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RELATIONAL PRACTICES IN BALI: BALINESE HINDUISM, *SUBAK*, AND MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

In a 2019 interview, the musician, dancer, and educator I Nyoman Wenten discussed the centrality of Balinese religious practices, emphasising that sacred artistic offerings and questions about the natural environment are "always intertwined". What accounts for this kind of intertwinement in Bali? In this article, this question is approached by exploring Balinese Hindu concepts including tri hita karana and sekala/niskala, which are related to post-1945 Balinese Hinduism while also connecting to the millennium-old water irrigation system of subak. Scholarship about subak has mainly occurred in the areas of anthropology, environmental analysis, and tourism-related studies, but there are broad connections to Bali's well-documented musical traditions as well. This article suggests how Balinese ideas about spirituality, engagement with the natural world, and approaches to the arts involve forms of "relational practice". Some ways in which Bali has hosted a multiplicity of religious and artistic processes that have nurtured productive and enduring relationships among people, nature, and the sacred are discussed. The article proceeds by first providing some history and concepts involving Balinese Hinduism. Then, aspects of subak as social processes akin to artistic practice are considered, after which music and the arts as they relate

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to concepts including tri hita karana and sekala/niskala are discussed. The article concludes that relational practices are historical traditions to learn from and adapt as ways to navigate a changing present. Regularly shared artistic pursuits and communal offerings are ways of drawing immediate human interactions together with the natural environment and beyond.

Keywords: Relational practices, Bali, Balinese Hinduism, *subak*, music

INTRODUCTION

This article begins with a comment that I Nyoman Wenten made during an interview that the two of us conducted with him in Sading, Bali on 12 July 2019. We were interested to hear from musicians in Bali about *subak*, a centuries-old approach to irrigation and agriculture that combines aspects of social organisation with religious belief. Scholarship on *subak* exists mainly in the fields of anthropology, environmental analysis, and tourism-oriented studies, separately from studies of music, and we were curious as to whether Bali's well-documented musical traditions also related to it. Wenten responded by discussing the importance of religious practices in Bali, and he noted that artistic offerings and questions about the natural environment are "always intertwined".

What accounts for this kind of intertwinement in Bali, in which different areas of human endeavour connect? This article approaches the question by exploring the concept of *tri hita karana* and considering how Balinese ideas (about spirituality, engagement with the natural world, and approaches to the arts) involve forms of "relational practice". Translating roughly to "three causes of happiness", *tri hita karana* is a conceptual outgrowth of post-1945 Balinese Hinduism but is also associated with the system of *subak* from roughly a millennium prior. This study defines the idea of relational practice as a creative human process that connects different categories such as new and old, worldly and otherworldly, and communal, environmental, and divine. With this definition in mind, this article discusses ways in which Bali has hosted a multiplicity of religious and artistic practices that have nurtured productive and enduring relationships among people, nature, and the sacred. These relational practices, occurring through repeated and multifaceted human interaction, connect people with each other and with worlds around and outside of them.

This article's methodology is interdisciplinary and seeks to combine arts- and humanities-oriented approaches. The research is based on observations and interviews done in Bali in July 2019 and continued work thereafter (Huang 2019; Huang and Rockwell 2019). It also involves a synthesis of selected academic literature on *tri hita karana*, *subak*, and Balinese music and religion, motivated by the fact that academic writings thus far have largely treated the topics of *subak* and music independently. This article proceeds by providing some history and concepts involving Balinese Hinduism, considering aspects of *subak* as processes akin to artistic practice, and discussing music and the arts as they relate to concepts including *tri hita karana* and *sekala*/*niskala*. We conclude by highlighting the idea of practice as a central means of tying together differentiated concepts, categories, and social procedures.

