ci 'nak 'ba program KB... ci ngaé adi, tundén ci.	Yer on the Family Planning program... and ya wanna make more kids?
Wijil:	'To... program KB, ragaé bedik ngelah panak, panak 'nak di luar Bali makacakan mai. Patuh 'gén ja dadiné kéngkén beli 'to?	So... with the Family Planning program, we don't have many kids, and then all the kids from outside Bali come tumbling on in. So it's all just the same, isn't it?
Panasar:	Oh... kéto?	Oh... is that so?
Wijil:	Ae...	Yep...
Panasar:	Nah... 'né patut pratyaksa?	So... is this something to keep a close eye on? ²³
Wijil:	Ae.	Yep.
Panasar:	Oooh...	Oh...



Wijil (left) and the Panasar (right)

Wijil:	Méng-é jumlah baang beli ragi, méng pisagaé ya teka, kéngkén beli 'to? Makacakan ya jumlah, kéto.	Ya give yer cat something to keep her from havin' kittens, ²⁴ and then yer neighbor's cat comes over... whadya think of that? They just keep tumblin' on over.
Panasar:	Oh, kéto?	Oh, is that so?
Wijil:	Yan panteg méng pisagaé, ngeng ati-é.	You'll feel bad if ya pelt yer neighbor's cat [e.g., with a stone].
Panasar:	Oh, kéto?	Oh, is that so?
Wijil:	Kéto sujatiné. Mawinan lantah, uh... dija ya untung rugi 'né? Ragaé 'ba ja bedik ngaé. Ngelah panak telu 'gén 'ba liyu... panak pisagaé makacakan teka. Nyak jani uwug bin gumié uyak gunung, dong sing konyo mai... "Di Bali paling aman-a," kéto.	That's how it is. And that's why, uh... what are the pros and cons here? We only make a few (i.e., kids). Having even three's a lot... then yer neighbor's kids come a-tumbling on over. Before ya know it the community'll be destroyed, the volcano'll blow, ²⁵ and they'll all come over here... "In Bali it's safe (<i>aman</i>)," they'll say.
Panasar:	Jeg aman rawosanga.	It's just so <i>aman</i> , they'll say.
Wijil:	Ae... aman.	Yep... it's <i>aman</i> .
Panasar:	Aman...	<i>Aman</i> ...
Wijil:	Ya aman Indonesia, ragaé ama(ha)n Bali.	It's <i>aman</i> in the Indonesian sense, but we're <i>ama(ha)n</i> in the Balinese sense...
Panasar:	Oh, kéto?	Oh, is that so?
Wijil:	Yan ama(ha)n Balié tawang?	Do ya know what <i>ama(ha)n</i> means in Balinese?
Panasar:	Kéngkén?	What's it mean?
Wijil:	Yén kayué amahan, kayu berek artiné, kéto. Yan 'ba Balié ama(ha)n, kéto, jeg berek 'ba dadiné ibaé. Makacakan 'naké mai, kéngkén beli 'to?	When a tree's <i>ama(ha)n</i> , it means the wood's rotten, eh? So, if Bali's now <i>ama(ha)n</i> , then we're already rotten. They'll all come a-tumblin' on over, ain't it so
Panasar:	Oh... sing aman artiné?	Oh... it doesn't mean 'safe'?
Wijil:	Aah? Mawinan aman-é dadua artiné. Yén aman Bali, artiné berek. Yén aman Nusantara, luwung artiné.	Huh? It's coz <i>ama(ha)n</i> has two meanings. The Balinese <i>amahan</i> means rotten. The Indonesian <i>aman</i> has a good meaning.
Panasar:	Luwung.	Good.
Wijil:	Ae.	Yep.

23. *Pratyaksa*. An Old Javanese term, from Sanskrit, used in Balinese to refer to a form of clear and distinct knowledge, or, as in this case, 'keeping a close eye on' something.

24. *Something to keep her from havin' kittens*. The Balinese term is *ragi*, yeast or ferment, which is sometimes given to cats in the belief it will prevent pregnancy.

25. *The volcano'll blow*. This is a reference to the recent eruption of Mount Merapi; on which, see below.

