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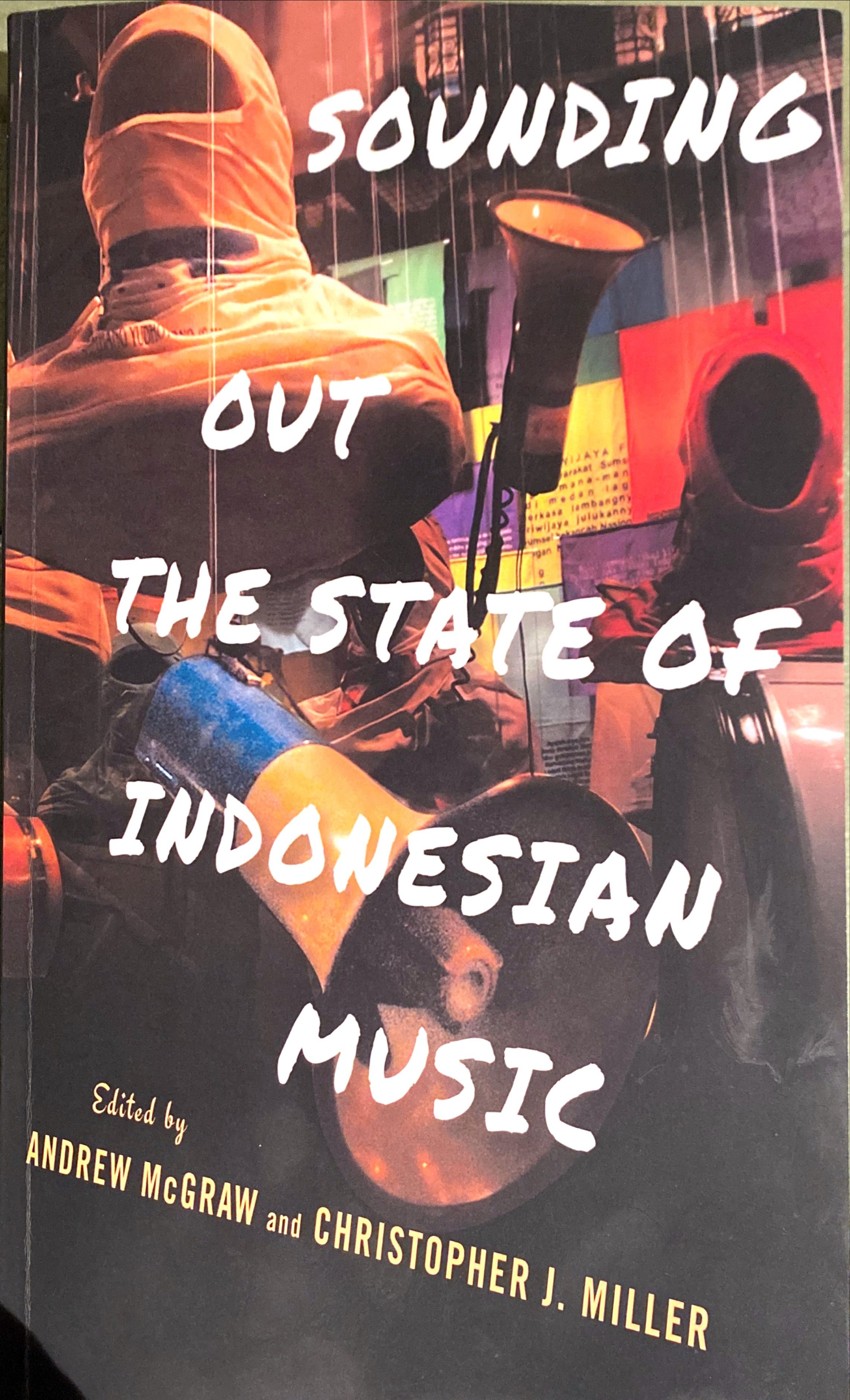
“Even Stronger Yet!” Gender and Embodiment in Balinese Youth Arja

Bethany J. Collier
Bucknell University, bc022@bucknell.edu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"EVEN STRONGER YET!"

Gender and Embodiment in Balinese Youth *Arja*

Bethany J. Collier

Featuring a nearly seamless relationship between music, dance, and theater, the operatic dance-drama *arja* has long been a popular form of entertainment for local audiences in Bali. *Arja* unites poetic song (*tembang*) and instrumental music (traditionally *gamelan gaguntangan*) with danced depictions of stock characters in a storytelling process that unfolds over the course of several hours. Often performed at village celebrations, temple ceremonies, and cultural festivals, *arja* performances follow a formulaic structure and draw on a variety of story types, including Balinese legends, historical narratives, and modern dramatic tales. While audience interest in traditional performance genres like *arja* has fluctuated over time in response to a range of historical and cultural developments, the past fifteen years have seen an especially notable resurgence in the development of new children's and youth *arja* groups, called *arja anak-anak* or *arja cilik* and *arja remaja* (Sumatika 2007; Sutiawan 2012; *Pos Bali Online* 2016).

While doing fieldwork in Bali in 2012, I arrived at the weekly rehearsal for an *arja remaja* group I had been following for several years. On this particular day, the director had called in only a few students to practice, so I observed as one of the longest-standing members thrust her BlackBerry forward to record the teacher's rendition of her *tembang*. My own digital devices in hand, I documented the rehearsal process: the director moved on to help a second student begin learning a new role, and it was clear from the start that this typically buoyant, gregarious teenager was nervous, reluctant, and perhaps even displeased with the new assignment. Instead of sitting attentively like her peers and following the

teacher's physical and vocal gestures, this girl slumped her shoulders and folded her arms around her body. Her singing was barely audible. "Aduh . . . tolong!" the director begged the surprisingly withdrawn student. "Kerasin biin bedik!"