TRI HITA KARANA AND BALINESE HINDUISM

In recent decades, the Sanskrit-derived phrase *tri hita karana* has been invoked to preserve, develop, advertise, define, protect, regulate, and sustain the island of Bali. The concept refers to three kinds of harmonious relationships that humans seek to have, i.e., with the divine, with their natural environment, and with other humans. In 2012, when United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated five sites in Bali as having "outstanding universal value", it explained: "The cultural tradition that shaped the landscape of Bali, since at least the 12th century, is the ancient philosophical concept of *Tri Hita Karana*" (UNESCO 2012: 23–24). Meanwhile, Balinese officials and scholars emphasise the concept as being an example of local wisdom that is rooted in Balinese Hinduism and can provide for responsible ongoing stewardship of the island, as Bali manages the ecological pressures and economic realities of tourism (Pitana 2010; Mudana et al. 2018). In this more forward-looking framing, *tri hita karana* provides a possible solution to political challenges in which the municipal and national government continue to develop the island for tourism at the expense of environmental sustainability and local needs.

Is *tri hita karana* a secular philosophical concept or part of a Hindu religious doctrine, and how ancient is it? The oldest studied religious practices in Bali are those of *Bali Mula* (original Balinese), sometimes also referred to as *Bali Aga* (mountain Balinese). These people's indigenous Balinese traditions, which still continue in small communities in the northern and eastern parts of the island, reflect both pre-Hindu Austronesian and early Hindu-Buddhist

influence.[1] Following animist beliefs and rituals, *Bali Mula* practiced ancestor worship and associated divine spirits with natural features including hills and waterways.[2] While architectural characteristics and village layouts show similarities to those of Austronesian peoples who did not adopt Hindu influences, evidence of such influence on Balinese religion towards the end of the first millennium nevertheless exists in artifacts that embody devotion to Hindu gods (Ardhana and Wijaya 2017).[3] The 14th century Majapahit conquest of Bali brought another strand of Hinduism to the island that would provide a more central source for contemporary Balinese Hinduism. Historical sources for this early religious foundation for Bali include texts written on palm-leaf manuscripts (*lontar*) that address cosmology, provide mantras, and speculate on the nature of reality (Acri 2006: 112). However, other than its relatively recent associations with pre-Majapahit *subak* traditions, and the general connection between Balinese Hinduism and tripartite schemas, the *tri hita karana* concept as such does not seem to factor significantly into early histories of Hinduism in Bali.[4]

A stronger connection exists between *tri hita karana* and Hindu reform efforts that began after Indonesian independence in 1945. The Indonesian Ministry of Religion (*Kementarian Agama Republik Indonesia*, or KAGRI), established in 1946, put forth a view in which Balinese "beliefs" (*kepertjajaan*) did not amount to a proper "religion" (*agama*). After declaring Indonesian independence from the Dutch in 1945 at the end of the Second World War (WWII), founding president Sukarno and his cabinet implemented a constitution that mandated *Tuhan Yang Maha Esa* (faith in "One Supreme God") as a foundational principle of *Pancasila,* the official national government philosophy (McDaniel 2013: 334–35). Michel Picard observes that in the early 1950s, Ida Bagus Mantra wrote an influential letter in a daily paper and eventually a PhD thesis that portrayed Balinese religion as an underdeveloped combination of Balinese and Hindu elements. From the perspective of a Balinese student who was studying in Bengal and would later go on to serve as the Indonesian ambassador to India, Balinese religion was in a nascent state and needed to achieve credibility through strengthening connections with its putative original source of Hinduism (Picard 2011: 491–92). Such a process of religious reform would help justify Balinese claims to citizenship within the newly formed nation of Indonesia.

The *tri hita karana* concept grew out of this post-WWII Hindu reform movement. Often abbreviated as THK, it refers to three causes of or ways toward happiness or prosperity. The concept recommends mutually beneficial relationships on three levels: between humans and deities, between humans

and their environment, and among humans. I Wayan Sukarma has argued that *tri hita karana* promotes "harmony in life" and provides salubrious rules and norms reflective of the moral foundation provided by Hinduism (Sukarma 2016: 87). Thomas Buttery (2012: 10) has articulated a common notion that "*Tri Hita Karana* is an ancient Balinese philosophy which stands for Three Steps to Prosperity". However, the scholar I Wayan Redig has noted, "We have never encountered the word of '*Tri Hita Karana*' (THK) written in any scriptures of Hinduism" (Redig 2015: 1).