Here the criticism does not appear especially subtle. The Balinese practice family planning, suggesting a forward-looking and modernizing way of life. Meanwhile it seems ‘newcomers’ to the island are breeding like rabbits—or cats, as the case may be. And this, we are told, undercuts the hard work of those Balinese who dutifully adhere to government programs and the like. The underlying criticism appears to address both the growing number and irresponsibility of those taken to be interlopers on the island. Such chauvinism is of course anything but unique to Bali. Similar stereotypes and prejudices have been leveled in other parts of the world against those identified as Catholic, Mormon, African American, Latino, Indian, Polish and so on. The list could no doubt be extended indefinitely. In sum, whatever else it may have been, the clown servants’ opening dialogue does not appear to embody the Governor’s ideals of tolerance and cultural flexibility. Nor is it easy to see how this particular example of the island’s performing arts would contribute to social harmony, let alone the spirit of brotherhood. Yet much of the audience laughed loudly at the clown servants’ jokes. And most everyone with whom I discussed the dialogue judged it not only to be funny (B. *banyol*), but also apropos, or ‘fitting’ (B./I. *patut*) of the circumstances at hand. So why was it so funny? With regard to what was it fitting? And is this kind of humor really as bigoted and ‘intolerant’ as it appears?

In recent pronouncements from local government there had been no shortage of suspicion when it came to non-Balinese ‘outsiders’ (I. *orang asing*) living in the community. At one of the recent monthly ward meetings, for example, the headman (B. *kelihan*) was asked to read out a letter of warning that had been sent by the district chief (B. *perbekel*), at the request of the regent (B. *bupati*). The letter called on the community to be on guard against the spread of ‘ideology’ (I. *ideologi*) that supported the creation of an ‘Indonesian Islamic State’ (‘NII’). The community’s youth, the letter explained, were at the greatest risk. And a series of precautionary measures were recommended including such things as increased vigilance at home, diligent bookkeeping for those running guesthouses, and reporting promptly on any suspicious activity.²⁶

In more casual conversation people tended to rely on stereotypes akin to those of the clown servants in the comedy routine—invoking such things as unfettered reproduction and a lack of personal hygiene. Yet, ironically, when it came to thinking more carefully about these ‘newcomers’ to the island, and especially of Muslims from Java, the complaints tended to center on what

26. It is also worth noting in passing that these warnings were reiterated in a speech delivered by the district chief to the wider community, during a local event held at the ward assembly hall (B. *balé banjar*).

might otherwise be considered *positive* qualities. A young businessman and recent university graduate, for example, complained of the inconvenience during the Islamic holidays, when it was almost impossible to find good *bakso* (meatball soup) in Denpasar. If anything this seemed a backhanded compliment in recognition of culinary skill. For, as he pointed out, Balinese *bakso* is at best a pale reflection of the soup sold by Muslim peddlers from Solo and Madura.²⁷ During the same conversation, a middle-aged farmer noted with no little admiration that Sasak and Madurese day laborers will often do twice the work in half the time of their Balinese competitors, and for two-thirds of the pay.

All of this is not to say that no one was concerned at the growing number of non-Balinese living on the island, and more specifically within their own communities. Many of those with whom I spoke were especially worried that local custom would not be respected—that, for instance, laundry would be hung out to dry in the vicinity of a temple, and this would offend local divinities, causing people to fall ill, and perhaps much worse. Yet, with but rare exception, these concerns were based on things that had supposedly happened elsewhere, often as reported in the newspaper.

Among the two-dozen or so people with whom I discussed the issue, over a period of some ten months, very few could think of a specific case of offense being taken in their own community.²⁸ Moreover, as many were well aware, the island's most pressing concerns arose not so much from the presence of resident non-Balinese, but rather from the economic and environmental consequences of mass tourism and related business interests (see MacRae 2010). Several complained bitterly, if somewhat cautiously, at the expropriation of tourism revenues by those with 'thick wallets' (I. *dompét tebal*)—an oblique reference to wealthy non-Balinese living elsewhere, either in Jakarta or abroad (see, e.g., Aditjondro 1995). So how are we to interpret the seemingly bigoted humor of the clown servants? Has Bali really been 'eaten up' by resident non-Balinese Indonesians? Might this alternatively be a case of scapegoating (I. *mengkambinghitamkan*), blaming

27. One of the initiatives associated with *Ajeg Bali* (see above) was the *Koperasi Krama Bali*, in which funds and logistical support were made available for small businesses selling, among other things, a Balinese form of meatball soup containing pork. As a culinary assertion of Hindu Balinese identity, this was presumably meant to compete with the more *halal* offerings of the (more popular) Javanese and Madurese peddlers.

28. This is not to discount the significance of a recent lynching of a young Sasak boy caught trying to steal from one of the local community's central temples. In conversation with those involved either directly or indirectly with the incident, much was made of the suspicion that the boy was employing 'Islamic magic' (I. *ilmu Islam*), as evidenced by his resilience under the blows of the barbaric beating that preceded his murder. Yet there is nothing to indicate that this brutal treatment was especially linked to the boy's ethnic or religious identity, as Hindu Balinese have met equally violent ends for similar offenses.

the island's woes on an easy target? Or were their jokes deemed 'fitting' for some other reason entirely?