Kerasin biin bedik. This encouraging yet impatient prodding, spoken that day in common Balinese, can be understood to mean "A little louder still" or "Even stronger yet." On the surface, the director's request can be understood as a simple appeal for the uncharacteristically subdued girl to sing more loudly, or with more confidence. But placing this outburst in a broader context—one where seasoned female performers devote countless hours to training a new generation of young and adolescent girls for *arja* performance—allows its deeper implications to come into view. Extending our analysis to encompass the pedagogical landscape of *arja remaja* reveals an embodied process that is marked by both intimacy and initiative, throughout which revered female performers sculpt and prod the young voices and bodies of their aspiring student artists.

In this chapter, I suggest that the pedagogical and performance processes tied to *arja remaja* have the potential to disrupt the ostensible endurance of conventional gender ideals as iterated and reinforced by Indonesian national and Balinese local ideologies. Examining how these ideologies participate in configuring and distributing social power in traditional Balinese contexts uncovers a dynamic that tends to sustain men's authority in public spheres while it mutes women's voices in those same arenas. This self-reinforcing structure is paralleled in traditional domestic contexts and extends forcefully into the performing arts, a generally male-dominated realm within which Balinese discourses on power circulate ubiquitously.

As I will show, *arja* stands as an exception to this tendency, not only because its casts comprise mostly female performers, but more importantly because *arja*'s privileging of vocal music generates an embodied pedagogical process. In the context of *arja remaja*, this process is usually presided over by older, accomplished female performers, and a teacher's effort to situate embodiment as the nucleus of their pedagogy yields a multidimensional set of results: first, it exposes students to an expansive range of possible expressions of the feminine and facilitates safe exploration of these roles; second, it cultivates the formation of tightly integrated relationships between students' voices and their bodies, regardless of what elements of identity become visible as that relationship coheres; and third, it secures a public arena for the projection of these newly embodied roles, a step that amplifies young female voices in ways that other performance contexts in Bali do not. As the opening vignette reveals, a call to "Kerasin biin bedik" is inflected by its own structures of power, by challenges related to human development and coming of age, and by the omnipresent force of media-based technology in contemporary Balinese life. In the context of this pedagogical process, though, *Kerasin*

biin bedik echoes further as a rallying cry, urging girls to probe their routine experiences as young Balinese women and invest more fully in bringing their voices into the public realm.

Ideologies That Mute

The opportunity for Balinese women to project their voices in ordinary contexts is constrained by a number of forces, including Indonesian national ideology and Balinese customary practice (*adat*).[1] During the New Order, the hierarchy of the state was mapped onto the family, in part through discourse related to *kodrat wanita* (I: the "intrinsic nature of woman" [Tiwon 1996, 48]) and the *Panca Dharma Wanita* (I: Women's Five Duties). These five principles position "women as appendages and companions to their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of Indonesian society—in that order" (Suryakusuma 1996, 101). These tenets underlie the dominant system that Suryakusuma famously called "State Ibuism" (derived from the Indonesian word for "mother" or "matron"), a collection of practices, actions, and policies that "aimed to domesticate, depoliticize and segregate women in the development process" (Ledda 2010).[2] Official government endorsement of this doctrine ensured that gender roles were strictly defined in both the public and domestic spheres, with women's primary duties binding her to the household realm over which her husband presides as head.

Indonesian national ideology on gender aligns in many ways with local *adat*'s directives. Balinese *adat* is often cited as closely connected to Balinese Hindu religious practice and is the central prescriptive force in Balinese community life.[3] As a set of cultural norms and practices related to ethics (I: *etika*), morality (I: *susila*), and ceremony (I: *upacara*), *adat* guides adult behavior and shapes how children imagine their futures. *Adat* apportions responsibilities, sets limitations, and yields benefits to men and women both differently and unequally, especially in matters related to inheritance and family law (Sukerti et al. 2016).[4] Within domestic life, for example, *adat* assigns women the daily responsibility for preparing and making offerings at various sites inside the home, in the family temple, and around the extended family compound. *Adat* also regulates residency and parental rights by prescribing virilocality for most families and paternal custody in cases of separation or divorce (Parker 2001, 181–82).[5]

Balinese *adat* acts on the female body from a young age and in ways that it does not act on the male body.[6] For example, as young Balinese women mature, they are forced to reckon with the tension between fertility and purity, both of which are lauded in Balinese *adat* but which clash with each other in

contemporary culture.[7] While many communities maintain the expectation that a woman should remain a virgin until marriage, because the fertile female body is the vessel where religious discourse around ancestry, reincarnation, and descendancy plays out, many Balinese couples will not formally plan a wedding until the woman has demonstrated that her fertility is intact by successfully carrying a pregnancy through the first trimester.[8] These ideals implicate each other, and if they are upset—by the loss of an early pregnancy, or when infertility issues plague a premarriage relationship—a resulting breakup typically has much more serious implications for the female partner than for the male. In such cases, speculation may swirl that she has surrendered her purity, which makes her a less desirable marriage partner for another man, or that her body is inadequate as a reproductive vessel (Parker 2001, 179–81).