Instead, the concept can be traced to the work of Wayan Mertha Sutedja (1934–2016), director of the Indonesian Academy of Dance (ASTI) in Denpasar, which is now the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI). In 1966, at the conference of the Board for the Struggle of the Balinese Hindu Community (*Badan Perjuangan Umat Hindu Bali*), Sutedja introduced an initial conceptual framework for *tri hita karana*.[5] Evoking traditional Hindu three-part conceptual frameworks, Sutedja proposed that "*Tri Hita Karana* philosophy embodies universal values and represents harmonious and balanced human relationships with the spiritual, social and natural environment to achieve spiritual and physical well-being" (Pickel-Chevalier and Ketut 2016: 10). During this time, music played a socially collaborative role in making sacred offerings, and Sutedja was influential in the development of Balinese Hinduism. Thus, during the initial crystallisation of the *tri hita karana* philosophy, music and the performing arts played an integral role in negotiating harmony within and between categories of human relationships with the prosaic and the divine.

SUBAK AS A SACRED PRACTICE

The *subak* system has provided a physical, social, and religious infrastructure that enabled Balinese farmers to be among the most productive rice growers in Asia for over a millennium. There is no general agreement on an authoritative definition of *subak,* since the concept is used in myriad ways across Bali. In an early study, Geertz used the phrase "irrigation society":

> *Subak* are organised according to the water system: all individuals owning land which is irrigated from a single water source—a single dam and canal running from dam to fields—belong to a single *subak*. *Subak* whose direct water sources are branches of a common larger

> dam and canal form larger and less tightly knit units, and finally the entire watershed of one river system forms an overall, but even looser, integrative unit (Geertz 1959: 995).

This framing of *subak* highlights the social organisation that has accompanied water management at multiple scales in Bali, from smaller waterways feeding individual fields to more complex networks supporting an agricultural region. Such a hierarchy has a spiritual dimension as well, since Balinese Hinduism ascribes special importance to elevated, mountainous areas from which rivers originate. *Subak* temples upstream are significant both for their role in regulating water that flows down to fields and for their locations as sites for deities. Their status as sacred places has made these temples host to a variety of artistic offerings including music, theatre, and dance.

Since *subak* temples are physical and spiritual centres of agricultural irrigation in Bali, they host ceremonies that align with calendrical cycles. The Balinese 210-day *tika* calendar provides times when temple festivals (*odalan*) are to be held. Stephen Lansing has noted how the structure of this calendar relates to the organisation of gamelan music. Within a *tika*, individual cycles for farmers combine to form a complete *subak* cycle, which itself can combine with others for a larger regional agricultural cycle (Lansing 1991: 67). In gamelan music, both Balinese and elsewhere in Indonesia, what the Dutch ethnomusicologist Jaap Kunst termed "colotomic structure" corresponds to nested cycles of musical time. In general, smaller and higher-pitched instruments play relatively fast repeating patterns, while the lower instruments play slower ones into which the faster ones fit. The large and deeply pitched gongs, which are the most spiritually significant instruments in the ensemble, mark the longest cycles of time. Traditionally, gamelan music-making and *subak* farming are not specialised matters, such that people doing both activities in a day are familiar with this cyclical approach to time in multiple ways. Short cycles, in the form of repeating melodies, thus, relate to longer calendrical cycles through the routine practices of observing and marking time.