The Politics of Comedy

When considering these questions it is important to bear in mind that Balinese humor has probably never been what 'politically correct' Europeans and Americans would consider sensitive or socially appropriate. For at least the past hundred years, and presumably much longer, Balinese actors have developed characters, and sought laughs, by exaggerating and otherwise playing on prevailing sensibilities and prejudices regarding sex, gender, illness, deformity and both mental and physical incapacity. Senior figures from the Arts Academy and related institutions often publicly decry the irreverence of modern-day Balinese comedy, particularly when it pokes fun at religious figures and institutions. The underlying premise is usually that things were not always so bawdy or blasphemous in the past, and so neither should they be today. Their line of reasoning commonly follows a logic similar to that of the Governor, with its emphasis on the purportedly traditional virtues of tolerance and maintaining social harmony.²⁹ It would not be especially surprising to find Balinese comedy to be a little more boorish than government officials would care to acknowledge. Yet, such official opprobrium aside, the real question is whether the jokes about Javanese Muslims are best understood as falling short of what is ultimately a state bureaucratic model of diversity and tolerance; or, alternatively, whether there might be a more pertinent frame of reference for interpreting these jokes.³⁰

As a step toward trying to answer this question I would like to consider more closely the character of the 'Yogyanese' buffoon that had become so popular in the community where I was conducting research at the time of the PKB. This character would most commonly appear toward the end of a given performance, playing off the incredulity of the elder clown servant (known as *Punta*, or simply the *Panasar*). During these episodes the latter would act as a comic 'straight man', offering opening lines and hooks for the buffoon's jokes. In the segment cited earlier from the same performance, the recent eruption of Mount Merapi was mentioned in passing; but it would now come center stage. For the past two weeks the fallout from the eruption had been a leading story in both the local newspaper and on the evening

29. Ironically it is not uncommon for these same figures to utilize precisely this kind of humor in their own performances.

30. The point is not so much one of interpreting 'meaning', but rather the *purposes* toward which such humor might have been directed, and the *virtues* (MacIntyre 1981, 2007) in aid of which these ends were pursued.

television news.³¹ The performance itself took place while the volcano was still in an active state, and relocation efforts were underway. The actors used the recent eruption as the pretext for returning to the question of non-Balinese ‘newcomers’ living on the island. The following segment began as the ‘Yogyanese’ character came on stage to the rousing applause of the audience.

I should note that, in transcribing the dialogue, I have used a plain typeface for Indonesian terms; *italics* for Balinese; and **boldface** for Javanese. Where the designation was ambiguous, I generally followed the interpretation of local commentators. I have left the Sanskritic and Arabic opening salutations in plain typeface.

Excerpt Two: A *Bondrés* (‘Buffoon’) from Yogya

Character	Transcript	Translation
Panasar:	<i>Bih... nawegan-nawegan...³² Sapasira?</i>	<i>Bih... I beg your pardon... Who's there?</i>
Bondrés: <i>Coming on-stage from behind the curtain.</i>	Om swastyastu... Assalamualaikum.	Om swastyastu Assalamualaikum.
Panasar:	Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh. <i>Sira dados?</i>	Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh. <i>Who is there?</i>
Bondrés:	Sampéyan ‘gak tahu?’	You don’t know?
Panasar:	Siapa?	Who is it?
Bondrés:	Kula saking Yogya.	I’m from Yogya.
Panasar:	<i>Oh, ‘ling di Yogya?</i>	<i>Oh, yer from Yogya?</i>
Bondrés:	Ngungsi ing Bali.	Evacuated to Bali.
Panasar:	Oh, pengungsi? Yah... <i>Kéngkén... kéngkén gumié di Yogya, kéngkén?</i>	Oh, yer an evacuee? So... <i>How’re... things in Yogya, eh?</i>
Bondrés:	Semua saudara kulo , semua sudah mati.	All my siblings, they’re all dead.
Panasar:	Apa?	What?
Bondrés:	Semua saudara kulo , semua sudah mati di Yogya.	All my siblings, they’ve all died in Yogya.
Panasar:	Mati?	Dead?
Bondrés:	Mati.	Dead.

31. The initial eruption occurred on October 25, 2010, killing some 350 people and displacing as many as 325,000 within two weeks’ time.

32. *Nawegan*. The transcription reflects the actor’s pronunciation. A more standard (i.e., dictionary) form would be *nawegang*.