As these examples show, there are various sites around which tensions play out in Balinese women's daily lives, and the issues only become heightened when viewed in realms that are typically male-dominated, like the performing arts. In such contexts, the asymmetrical control that religious guidelines and cultural norms exert over female bodies as compared to male bodies is even more apparent than in everyday experience. For example, one children's ensemble I encountered in my research had come into being as the result of a clash between these same two competing ideals, fertility and purity. In this village's rare, distinctive tradition, the sacred group's female performers must all be "pure" girls who "do not yet know men," and group membership is mandated to be both exclusive and stable.[9] The selected children are therefore bound together as a unit to perform in temple contexts: if any member falls away or quits, or if a female member becomes "impure," the whole group must disband and a new one be established.[10] The formation and consecration of this particular children's group as their village's ritual ensemble transpired in haste, when a teenage member of the then-active ritual ensemble became pregnant, forcing the end to that generation's activities and initiating a series of ritual purifications in their village. The essential point here is not that this single performer's choice impacted her entire troupe, although it was clear that other group members indeed felt some disappointment, even resentment, that their friend's actions led to the group's dissolution. Rather, the central issue lies in the tension that plays out on these young women's bodies: activating the reproductive capacity of their fertility makes public the surrender of their purity, which in turn (in this village's practice) leads directly to both the demise of their group's status as a consecrated community body and a concomitant loss of their agency as ritual performers.

These examples provide a view of how, in traditional Balinese contexts, gender ideologies indeed "[distribute] social power differently among women and men, affecting them differently" (Cusick 1999, 474). So while many Balinese women

do not have decision-making power at the local community (*banjar*) level, they are still subject to its rulings (Parker 2001, 190), a norm that constitutes a "structural exclusion from positions of civic and ritual authority" (Jennaway 2002, 33).[11] This marks Balinese women as "socially 'muted'" (33), an act that "not only signifies women's exclusion from formal levels of discourse, that is, from the domain of public power, but also indicates a parallel constraint upon their sexuality" (34). Viewing this through the lens of *arja* performance, however, has the potential to disrupt some of these seemingly rigid structures. By beginning with the voice—very commonly the female voice, trained by an experienced female artist, sounding from within the female body[12]—*arja*'s processes invert this dynamic and bring women's voices into the public sphere where they can be projected outward from the stage, at least temporarily unmuted.[13]

Projecting Female Voices

Arja is one of the few arenas of Balinese performance where women truly predominate.[14] In sharp contrast to the many male-centered Balinese art forms such as instrumental music, shadow puppetry, and masked performance, where women's participation is an exception, a new development, or in some cases controversial, *arja* relies on casts of women—indeed, on their voices and bodies—to convey its messages.[15] These messages are delivered via an ensemble of (typically) twelve performers, with roles ranging from male to female, refined to coarse, and servant to nobility (see table 14.1).[16] With nearly two-thirds of these roles played by women who have mastered and integrated a daunting range of artistic skills, *arja* provides a unique opportunity for female performers to embody and collaboratively display a range of gender, class, and status identities.

Exploring the stories of remarkable female performers who challenge boundaries has been one useful avenue for scholars to initiate questions about gender, power, and ideology in the Balinese arts.[17] Indeed, when female *arja* performers adopt and present their various roles on public stages, the influence of their voices extends over their audience and their fellow artists: their labor draws viewers in to consider that there may be many possible ways of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987).[18] One actress, for example, portrays a discerning prince whose restraint and nuance convey stability, refinement, and power. On the same stage, another actress plays an eccentric and unruly princess who races madly around the stage, dancing provocatively and impulsively blurting out her thoughts. Integrating their bodies and voices to depict this broad range of stock characters, female performers bring compelling stories to life for audience members of all ages. When these performances successfully entice audiences

TABLE 14.1 *Arja*'s stock roles, attributes, and sex for each character, and the typical sex of the role's performer

STOCK ROLE	DESCRIPTION	PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES	CHARACTER'S SEX	PERFORMER'S SEX
Condong	Maidservant to Galuh	Wise, bossy	Female	Female
Galuh	Princess	Sweet, refined	Female	Female
Limbur	Mother of Galuh	Wise, maternal	Female	Female
Desak Rai	Maidservant to Liku	Eccentric, funny	Female	Female
Liku	Princess	Bawdy, unrefined	Female	Female
Penasar	Servant to Mantri Manis	Refined	Male	Male
Kartala	Servant to Mantri Manis	Wise	Male	Male
Mantri Manis	Prince	Refined, wise	Male	Female
Punta	Servant to Mantri Buduh	Unrefined	Male	Male
Wijil	Servant to Mantri Buduh	Funny	Male	Male
Mantri Buduh	Prince	Unrefined, arrogant	Male	Female

to become entangled in the narrative reality of the stage, *arja* serves—at least temporarily—to destabilize the presumed endurance of traditional cultural values like gender ideals.[19] Examining, then, what is at stake for the individual women who execute this labor and how their past experiences have shaped the landscape of women's performance today are but two of the valuable contributions that a biographical approach can offer.

Little scholarly attention has focused, though, on how these same women deploy their expertise in teaching roles in order to effectively and intentionally cultivate a strong, critically minded new generation of young performers.[20] By curating how, what, and whom they teach, the contemporary *arja* teacher extends her influence beyond the geography of her own performance space and gradually emboldens new female performers to raise their voices in the public arena. Viewed in this way, *arja* pedagogy that is developed and enacted by adept female teacher-performers represents a discursive site where social norms and cultural values related to gender and the female body can be inverted and negotiated.[21]