NATURE, SPIRITUALITY AND MUSIC

Members of *subak* collectives regularly present *yadnya*—sacred offerings—to appease gods and hence ward off agricultural catastrophes such as drought and pests. These daily practices maintain the life-assuring balance between the seen and unseen realms (*sekala*/*niskala*) that exist within Balinese

cosmology. As with the concept of *tri hita karana*, traditions of *yadnya* took shape in keeping with Hindu reform movements in the second half of the 20th century (McDaniel 2010: 99), while also having antecedents in Majapahit-era religious thought (Suamba and Mudana 2018). How do these devotional practices connect to artistic endeavours? I Wayan Sudirana proposes that the concepts of art, ritual, life, and sacredness are fundamentally connected within Balinese Hinduism. From this perspective, all creation is potentially beautiful and artistic, since it represents the intersection of divine and temporal realms, with value and significance for all beings (Sudirana 2013: 18). Beauty is associated with the idea of a holy offering. Therefore, all artistic creation originates in sacred ritual or *yadnya*. Dance and gamelan music present a means of welcoming deities in attendance at temple ceremonies, while visual arts constitute ways to forge a spiritual connection between human and divine worlds.

Early ceremonial and philosophical roots exist for artistic spiritual practices in Bali. In Tenganan, known for maintaining and preserving some of Bali's oldest cultural traditions, the *nyangjangang* ceremony involves three *selonding* (an archaic type of gamelan ensemble) that move through the village in specific clockwise and anticlockwise directions. This spatial movement corresponds to cosmological precepts that involve the cardinal directions, and the ceremony serves as a form of purification in accordance with the sacred physical orientation of the village (Français-Simbürger 1998: 71–72).

The concept of *bhuta* provides another early example of the connection between spiritual and artistic practices. Relating the outer universe and inner subjective world, *bhuta* traces at least as far back as a 12th-century inscription by a Balinese king.[6] Controlling *bhuta* is fundamental to a healthy and productive existence, and this process occurs for such activities as making music or composing poetry. Organising *bhuta* is the work of humans and gods, and without such organisation it will decompose into chaos and disorder. Likewise, *bhutakala* are forces that bring about plagues and illness, and in his discussion of the concept, Lansing remarks that "retaining some measure of control over the *bhutakala* becomes the central problem of human existence" (Lansing 2006: 131). Such control occurs through practices of spiritual purification such as dance or music.

Scholars of Indonesian performing arts have described how performances function in three ways, ranging from sacred to secular. R. M. Soedarsono's functional categories include ceremony or ritual, personal entertainment, and an aesthetic show or presentation (Soedarsono 1985, as

cited in Sugiartha 2018: 3). Following Bandem and deBoer (1981), I Wayan Dibia discusses how *odalan* performances include sacred (*wali*) styles, ceremonial but non-sacred (*babali*) forms, and secular (*balih balihan*) staging for people's entertainment (Dibia 1985: 65). It has also been proposed that the Balinese arts correspond to distinct elements of Balinese Hindu worship. Jan Hendrik Peters, describing music and dance in the context of *tri hita karana* precepts, suggests that dancing resembles *mudra*, the rhythmic movements of the priest's hand during ritual ceremonies, gamelan music evokes the priest's bell (*genta*), and singing (*kidung*) suggests the intoned mantras of a priest (Peters 2013: 105). In ceremonies, the performing arts and worship merge in the form of *yadnya*, which highlights the regularity and cyclical characteristics of sacred performances.

Circular temporality, which Lansing discusses as a "wheels within wheels view of time", (Lansing 1991: 70) relates the interlocking cycles of a *subak tika* calendar to periodic processes in artistic performance such as gamelan music, dance, and *wayang* (theatre). The idea of circular time has been discussed extensively in scholarship on Balinese and Javanese music, and the extent to which this idea is a governing musical-religious principle in Bali is a matter of debate. Human perception of long vs. short spans of time can be fundamentally different (McGraw 2008), and Balinese music has aspects of both periodic and progressive time just as other kinds of music do (Tenzer 2000: 74–75). Nonetheless, for the purposes of this article, the *practice* of regularity and routine is a way of connecting small-scale and large-scale time. Marking time creates a conceptual balance that relates the immediate (e.g., a repeated musical rhythm), to the social-local (e.g., gathering daily or weekly for communal music making), to the otherworldly (e.g., a lunar cycle).