The 'Bondrés Yogya' (left) and the Panasar (right)

Panasar:	<i>Liyu?</i>	<i>Were there many?</i>
Bondrés:	Kena lahar dingin, kena wedus gémbé l, kena céwék...	Struck by cold mudslides, ³³ struck by hot clouds of gas , ³⁴ struck by the ladies...
Panasar:	<i>Ah? Ada kéto-kéto? Jeg kena céwék... Artiné ngungsié mai, ulihan gunungé maletus.</i>	<i>Eh? What's up with that? Ya say struck by the ladies... Meaning you fled here, on accounta the erupting volcano.</i>
Bondrés:	Meletus.	It erupted.

33. *Lahar dingin*. Literally 'cold lava', this is a commonly used term for the flow of ash and water that accompanies a volcanic eruption.

34. *Wedhus gembel*. According to Dove, during an earlier eruption on Java, 'There was ubiquitous use in press accounts of the local Javanese terminology for the volcano: both for its spirit inhabitants and its eruptions. Thus the Javanese term for hot gas clouds, *wedhus gembel* ("Javanese goat," the whorls of whose coat are likened to the spiraling gas clouds), was widely used instead of or in addition to the Indonesian term, *awan panas*, or the international vulcanological terms' (2007: 32).

Panasar:	<i>Oh, kéto?</i>	<i>Oh, is that so?</i>
Bondrés:	Dua ratus sekian ékor...	(Killed) as many as two-hundred head... (<i>ékor</i> , lit. 'tail')
Panasar:	Sekian orang, <i>kéto</i> 'naké.	(Killed) that many people (<i>orang</i>), just like that.
Bondrés:	Termasuk sapi.	Including cows.
Panasar:	Oh, kéto?	Oh, is that so?
Bondrés:	Mati.	Dead.
Panasar:	<i>Mati. Men... keluargaé 'nu ada? Apa didian? Apa 'nu ada ajak mai?</i>	<i>Dead. So... is yer family still around? Or are ya alone? Were any left to come with ya?</i>
Bondrés:	Anak, mati.	Children, dead.
Panasar:	Anak, mati.	Children, dead.
Bondrés:	Istri, mati.	Wife, dead.
Panasar:	Aduh!	My goodness!
Bondrés:	Simpanan... hidup. <i>The peninsulae line (I 'don't mean...') is addressed directly to the audience</i>	Bit on the side (<i>simpanan</i>)... still alive. Meaning I've still got money that's saved (<i>tersimpan</i>) in the bank, it's secure. If I'd left it at home, coulda been destroyed. Gone... but coz it's in the bank, my bit on the side (<i>simpanannya</i>) is safe... I don't mean my mistress (<i>istri simpanan</i>)! What a naughty audience!
Panasar:	<i>Ah... sing ja penontoné. Kataé kéto pesu. De 'naké anu... démpétanga... pisahang ngorahang 'naké. Apa?</i>	<i>Ah... it ain't the audience. Yer the one who said it. Don't go, uh... gettin' 'em all stuck together... ya gotta separate 'em out. Eh?</i>
Bondrés:	<i>The bondrés character gestures toward the audience, but does not speak a word — to the seeming consternation of the Panasar.</i>	
Panasar:	Apa?	What?
	<i>Sounding annoyed</i>	
Bondrés:	Saya datang ke Bali, karena saya kira Bali lebih aman, lebih selamat...	I came to Bali because I figured Bali was safer (<i>aman</i>), more secure...
Panasar:	Oh, kéto? Kala 'ba aman...	Oh, that so? So long as it's safe (<i>aman</i>)...
Bondrés:	...karena orang Bali senang melakukan upacara.	...because the Balinese like to perform ceremonies.
Panasar:	Upacara.	Ceremonies.

A Balinese servant to the court was depicted as meeting by chance with a Javanese Muslim who had fled to Bali because it was 'safer' than his hometown of Yogya—the term *aman*, or 'safe', echoing the pun from the

opening exchange between the clown servants (see Excerpt One). Their dialogue began with a greeting that brought together the religiously inflected languages of Arabic and Sanskrit, associated with Indonesia's Islamic and Hindu communities respectively. The two characters then carried on their conversation in a mixture of colloquial Balinese and Indonesian, punctuated with formal Javanese pronouns and prepositions. This is no doubt a caricature. Yet it is one that nonetheless exemplifies the religious, ethnic and linguistic complexity of life in contemporary Bali.³⁵

As in the earlier segment, recent events provided the backdrop for a discussion of serious issues, interspersed with humor. The dialogue addressed the very real suffering of those who had lost homes, family members and their means of livelihood in the eruption of Mount Merapi—events that were receiving what at times seemed to be around-the-clock television coverage on both local and national channels.³⁶ With the buffoon having fled to Bali, the comedy routine raised the important question of how these events on the neighboring island of Java might affect the local community. Yet, in some ways contrary to appearance, I believe it did so in a manner quite carefully calibrated to *educate* its intended audience;³⁷ and this aim was pursued through the deft manipulation of pretense, expectation and disclosure.