Embodiment is at the core of this pedagogy, aimed at uniting the kinesthetic, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual elements of the art form. *Arja*'s complex integration of vocal and instrumental music, dance, and theater demands virtuosic

performers who are exceptionally well rounded and able to balance requisite competencies. As pedagogues, then, *arja* teachers work to develop training strategies that ensure effective transmission of this complex skillset to their students. Selecting cast members and carefully filling stock roles with the young artists they believe are best suited for each part is an essential starting point. Mindful that each stock character has a particular manner of singing, moving, speaking, and dressing that coincides with his or her set attributes, teachers necessarily seek students whose vocal and physical features match those different characteristics: as much as possible, they typecast while forming their youth troupes. This typecasting is most effective when it replicates in onstage life the Balinese real-life tendency for "bodily behaviors—one's postures and demeanor, the tone of one's voice—[to be] constantly attended to and read as signs of inner moral states" (Errington 1990, 17).[22] For example, *arja*'s Mantri Manis (the refined prince) composes himself in a poised but fluid stance that transforms via smooth, controlled gestures from one pose to the next. Using a thin, nasal timbre and relatively high tessitura, he communicates only through the elevated medium of song, avoiding altogether the mundane act of speech.[23] These refined "bodily behaviors" serve as markers of his ethical qualities: he is a sage and judicious leader, always able to exercise restraint, and a deliberate and reflective counselor. In searching for an actress to play this role, then, *sanggar* directors seek an artist who not only fits the voice and body type but ideally is herself both firm and gentle, and confident enough to garner onstage visual focus while conveying the quiet authority of a courtly prince.

Once assigned their roles, students learn to negotiate the specific combination of refined or coarse, nobility or servant, and male or female along with other aspects of character identification as they work within the conventions of *arja* form and the constraints of their bodies to skillfully represent their character in song, dance, speech, and movement. Because *arja* experts declare the primacy of singing *tembang* over all other elements, most teachers begin by testing, strengthening, and conditioning new students' voices and teaching appropriate poetic meters and texts. For example, famous Singapadu-based *condong* Ni Nyoman Candri ("Bu Candri") sits with her students as they first learn their *tembang*, singing together to memorize its basic melody and pair it with an appropriate text, tasteful phrasing, and idiomatic embellishments (*wilet*).[24] Like Bu Candri, Tjokorda Istri Putri Rukmini models subtle movements of the head, facial features, and neck as she sings with her students, believing that these tiny gestures are crucial to producing the correct melody and projecting a beautiful, nuanced sound. Similarly, the multitalented *arja* performer Desak Made Suarti Laksmi ("Bu Desak") often kneels alongside new students as they attempt to trace the melodic line she demonstrates. While singing, Bu Desak waves her index finger,

flicks her wrist, and shifts her head and neck to emphasize her chosen musical contour. These small gestures are set within the larger yet still subtle movements of her legs and torso, rising from and settling back down to her kneeling position, extending and releasing her body to match the rise and fall of the melody.

The primary goal of this first pedagogical step is to help the novice performer learn how to inhabit her voice, and then to establish a clear connection between that voice, the interior space of her body, and her body's visible exterior. This focus on the voice first before the body inverts the priority that *adat* establishes for women in the domestic sphere, where the female body labors while the voice remains muted.[25] Because these gendered values have been inscribed in girls from an early age, it is not surprising that boys generally exhibit self-assurance and risk-taking during these early stages of the vocal training process to a greater extent than their female counterparts do. While many young girls initially hesitate, giggle, and wrap their arms around their bodies when singing in front of a new teacher or among peers for the first time, young boys in the same context typically sit up straight, hold their arms at their sides, and look their teacher in the eye. Additionally, girls and boys manage their struggles and embarrassment differently throughout the pedagogical process. During passages where they falter or make a mistake, the former often cast their eyes downward, let their voices trail off, and cover part of their faces, while the latter often laugh, sing past the error, widen their eyes, or slap their legs in an "Aw, shucks!" gesture.[26] These distinctions suggest that the initial, crucial stage of *arja* pedagogy—when the voice is first being conditioned and basic competencies related to song are being developed—elicits preliminary responses from girls and boys that parallel the way they manage other challenges in their lives and in accordance with their enculturation as gendered members of Balinese society.

For many young students, this step unfolds over days or weeks, in both group and individual contexts, before they gain enough confidence to demonstrate strong, independent command of their *tembang*. Once students are able to confidently project their voices, the pedagogical process works next to strengthen the full integration of the voice and the body by gradually developing other key skills that *arja* demands, including mastery of standard dance combinations, techniques for narrative development, and strategies for group improvisation.[27] Like *adat*, this stage of *arja* pedagogy acts directly on the body. As is common in other Balinese dance pedagogy, teachers stretch, press, mold, and swat their students' body parts into character-specific standing positions, gestural subtleties, and codified choreographic cycles. While most young girls have prior Balinese dance training, *arja* teachers often cite such experience as more problematic than useful: since *tembang* is the focal point of *arja* performance, the dance should manifest as a physical elaboration of the *tembang* rather than the *tembang* serving

as decoration for the dance. Typical critiques of amateur *arja* performers point to their overemphasis of danced elements; a lack of subtlety, nuance, or focused power in small gestures; and occasions when overzealous movement eclipses their *tembang*'s sentiment (Collier 2014, 463). For this reason, this key step of the process challenges students to revisit the notion of embodiment and allow the inner-body work of the voice to manifest externally in appropriate movement.

As students gain competence, *arja* pedagogy transitions gradually to a "hands-off" model, but even this part of the process facilitates embodiment. During such rehearsals, teachers dart from one student to another, demonstrating different body positions and vocal inflections, then waiting as the students perform it back convincingly before stepping in front of another student to coach her in the same way. While this approach does not involve any direct physical contact with the students, the young artists closely watch and carefully emulate their teacher in turn, acting as if they have become her shadow, or as if they can emplace themselves in her (figure 14.1). At its surface, this intermediate phase appears to be little more than a logical next step in preparing the student for independent performance. However, the ability to demonstrate her character's song and

FIGURE 14.1 Ni Nyoman Candri (*far left*) adopts a "hands-off" pedagogical approach while coaching members of Sekaa Arja Kirtya Kencana Budaya (Bengkel, Tabanan) at her home in Singapadu, Gianyar, in 2013. Photograph by the author.

dance with appropriate affect does not itself mean that a student has mastered embodiment or characterization. The in-between stage, then, is a crucial transitional moment when the teacher expands the pedagogical sphere beyond tactile experience by literally stepping away from her student. The consequent transition to proximate-distance learning initiates a practice of projection, whereby the student is empowered to see herself in her teacher, the master performer, and begin realizing her own transformation from student to performer.