Most religious ceremonies in Bali involve some combination of performing arts, which almost always include music. There are performances to acknowledge and greet the gods and ancestors (*pendet*, *rejang*, *baris gede*), to purge community sacred spaces from evil spirits (*calonarang*, *sanghyang*, *barong*), to mark the different parts of ceremonies (*topeng pajegan*), to call to mind philosophical knowledge in *lontar* or other holy texts (*wayang kulit*, *wayang wong*), and to ease the journey of the spirits of the dead (*gambang*, *gong luang*) (Sudirana 2013: 20). In a collection on the performing arts, John Blacking emphasised the idea that they "cannot be understood without referring to their social context and functions" (Blacking and Kealiinohomoku 1979: xiv). Though the social function of artistic performances varies widely across Bali, an important context for those involving Balinese Hinduism is that of *yadnya.*

I Gede Arya Sugiartha explains how *yadnya* can occur in various ways, such as a prayer recitation with *banten*—artistically arranged offerings of flowers, leaves, fruits, and meats—and multiple kinds of selfless work in the spirit of *ngayah*. *Ngayah* is a form of devotion expressed through dancing, playing gamelan, cleaning the temple, and other activities paying homage to the gods rather than for one's self-benefit. Therefore, the concept of *yadnya* inherently relates to artistic practices. The use of art or beauty as a medium for sacred offering is revealed in the treatise *Natya Sastra*, dating from roughly two millennia ago and regarded as source material for Hindu approaches to theatre, dance, and music. The treatise explains that art is *yadnya*: it is not used solely to please the human senses, but it is rather a means of spiritualising one's life (Sugiartha 2018: 3).

In the first half of the 20th century, Colin McPhee and Margaret Mead took note of the emphasis on the regular practice of artistic offerings in Bali. McPhee remarked upon the "utilitarian" nature of Balinese music: "At a ceremony its presence is as necessary as flowers, incense, and offerings". Mead, meanwhile, pointed out the interest in the practice rather than the singular product, commenting on "this delight in the art of acting rather than in the play, in the way in which the music is played rather than in the music" (Merriam 1964: 72). In the case of gamelan music, a practicing group often has other people present who will be ready to take over an instrument when a player tires or slips away for a rest. In this sense, the concept of being a musician goes hand in hand with being a reliable member of a community. Moreover, there is an emphasis on the regular practice of music more than the individual and isolated product of a musical performance.

SEKALA/*NISKALA* AND MUSICAL PRACTICES

As mentioned earlier in this article, Balinese Hinduism combines both general aspects of Hinduism and older sacred traditions that are specific to Bali. Underpinning religious ritual is the idea that humans experience the world through an interaction of *sekala* and *niskala*. *Sekala* refers to external, material features of physical reality, the component of the world that can be seen, heard, and felt. *Niskala* refers to the inner spirit, or essential life force that underlies all that can be seen and touched (Eiseman 2009: 127). These paired concepts relate to similar dualistic frameworks for the worldly and otherworldly, or the mundane and the divine, in other world religions.[7]

In contrast to the tripartite idea of *tri hita karana*, the concept of *sekala*/*niskala* provides a twofold credo for living. *Niskala* refers to the realm of the spirits who can exert a benevolent or baleful influence on physical events. Such influence can ultimately be as much a part of daily reality as *subak* fields or ceremonial dance and music. *Niskala* has been interpreted as a "safe haven of ideological exigency", the urgent demands of how to explain the world and change it (Tangkas 2015). Anand Krishna comments on this binary concept as follows: "*Sekala* and *Niskala*, both are equally important. A body without soul is of no value. And a soul without body cannot express itself. So any damage done to the body is also damage done to the soul, to its potential to express itself" (Krishna 2009). This distinction between soul and body mirrors the dichotomy between *puruṣa* (spirit) and *prakṛti* (nature) within Sāṅkhya philosophy, which informs Hinduism in India and also factors into the historical development of Balinese Hinduism (Acri 2013: 76).[8]