At first confronted directly, the gravity of the subject matter was then serially deferred, offset by the levity of wordplay and innuendo. This allowed the actors to play on prejudice without necessarily endorsing it. The buffoon explained, for instance, that he had lost his family, and then drew a laugh by playing on the ambiguity of the term *simpanan*—which here could refer either to money 'saved' in the bank or to a mistress 'kept on the side'. Similarly, in saying 'two-hundred' had died, he employed an Indonesian classifying term, *ekor* (literally 'tail'), that would be decidedly ill-mannered if used in reference to human beings. (It would be rather like using the term 'head', as in 'two-hundred head of cattle', to refer to the human casualties of a plane crash.) The buffoon is made to appear naive for not properly

35. Local commentators tended to associate this character with a well-known Javanese peddler at the local market who spoke Balinese quite well, but with a strong eastern Javanese accent.

36. Here it is worth noting the extent to which 'Indonesia' is something to be viewed on television. If not by design, neither was this a fortuitous accident. As Kitley (2000) has neatly shown, television was a crucial instrument in the New Order state's drive for national unity and economic development.

37. It is important to emphasize the fraught nature of 'the audience' as an object of study (see, e.g., Hartley 1992, Ang 1991, Nightingale 1996, Hobart 2011). As has become increasingly clear in critical cultural and media studies, 'the audience' is not so much an empirical reality waiting to be discovered, but rather something presupposed—as, here, in the practices of Balinese drama.

‘separating’ the two meanings of these ambiguous terms (B. *raos ngémpélin*). Yet, in the end, the onus of interpretation is left with his ‘naughty viewers’.

In each case, a given turn of phrase appears *at first* to cast the buffoon as being crude or coarse (B./I. *kasar*) of character. The humor—and perhaps the lesson—then, turns on a perceived prejudice of the audience, as represented by the clown servant playing the ‘straight man’. For, each time a disparaging stereotype seems to be confirmed by the buffoon’s use of language, he then quickly turns the tables on his interlocutor—and so the audience—by specifying his usage, and thereby revealing his remarks to have been appropriate all along. Recalling the Governor’s speech to the PKB, this apparent subversion of stereotype presents an interesting question. Is it possible that, despite its appearance, the character of the hare-lipped Muslim buffoon embodies a call to tolerance and the spirit of brotherhood? Put another way, in playing with stereotype and expectation, might the ‘Yogyanese’ character ultimately *unsettle*—as opposed to simply *support*—Balinese prejudices regarding ‘newcomers’ to the island?

Such a generous interpretation would certainly accord with the actor’s own account as to why he created this character in the first place. In a series of conversations in later months he explained that he admired the resilience and industriousness of the Javanese living in Bali, and their willingness to work hard and endure difficult circumstances in order to secure a better future both for themselves and for their children. By contrast, he said, Balinese were all too often lazy and complacent. With a cigarette in one hand, and a cup of coffee in the other, they flounced about as if they were kings.³⁸ He said he wished to show, in a humorous way, how appearances may be deceiving.³⁹ Balinese might think themselves to be refined, in contrast to the coarseness of outsiders. But oftentimes it is quite the reverse. The Javanese buffoon saved his money in a bank account where it would be safe, much as he was depicted starting a small business in a similar performance a week later. In yet another routine, the ‘Yogyanese’ buffoon went so far as to become a Balinese priest. In each case, and contrary to his uncouth appearance, it seems this character nonetheless exemplified the sort of industriousness and forward planning often said to be valued by Balinese themselves.

38. The anthropological literature has made much of the refined ideal of a quiescent yet powerful ‘exemplary center’. Less has been said of its opposite number—the ill-mannered and coarsely wielded power of the *mantri buduh*, the ‘mad prince’.

39. That appearances are often deceiving is a common theme in Balinese literature and dramatic performance. One of the more well-known stories is that of Brahmana Keling, whose mistreatment on account of his misrecognition led to a wide-reaching crisis in the realm, requiring (on at least one account) a formal apology from the king and his courtiers.