Even Stronger Yet?

The opportunity to experiment with a range of femininities—defined here as a set of different ways to imagine, experience, and express the feminine—allows a young actress to safely explore intersecting relationships between her body, her voice, and, to some extent, her fellow performers' bodies and voices. In some cases—as with Bu Desak's short, spunky, and chatty candidate for Desak Rai, or Bu Candri's tall, strong-willed, even bossy choice for Mantri Buduh—this cultivates the formation of a tightly integrated connection between the student's voice and her body, allowing her to openly and even proudly display aspects of her personality that may not conform to Balinese society's ideal model of demure, *halus* femininity, but without suffering typical social repercussions for her deviance.[28] There is, however, no single, seamless pathway to the moment of confident public debut. While some girls assuredly embrace their physical and personality traits, quirks and all, others express reluctance, nervousness, or muted disappointment when identified as *cocok* (I: "suitable" or "appropriate") to play characters that are older, "fat," or harsh like Liku or Limbur. For a girl who has been shamed for her body type or chided for being too outspoken, embodying one of these roles requires her to exploit—eventually in front of a large audience—those very aspects of her body, voice, or disposition about which she is already self-conscious. In such a case, the girl's desire to become a successful performer forces her to reckon with her personal insecurities and fully embrace the body she inhabits, a progression that can be awkward and even painful to undertake, especially during adolescence and in a public, social context. Given this, the more private pedagogical space of the youth *arja* rehearsal can serve as a productive site where initial hesitations like the ones highlighted in this chapter can yield to playful experimentation, positive reinforcement, and gradual incorporation of those qualities.

Participating in this type of training process can equip girls with the skills and opportunities they need to develop and execute an alternate professional identity, one that may well follow them publicly throughout their whole life. This is a

prospect that female performers, young and seasoned alike, raise unsolicited and frame as a positive outcome of their dedication to *arja*. They note that performing *arja* allows a woman to stay active past her physical "prime," unlike in dance, the one other performing arena where Balinese women have access to power. "If you perform *arja*," one young woman explained, "you're not limited by age. For dancers, once you have a few wrinkles, no one will use you anymore. . . . For *arja* performers, there are some older ones like *Ninik* who still get used, even at their age. That's a good thing about *arja*" (Aniek Ferdiantini, personal communication, July 2014).[29] This common discourse is seductive, for it advocates purportedly liberating aims related to women's participation in the arts and signals an inspiring level of optimism among young performers as they envision their potentially long future careers. But it is also conflicting, for it exposes the persistence of sexist social mores that privilege the youthful, firm, able body as a public object, suitable for the voyeuristic gaze and, by contrast, cast the aging, increasingly wrinkled body as abject, to be concealed or retired from the stage. Paradoxical circumstances like these complicate efforts to make categorical declarations about gender politics in Bali, but insofar as they reproduce discourse on the physical body in isolation from other aspects of personhood and identity, they are also precisely the contexts that can be most impacted by the more integrated, embodied type of approach that characterizes *arja* pedagogy and performance.

Arja teachers who center embodiment in their pedagogy safeguard an intimate process and setting within which students can avail themselves of the necessary tools and avenues to probe an eclectic set of gender- and identity-related possibilities before ever taking to the stage. Once teachers are confident in their students' preparation, they facilitate the key transition from the privacy and security of the routine rehearsal to the open, public space of the performing arena. Whether that performance takes place in their local village, where the audience might well comprise the cast members' family and neighbors, or at a major festival that attracts viewers from around the island and beyond, recently trained performers are faced with the task of navigating the challenges and exhilaration of their newfound autonomy when they reach the public stage. While first-time actresses may not yet identify this as a liberating moment, other young performers with more stage experience, whose training has prepared them for multiple roles, or who have identified deeply with a particular character over time do have the capacity to recognize, harness, and exercise their agency in performance.

The extent to which a young actress's voice can effectively impact conventionally held ideas related to gender and authority became apparent to me one evening in 2019, as I enjoyed a popular youth *arja* group's appearance at the annual Bali Arts Festival. That night's standing-room-only crowd quickly warmed up

to the story and seemed especially awed by the group's newest Galuh, a perfectly cast primary school student who executed a stunning opening sequence. About an hour into the show, the comic male servant Penasar Manis made a forceful entrance, singing and dancing around the stage with his characteristic swagger. Following suit, his slighter counterpart Kartala ambled onstage and the pair took up their lighthearted banter, pushing each other around the stage and tossing jokes back and forth (figure 14.2). The audience clapped with delight and roared with laughter, but soon a low murmur rose up in the outdoor arena. "Are those girls?" Fervent whispers mixed with giggles. "No, no way." Then, wide-eyed uncertainty: "Could they be?"