Literally translated, *sekala* means "within time" and *niskala* means "beyond time", and this dual principle advocates balancing life rather than striving to eliminate or ignore difference. The concept thus emphasises the interdependent nature of the tangible and intangible. The tangible side—the things that are visible and perceived externally, such as colourful offerings, dancing and ceremonies—complements aspects of these occasions that can be felt but not seen. From the standpoint of this article, it is, crucially, through the practice of creating such offerings that these two sides can be reconciled. The continuing cycles of Balinese public ritual and private observance serve to maintain a harmonious balance between *sekala* and *niskala*. Practices of routine communal offering can create *alango*, an idea dating back to the old Javanese language of Kawi and referring to transcendent beauty. Existing in "both inner and outer worlds", *alango* is present in the sounds of a poem but also "in the beauty of the mountains and the sea" (Lansing 1995: 53).

How do the arts contribute to maintaining the cosmological balance between *sekala* and *niskala*? I Nyoman Sedana has written about how contemporary shadow puppet theatre (*wayang kulit*) served to heal and restore a sense of harmony in the wake of the 2002 terrorist bombings in Kuta. The performance he discusses is based on a story contained in a centuries-old *lontar* (*Çudamani*), in which demons carry pestilence and malevolence into the world. The Hindu trinity of Brahma, Wisnu, and Iswara then turn themselves into priests who perform *wayang kulit*, exorcising the demons and restoring balance (Sedana 2005). In this old and renewed story of artistic creation, divine musicians play a pivotal role in saving humanity from ruination by restoring order from chaos. Enactments of this story testify to the power of

sacred performance, both historical and contemporary. Artistic practices present opportunities to make offerings to the forces that determine human welfare. The act of making offerings to the divine provides people with the experience of creating and sharing symbols of faith. It provides a pathway not only to make sense of individual lives, but also to make sense of group life as a community of interconnected human beings.

Modern Balinese performances such as what Sedana discusses are taking place in a very different social and economic context than that of a half century ago. Due to the pressures and dominance of mass tourism, significant changes have occurred to relational practices in Bali in recent decades. A tourism-driven economy provides for religious and artistic traditions in some ways while constraining and encroaching upon them in others. The dual instantiations of *tri hita karana*—one an elusive element of traditional Balinese cultural heritage, the other a regulated engine of unrelenting economic progress— are apparently incongruous. The connection to *subak* traditions in Bali seems to relegate the concept to an increasingly distant past, since rice fields have been replaced by hotels and working in the tourism sector is more prosperous than farming. Likewise, the traditional concept of *sekala*/*niskala* does not ensure sustainable health on an island where land is scarce and the environment is easily damaged.

I Ketut Ardhana has written about the changing context of Balinese Hinduism as Bali has become a more pluralistic and globally connected society (Ardhana 2020). Prior to the Dutch military campaigns leading into the 20th century, religious ritual activities in Bali had taken place in accordance with traditional customs recognised by local Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms. However, after integration into a global capitalist economy and entering the 21st century, existential questions have arisen concerning who will supervise and participate in religious offerings that demand substantial time investment and financial outlay. There is a significant decrease of young Balinese who regularly perform traditional rituals, given that many work in a demanding tourist sector that leaves little spare time to arrange for religious activities. Ardhana and other scholars have posed several questions that arise from this evolving context: what is the role of the contemporary state and society in the management of the religious ceremonies in Bali? (Ardhana 2020: 20); how will these issues be managed by the Balinese populace, which is no longer overwhelmingly Balinese Hindu and has divergent views about Balinese identity? (Allen and Palermo 2005: 240); and how does music function amidst such cultural change? (Fushiki 2013: 56).