Yet, even if we were to follow this interpretation, there remains a surplus of chauvinism to be explained. It may be the case that the character of the ‘Yogyanese’ buffoon was meant to prod Balinese into action. But, even setting aside the character’s grotesque appearance, we are still left to contend with the perduring theme of an island ‘eaten away’, or ‘rotting’, from the presence of outsiders. Was this simply a sop to the baser instincts of the audience? Based on conversations with the actor, it seemed he was acutely aware of the wider economic and environmental problems threatening the island’s future. But would this mean he was then acting in bad conscience, by scapegoating the non-Balinese residents of the island? If so, how are we to square this with the earlier argument for the character’s educative unsettling of stereotype? And what, if anything, can this tell us about the problem with which we began—namely of the exclusions entailed in any call to tolerance and pluralism. The final remark cited in the preceding segment may offer a clue, where the ‘safety’ of Bali was attributed to the performance of ceremonial rites. As the ‘Yogyanese’ character himself put it, ‘I came to Bali because I thought Bali was safer, more secure ... because the Balinese like to perform ceremonies’ (see above). And he returned to develop this idea a little further, a bit later in the routine.

Excerpt Three: Of Ceremonial Rites and Volcanos

Character	Transcript	Translation
Bondrés:	...saya lihat di televisi itu, semua gunung-gunung yang ada di Nusantara hampir <i>makeplug</i> . Yang ada di Jawa, yang ada di Sumatra, yang ada di Indonesia timur...	...I’ve seen it on television, ⁴⁰ all the volcanoes in Indonesia are about ready <i>to blow</i> . The ones in Java, the ones in Sumatra, the ones in Eastern Indonesia...
Panasar:	Ya?	Yeah?
Bondrés:	Cuma gunung di Bali tidak disinggung.	Only the volcanoes in Bali aren’t mentioned [i.e., on TV].
Panasar:	<i>Adi kéto?</i>	<i>Why is that?</i>
Bondrés:	Mungkin malu dia.	Perhaps they’re embarrassed.
Panasar:	Ah? Malu?	Eh? Embarrassed?
Bondrés:	Ada Gunung Batu Karu, ada Gunung Agung, ada Gunung Batur...	There’s Gunung Batu Karu, there’s Gunung Agung, there’s Gunung Batur... [NB: These are the names of volcanic peaks in Bali.]
Panasar:	<i>Men?</i>	<i>And?</i>

40. See note 36 on the importance of television for creating and maintaining the appearance of Indonesia as a unified nation.

Bondrés:	Makanya sering-seringlah... berbanyaklah bertobat... banyaklah bernyadnya... supaya upacara di Bali itu tidak... mengundang wedus gémbé! datang ke Bali... tidak mengundang awan panas dan lahar dingin ke Bali.	And so we should regularly... repent more often... ⁴¹ perform more ceremonial rites... so the ceremonies in Bali won't... invite hot clouds of gas to come to Bali won't invite the hot clouds and cold mudslides to Bali.
Panasar:	Makanya 'né... perlu upacara.	That's why... we need ceremonies
Bondrés:	Makanya perlu...	That's why we need 'em...

In conversations following the performance, most local commentators interpreted these remarks to be suggesting the volcanoes would be 'ashamed', or 'too embarrassed', to erupt because they had received the gift of offerings embodied in ceremonial rites. To be clear, I do not wish to draw a parallel to Clifford Geertz's (1966) oft-cited argument regarding the centrality of shame, or of 'stage fright', in Balinese society.⁴² Yet I would suggest the actor's use of an Indonesian term associated with embarrassment, or shame—*malu*—was nonetheless significant. For, whether one is dealing with intangible (B. *niskala*) beings and forces or merely one's next-door neighbor, a well-given gift has the potential to bind, or at the very least to affect, the will of its recipient (Mauss 1923).⁴³ In short, having received ceremonial attention, erupting would have been *bad form* on the part of the Balinese volcanoes.⁴⁴

Here it is important to bear in mind that this understanding of ceremonial rites as a mode of exchange parallels the configuration of relationships that constitute many of the island's traditional forms of collective life. Here I am

41. *Bertobat*. In my experience this term is not commonly used by Balinese Hindus in reference to their own practices. It is used, however, more generally in reference to a generic 'religiosity', or the practices of Muslims.

42. See Hobart 1999 for a trenchant critique of Geertz on 'stage fright'.

43. What I am suggesting is that the actor's use of the term *malu* was an on-the-hoof translation into Indonesian of the Balinese term *lek*—specifically as it relates to one's sense of propriety. If one is deemed 'shameless' (*sing nawang lek*, literally 'not to know' *lek*), it means one is brazen or brash in both flouting etiquette and social convention, and so ignoring one's obligations. Were the Balinese volcanoes to accept the gift of offerings, and still insist on erupting, it would show they were 'shameless', or 'knew no shame' (*sing nawang lek*).