The rumble that circulated among audience members was a mix of speculation and disbelief, resulting from the convincing nature of the newly trained actresses' *penasar* characterizations and reflecting the extent to which the audience's expectations were interrupted when faced with the prospect of such unorthodox casting. This reaction came as no surprise to the *sanggar* directors, who unapologetically acknowledged that their unprecedented decisions to cast and train young women for these roles might uncomfortably stretch both the genre's conventions and their audience's tolerance: if

FIGURE 14.2 Penasar Manis, performed by Made Ayu Oka Wijayanti, jokes with Kartala, performed by A. A. Made Gitaningtyas Adhi Susila, at the 2019 Bali Arts Festival. Photograph by the author.

men can earn accolades for playing female roles, they reasoned, why shouldn't female performers have a parallel opportunity to try out roles that are typically reserved for men?

Like their teachers, the *penasar* actresses saw the potential for their performance to achieve multiple aims. The Penasar Manis, in particular, was a longstanding group member in her early twenties who already functioned as a strong role model for the *sanggar*'s younger performers-in-training: she routinely led rehearsals and often coached new members when the directors were unavailable, and she had cycled through learning several different *arja* roles over the course of her early career. But the ambitions that motivated her to study the *penasar* role extended beyond a simple desire to inspire younger girls around her: she also sought to disrupt both the general presumption that male actors would be playing those roles and the deeply entrenched view that women lack the physical stamina and commanding charisma needed to convincingly portray the comic servants. While the audience members' stunned mid-scene chatter seemed to confirm that the young women's performance had indeed complicated their assumptions, the path to accomplish this goal was fraught with a double bind. On the one hand, the female performers had to render their own identities as women illegible in order for the audience to take them seriously: "passing" as men was necessary to maintain the integrity of their *penasar* characterizations. On the other hand, fully concealing their identities as women would erase their efforts at the very moment they sought to influence the gendered narrative around *penasar* performance: the audience could only be confronted with the subversive nature of the performance if they became aware that the performers were actually women.

In the weeks following their performance, the young women's social media posts engaged playfully with the tensions embedded in this double bind. Sharing a pair of preperformance photos taken with her counterpart, one caught her followers' attention with the caption, "Handsome, right?" before continuing on to report a smooth performance and extend public thanks to her teacher for the "truly extraordinary experience."[30] Her partner reflected similar sentiments, calling the performance "such a great opportunity to act as. . . 'not the real me'" and expressing relief and delight—punctuating her response with the "tears of joy" emoji—when one follower admitted they truly didn't realize she wasn't a male performer. "*Astungkara* you didn't suspect anything," she wrote, "that's what we were going for."[31]

This context leads to two important conclusions. First, empowering young *arja* performers to publicly project their individual voices strengthens their capacity to contend with aspects of the cultural systems that impact their daily life. This first conclusion compels us to reframe how we interpret the actresses'

efforts to conceal their personal identity markers—especially their sex—when they perform as *penasar*. Viewed through this lens, what might initially appear to be an ordinary attempt to stay "in character" can be better understood as a deliberately destabilizing move, intended to incite precisely the type of incredulity that spread through the arts festival audience that evening. By generating an unusual sense of ambiguity related to their sex, the actresses' adept performance successfully converted the stage to a discursive space where the audience was obliged to reconsider the perceived impossibility that girls could be convincing as *penasar*. In providing space where the audience both could and must ask, "Could they be [girls]?" these young actresses initiated a public conversation about the gendered assumptions and paradoxical structures that circulate around them.

Second, it is imperative to expand and nuance existing arguments about the progressive nature of *arja* to better attend to the labor and processes that underlie the cultivation of the genre's predominantly female performers. At its base, this assertion seeks to underscore the transformative role of the *arja* teacher, an overlooked figure whose work is often executed away from public view and—like domestic labor—is thus easily rendered invisible. In tandem with this, it aims to problematize the ways that elevating the public, ephemeral spectacle of performance can overshadow the importance of the intimate, iterative practices of pedagogy and rehearsal. Given that these processual contexts are precisely the ones that both generate young performers' readiness to take to the professional stage and can operate as preliminary spaces for traversing social norms, coming to understand how veteran female performers structure and curate these experiences exposes the multiple levels within which Balinese women's labor has to function in order to begin mediating culturally embedded systems related to gender and power.

Taken together, these conclusions suggest that accessing *arja*'s potential as a productive site for interrogating cultural norms and social values necessitates a shift in critical focus from ostensibly culminating acts like public performance to the iterative practices like training and rehearsal that gradually sculpt novice students into masterful artists. While learning to perform *arja* cannot itself dissolve the complexities that characterize daily life for Balinese women and girls, participating in the intimate, integrative processes discussed here equips young artists with tools and practices that allow them to imagine different futures for themselves and future generations. As girls grapple with some of the constraints that bind Balinese women to established norms and restrict their ability to negotiate for power, undertaking a commitment to *arja* can embolden them to raise their voices and become "even stronger yet," both on and off the stage.

NOTES

All non-English text is Balinese, except for Indonesian text indicated by the abbreviation "I." This chapter is based on research carried out in Bali during various one- to two-month periods between January 2012 and July 2019. I am grateful to Sanggar Makara Dwaja, Sanggar Puri Saraswati, and Sanggar Seni Citta Usadhi for welcoming and allowing me to carry out this research in their communities. In particular, I thank *sanggar* directors Ni Nyoman Candri, Tjokorda Istri Putri Rukmini, and Desak Made Suarti Laksmi, all of whom are extraordinary artists, inspiring teachers, and generous liaisons. I am also grateful to Bucknell University for supporting my research through a semester of untenured faculty leave (spring 2012), a semester of sabbatical (fall 2017), a summer 2019 research grant from Bucknell's Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender (CSREG), and the ongoing commitment of the Ellen Williams Professorship in Music (2016–21).

1. Any view of *adat* that depicts it exclusively as a structural, constraining force fails to take into account the varied, individual ways that humans relate to such systems in circulation. As ethnomusicologist Nicole Reisnour notes in her nuanced 2018 exploration of vocal music, ethics, and religion, "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" (21).

2. Suryakusuma first coined this phrase in her 1988 master's thesis, "State Ibuism: The Social Construction of Womanhood in New Order Indonesia," and later published a dual-language (English and Indonesian) revision by the same name (Suryakusuma 2011). Some have questioned the endurance of her concept in the post-Suharto, post-Reformasi era, a critique she addressed convincingly in a short 2012 piece, "Is State Ibuism Still Relevant?"

3. Literature on Balinese *adat* and its relationship to religion and culture in Bali is abundant. See, for example, Boon 1977, Warren 1993, Picard 1996, Ramstedt 2004, Hauser-Schäublin 2011, Picard and Madinier 2011, and Hauser-Schäublin 2013.

4. Balinese legal scholars have recently turned significant attention to issues related to women's inheritance rights, in part in response to a 2010 decree related to this issue. See, for example, *Udayana Master Law Journal* articles Sadnyini 2016, Ratmini 2016, and Sudantra and Dharma Laksana 2016.

5. This stands in sharp contrast to American and European norms, where rulings about custody and related matters hinge heavily on contributing factors, including some that are prevalent but disregarded in the Balinese context, like domestic violence, substance abuse, infidelity, and polygamy. It is also important to note that exceptions to this virilocal system exist in Bali, such as when a family has no male descendant, so a daughter's husband joins her household and their children are then tied to the wife's lineage. See Geertz 1975, especially 54–55.

6. While aspects of this argument seemingly align with elements of and concepts from American feminism, this is not an attempt to assert the universal applicability of Western feminist ideals or to posit *arja remaja* as a site for the projection of a Balinese feminism. In my view, the right to make such a declaration, if one is even to be made, belongs to those who live the daily realities of *adat* and its proscriptions. I will contend, however, that we can view *arja*'s embodied pedagogical process and the teachers who invest in that process as "doing the work of feminism—that is, creating strategies that enable [one] to perform various identities, often in conjunction with so-called traditional ones, that resist and critique issues of gender within her specific context" (Koskoff 2013, 214).

7. Discourse around menstruation engages with similar tensions. While the biological link between ovulation, menstruation, and fertility is widely understood in Bali, menstruating women are considered spiritually impure and are thus prohibited from entering temples, making offerings, or undertaking other religious tasks.

8. While it may seem redundant to include descendancy as a third prong in the context of Balinese discourse on ancestry and reincarnation, it is important to consider that not all descendants are recognized as reincarnated ancestors, and that male descendants—whether or not they are themselves acknowledged as reincarnated ancestors—are highly valued as the presumed blood link that enables future reincarnations within the family line.

9. This example serves as an important reminder that even when performance is a powerful arena for challenging conventional gender expectations, it can also (sometimes simultaneously) bind women and girls more tightly to traditional gender norms.

10. My inquiries about whether the same standard for purity applied to the group's young boys were met with giggles, shaking heads, or silent eyebrow raisings. While a developing pregnancy is a clear sign that a girl is no longer a virgin, in the case of a boy, one member's parent noted, "How would we ever know?"

11. Some Balinese communities, particularly those known as *Bali Aga* or *Ulu Apad*, exercise different models of social organization, within which the roles and status of women may vary significantly from what I describe here. For discussion of such communities, see Ottino 1994 and Reuter 2002, 2006. For the limited purposes of this chapter, further references to "Balinese women" should be understood as bounded, referring to the majority Hindu Balinese population.

12. There are two distinct reasons that I emphasize the voice as a starting point here, and qualify that these voices are female, sounding from within female bodies. First, cross-gender performance is common in Indonesian dance and theater traditions, so there is ample space for female voices to sound from male bodies. A particularly relevant example in the Balinese context is the all-male *arja muani*. Second, and more importantly, beginning with the voice brings into view a process within which all the pathways—the interior space through which columns of air rush, the physical apparatus of the voice, the material body that contains the interior space and apparatus, and the pedagogical sources that teach embodiment—connect in, on, and through female bodies.

13. This exploration of the female voice, embodiment, and *arja* pedagogy is informed by foundational works on the voice and vocal music in Bali (Wallis 1979; Herbst 1997), influential anthropological studies related to various dimensions of voice and voicing (Keane 1997; Srivastava 2006; Harkness 2014), and ethnographic studies of gesture and embodiment in music and dance (Rahaim 2012; Hahn 2007). Harkness's concept of a "phonosonic nexus" has been particularly impactful, as it "allows us to analyze systematically two important facts: that the voice concerns both sound and body, and that it links speech and song. Furthermore, this concept clarifies the relationship between literal understandings of 'voice' (e.g., a laryngeal setting involving vocal cord adduction, a material locus of human sound production, an instantiation of a speaking or singing individual, etc.) and more tropic understandings of 'voicing' (e.g., a metonym of political position and power, a metaphor for the uniqueness of an authentic self or collective identity, an expression of a typifiable persona, etc.). These two related views consider voice as a ubiquitous medium of communicative interaction and channel of social contact and as the positioning of a perspective within a culturally meaningful framework of semiotic alignments" (12). His work points too to Feld and Fox's similar observation that "one [discourse] is a more phenomenological concern with the voice as the embodiment of spoken and sung performance, and the other is a more metaphoric sense of voice as a key representational trope for social position and power" (Feld and Fox 1994, 26, quoted in Harkness 2014, 234).