44. That ceremonial rites would engender such a relation of reciprocity is an idea consonant with one of the older, and still dominant, understandings of religious action in Bali (Fox, *forthcoming*). As with the exchanges made in one's more tangible (B. *sakala*) social life, the character of such ceremonial exchanges varies greatly depending upon the entity with whom it is carried out. The making of offerings (B. *banten*) may be part of an ongoing relationship of reciprocal obligation, not unlike those one sustains with kinsmen and neighbors; or it might be a supplication to a superior. Alternatively, it might also be the payment of a debt, or even a bribe. Not all of the instruments we often call 'offerings' actually work in this way. But many of them do, and they are generally construed as embodying an ongoing relationship of giving and receiving, debt and repayment, or clientship and patronage.

thinking of the ward (B. *banjar*), but also of the various overlapping temple congregations (e.g., B. *pamaksan*) and descent groups (e.g., B. *dadia*) that figure so prominently in the anthropological literature (see, e.g., Geertz and Geertz 1975, Hobart 1979, Barth 1993). Their form of community is one constituted by ongoing relationships of but loosely calculated giving and receiving.⁴⁵ For example, when one is preparing for a major rite of passage, or to perform the anniversary ceremony for a family temple, one's neighbors and relations are obligated to assist. And, when the time comes, one is similarly expected to return the favor. The preparations can often be both expensive and time-consuming. But the burden is shared, and the work carried out collectively—if not always equally. Historically speaking, these rites and the relationships that support them have long been the very stuff of what we often rather facetiously call 'Balinese religion'. Here the common good arises not so much from abstract ideals—such as 'tolerance' or 'balance and harmony'—but rather from assiduous attention to one's particular obligations. These obligations are most commonly to other members of the ward and descent group, but also to one's neighbors, kinsmen, patrons and others.

So how are we to interpret the character of the 'Yogyanese' buffoon? I think we would be mistaken to assume these actors and their routine simply reflected a breakdown in tolerance, or *toléransi*. This is for the simple reason that, in at least one respect, their humor has almost nothing to do with 'religion' as it is understood by the State. And it is precisely here that we begin to see the fault lines emerge between conflicting ideals of agency, community and the collective good.

On the state bureaucratic account, religion, as '*agama*', is a matter of private conscience to be tolerated in others; while tolerance itself, like one's religiosity, is the individual duty of each and every citizen of the Republic.⁴⁶ The practices of collective deliberation embodied in comedic theatre, by contrast, tend to take 'religion' to be a public matter. Or, perhaps more

45. My approach to the study of such relationships of giving and receiving is informed by the later work of Alasdair MacIntyre (see, e.g., 1999).

46. The genealogy for this model of tolerance would likely take us back, among other places, to a series of important developments in Eighteenth Century Europe—and perhaps more specifically to the Habsburg Monarchy of Joseph II, and the Toleranzpatent of 1781. Here the idea of tolerance was clearly something to be granted, or not, by one in power. Whereas, by contrast, the idea of tolerance as a universal moral imperative is closely linked to the dissipation of the absolute monarchy. With the rise of a bureaucratic form of power, '[t]here is no despot that could be driven from the throne, only an anonymous domination that governs all. Now this is where the idea of tolerance gains a new significance, precisely because tolerance can no longer be demanded of the one or the few who have power. In the end nobody has power and everybody is in service. But for just this reason, tolerance becomes a universal duty. In point of fact, the history of this idea shows how, through being invoked in constitutions and religious edicts, tolerance has expanded beyond its original political meaning into a universal moral requirement.' (Gadamer 1998: 96-7)

precisely—as we are not actually dealing with a simple inversion—practices like making offerings and preparing for temple festivals comprise the collective work through which the community itself is constituted. On the state bureaucratic approach, ‘newcomers’ to the island are to be *tolerated* as religiously and culturally different, yet ultimately part of an organic national unity. While, on this theatrical—or comedic—approach, by contrast, these ‘newcomers’ to the island appear to be outside of, and potentially threaten, the relations of but loosely calculated giving and receiving that have long underpinned traditional forms of Balinese collective life.⁴⁷

Under the circumstances, I would suggest it is not so much that the actors and their audience were simply ‘intolerant’, or bigoted, in making these jokes and laughing at them. Nor, I might add, do I wish to defend them by suggesting the converse. Rather I would argue that this kind of humor embodies a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, we have a distrust of outsiders based on their perceived lack of commitment to the collective good, and non-participation in the institutions of traditional community. On the other hand, we have the educative unsettling of stereotype that is, at the very least, commensurate with state bureaucratic ideals such as tolerance and national unity. Given the ongoing interaction between these two quite different styles of social and practical reasoning, I believe the point to be taken is perhaps that characters like the *Bondrés Yogya* are not so much expressions of a fixed orientation to the world; but, rather, they embody the ongoing debate through which a tradition examines and recalibrates itself in response to changing circumstances.