14. Women play an essential role within the arena of traditional Balinese dance. While some works in the traditional dance repertoire include a sung component, most focus on

the physically expressive artistry of the female body without engaging the female voice. There are also a few Balinese genres (*janger* and *sandya gita*, for example) in which women's and men's voices and bodies are equally present. Despite this relatively equal balance, the roles and interactions assigned to men and women performing within these genres are clearly circumscribed and typically align with or reinforce the same gender ideals imposed by Balinese *adat*.

15. See Ballinger 2005, Palermo 2009, and Downing 2019. There are versions of *arja* that are exceptions, like the all-male *arja muani*, but that is itself another powerful site for gender discourse and negotiation in Bali. On *arja muani*, see Kellar 2002.

16. See Dibia 1992 and Hobart and Pujawati 2001 for richly descriptive reckonings of each character's personal attributes.

17. See Kellar 2004, Palermo 2005, Goodlander 2012, and Coldiron et al. 2015 for examples of this approach.

18. In their seminal article, West and Zimmerman declare that "the 'doing' of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (1987, 126).

19. See Kellar 2004 for further discussion of this idea. The interactive nature of the performance-audience dynamic in Balinese theatrical performances is well documented; see, for example, Dibia 1992 and Jenkins 1994.

20. It is true that men also take on teaching roles with *arja* groups, although their involvement is often allied with a female teacher's efforts or dedicated exclusively to male students. More importantly, men already have considerable access to public influence and power in other social and political areas, so the opportunity to project their voices is not unusual. Further, as noted earlier, *arja* is the only realm of Balinese performance where men are in the minority, so women's voices also actually outnumber theirs.

21. The three teachers highlighted in this study range in age from their forties to early seventies, and they represent a variety of family, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. For these reasons, among others, their pedagogical strategies and approaches to gender ideologies differ somewhat from each other. Of the three teachers, Desak Made Suarti Laksmi is the most outspoken about her efforts, so it is tempting to identify her extensive experience in the West as the leading contributor to this perspective. While this has indeed been impactful in many ways, she identifies her exceptional experiences studying instrumental music as a young child and her father's support as the primary influences on her ideological framing.

22. Thanks to Andrew McGraw for drawing my attention to the connection between Errington's important work and the discourse commonly referred to as an "ethics of sincerity." Reisnour's (2018) convincing exploration of ethical orientations that operate in the context of post-Suharto Bali, noted earlier, posits the centrality of an "ethics of divine blessing" within Hindu Balinese subjectivity, a suggestion that contrasts with the above example's orientation toward an ethics of sincerity.

23. This contrasts with most of his counterparts, who alternate flexibly between sung passages and spoken segments. The only other *arja* character who exclusively sings is the refined heroine, the princess Galuh.

24. The examples that follow derive from my research in two sites in Singapadu village—observing Bu Candri with her students (from various villages and *sanggar*) and Tjokorda Istri Putri Rukmini ("Cok Pring") with the students of Sanggar Puri Saraswati—and in Mengwitani village, observing Bu Desak with her students (from various villages but all members of Sanggar Seni Citta Usadhi, the *sanggar* she cofounded with her husband, famous *topeng* dancer I Nyoman Catra). See Collier 2014 for a concise artist's

biography of Bu Candri and Bu Desak. While all three of these teachers are deeply invested in training young students because they want to ensure continuity in Bali's *arja* tradition, they also work actively to support their female students and think critically about the likely impact of traditional domestic issues including marriage, pregnancy, relocation, child-rearing, and *banjar* obligations on their futures as performers.

25. I do not mean to imply that Balinese women do not speak in their own homes or engage in dialogue with others on a regular basis. It is indeed commonplace for women to converse and gossip with each other, an occurrence I have heard multiple Balinese men liken to "the clucking of chickens." Such exchanges, however, typically occur in private, domestic, or gendered spaces like kitchens and markets, and among only women. While I believe such conversations are important for the many ways they can impact their participants (for example, by cultivating intimacy among acquaintances, creating empowering partnerships, bringing issues of concern to light, and encouraging empathy), such discussions do not ordinarily cross into typically male-dominated public arenas where crucial decision-making takes place. That these exchanges usually do not (and indeed often cannot) move beyond such domestic/gendered realms reinforces their "muted" nature: they do occur, but they are kept down, unheard outside of the private circle.

26. Deeper analysis of these (and other) differences in pedagogy and response for young women and men in *arja* contexts is the subject of another article currently in progress.

27. See Collier 2014 for a more detailed description of the pedagogical process in contemporary *arja remaja* settings.

28. See Harriot Beazley's 2008 "'I Love *Dugem*': Young Women's Participation in the Indonesian Dance Party Scene" for an account of another (albeit radically different) Balinese space in which young women successfully negotiate and inhabit alternate identities that are otherwise unaccepted in their daily lives.

29. "Ninik" literally means "Grandma" in common Balinese, but in this context its use explicates both the generational separation between student and teacher and the affectionate nature of their relationship.

30. Anak Agung Made Gitaningtyas Adhi Susila (@ajunggit), "Ganteng kan? 😁/ . . . / Akhirnya berjalan lancar pementasan malam ini 💝/ Kirang langkung aksamayang 🙏/ Sukma [*sic*] ibu @desaksuarti pengalamannya sangat luar biasa 😘," Instagram post, June 19, 2019.

31. Ni Made Ayu Oka Wijayanti (@ayuokawijayantii), "Such a great opportunity to act as a [*sic*] 'not the real me,'" Instagram post, July 3, 2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BzczxIrHrhF/. The original text of the first comment on this post reads, "'Seken' Kaden mb sing dek ne dek dduuhhhh jeg muani ajan ngenah. 😁" The performer's response reads, "wkwk. . astungkara mb sing menduga, itu yg di cari [*sic*] 😂."

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