Ending on Conjecture

To juxtapose, as I have, two discrete styles of practical reasoning—i.e., by opposing the ideals of the state to those embodied in comedic performance—is to overstate my case in one or two important respects. First, neither of these models ever appears in a purely determinant position in relation to a given action or set of practices. I take it on principle that human action is underdetermined by the reasons it is alleged to embody; and, in our case, each of the two models is always already shot through with the other. (Here we might think of the proximity of the clown servants’ chauvinism to the buffoon’s educative unsettling of stereotype.) Moreover, in speaking of either of these as if they were themselves unitary is also potentially misleading. Setting aside the complexities of ‘the state’ (Skillen 1977), my recent fieldwork on small-scale offerings would suggest that ‘Balinese

47. Historically speaking, Balinese lives have long been closely tied up with the lives of Muslims and others of a non-Hindu orientation living on the island and in the region more generally (Vickers 1987; for an illustrative ethnographic example see Hornbacher 2012: 50, n. 9).

tradition’—at least when it comes to ceremonial rites—is made up of a congeries of overlapping, and at times conflicting, understandings of agency, community and the collective good (see Fox *forthcoming*).

Returning briefly to the questions with which I began, this would suggest that it is perhaps misleading to think of religious and ethnic conflict as occurring along established lines of difference. It took several centuries of colonialism, followed by decades of state-sponsored ‘development’ (I. *pembangunan*), ‘education’ (I. *pendidikan*) and ‘guidance’ (I. *bimbingan*), to bring about the conditions in which Indonesians might come to recognize themselves as defined by differences of religion, ethnicity and language—those forms of identification allegedly constitutive of ‘communal’ conflict. The articulation of community, and so the exclusion of its Others, takes place around those circumstances in which something is seen to be at stake. So it may be that assuming such ‘primordial’ divisions to be the root, or cause, of conflict is to put the cart before the horse.

On which, having considered a series of questions around religio-ethnic humor on the Balinese stage, I would like to conclude on something of a conjectural note. It may be recalled that, in his recent article on the history of dance in Bali, Hobart (2007) observed that Balinese have often developed new performative styles in response to wide-reaching crises—from the rise of Gambuh and Wayang Wong out of the anarchy of the 17th century to the creation of Drama Gong following the massacres of 1965-66. Extrapolating from his argument, and with the same caveats in place, I would like to propose an additional point to Hobart’s historical résumé (see above). The characters I have referred to as ‘buffoons’—*bondrés*, in Balinese—have long been a much-loved component of traditional drama. But it seems that it was not until the early 1980s that these characters came to appear in their own, free-standing routines called *babondrésan* (Kodi 2006). This new form of comedic drama was well-suited, both structurally and otherwise, to the rapidly changing lives of Balinese. Unlike older forms of theatre, which would sometimes run all night, a *babondrésan* performance might last for as little as twenty minutes. This abbreviated form was arguably a better fit for lives increasingly organized around wage labor, schooling and the demands of life in a nuclear family—i.e., without the support of an extended family characteristic of a more agrarian lifestyle. I suspect it may be significant that the central characters in this new genre are generally portrayed as demotic figures exemplifying the rough-and-tumble of life outside the privileged circle of the court. In older performative genres, such as *topéng pajegan* and *prémbon*, these characters are not simply the lumpen masses.⁴⁸ Rather, their

48. It seems likely that the precedent for *babondrésan* may well have been not so much in the masked dance dramas themselves, but rather in *wayang kulit*, which by the mid- to late 1970s

position is crucial as both commenting on and constituting the collective life of the realm. By contrast, *babondrésan* appears to render the buffoons autonomous, driving a dramaturgical wedge between these representatives of ‘the people’ (B. *panjak*, ‘subject’) and the wider realm (B. *gumi*) that traditionally sustained them. What better way to represent the erosion of solidarity wrought by the rise of Capital and its valorization of ‘the individual’?

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had begun to feature protracted episodes of comedic banter between the clown servants (*punakawan*) bearing little if any relation to the plot (personal communication, Mark Hobart).

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