Contemporary Balinese musicians aspire to create a balance between religious tradition and modernity amidst the pressures and opportunities brought by tourism and global recognition.[9] I Nyoman Wenten is the director for multiple Southern California Balinese gamelan ensembles during the North American academic year, and of *Bharata Muni*, his hometown gamelan ensemble in Sading, Bali, in the summer months. He notes that within his own hereditary tradition of musicians, prior to the Hindu reform movement and establishment of educational arts institutions, his predecessors would be referred to with the phrase *seniman alam*, or "artist of nature" (personal interview by Joti Rockwell, Valencia, CA, 5 February 2021). This phrase refers to the learning of expertise through dedicated regular practice and an accumulation of life experience, rather than a programmed conveyance of institutional knowledge.

> I Nyoman Wenten: *Seniman* means artist, *alam* means nature. The broad meaning is those artists, those musicians or dancers or painters, they don't have formal schooling. Like you go to ISI, a conservatory of music, an arts academy, and so on. So basically, they learn their technique or their art from older generations in the village. Or another village. Like my experience: I studied first like my grandfather before I went to school. If I keep going like this, learning from my grandfather and other artists from Batuan, from Ubud, from in a village without any diploma, I'm a so-called *seniman alam*.
>
> Joti Rockwell: I'm wondering if some of the concept has to do with learning from previous generations but also from the environment.
>
> I Nyoman Wenten: Actually both because you're part of the *yadnya*, the social life in Bali occurring in every village. Because for that, you always volunteer your time with whatever you could be able to do—like you are a dancer, you have experience to perform in the temple, or another type of *yadnya*. So many different, hundreds and hundreds of *yadnya* every month, so so many opportunities to collaborate with your fellow artists. Because of that, you've prepared an incredible tool from the experience you have.
>
> Joti Rockwell: Does this relate to the idea of *sekala*/*niskala*?
>
> I Nyoman Wenten: Yes, you're part of nature. We believe in *bhuana alit*—small world—in our body, made up the same as what the universe is made out of, *bhuana agung*. Unseen and seen, *niskala* and *sekala*. That is the relationship, why the older generation was able to

> accomplish so much of one particular thing. Like learning *Kakawin*, you can memorise the whole *lontar*. Because every day, I remember my grandpa in the morning—he would already sing in the morning before breakfast. He was not particular about breakfast—as my mom would make something, he would eat it! *(laughs).* It was important for him to sing at the beginning. (*sings lines from the* Kakawin Ramayana *epic*). (personal interview by Joti Rockwell. Valencia, CA, 15 February 2021)

Wenten's ideas illustrate how closely tied together religious practice, community sustenance, and the arts have been in Bali, even amidst generational change. His commentary also illustrates how *subak* and gamelan are interrelated. Noting that his father and grandfather were both farmers as well as musicians, and that many members of *Bharata Muni* are still active farmers, he emphasised that music and the environment are always connected (personal interview by Joti Rockwell and Hao Huang, Sading, Bali, 12 July 2019). He discussed how his grandfather learned to be an artist through regular, daily practices:

> This is his everyday routine. To give an example: morning, singing a little bit, and then go to the rice field and back. Lunchtime, sleep a little bit; at night, perform. Either *wayang* or dance. This is the routine (*makes circling motion*), every night, every day. (personal interview by Joti Rockwell. Valencia, CA, 15 February 2021)

Wenten's comments suggest a different view of *subak* than one in which historical approaches to agriculture go hand in hand with the philosophy of *tri hita karana*. Rather, the process of ritual observance is a way of relating disparate areas of life, from the immediate and tangible to the vast and immaterial. *Subak* practices are analogous to musical practices in the sense that they involve regular gathering and work that serves to sustain a community within a shared devotional framework. Nature is thus not merely an object of art in the sense of being what a musician or a painter might depict. Instead, it is an active part of a historical process in which artists, as with members of a *subak* collective, learn how to provide offerings through practice.

CONCLUSION

This article has suggested how relational practices in Bali allow people to forge connections with each other and between inner and outer worlds. In this sense, multidimensional Balinese Hindu concepts including *tri hita karana* and *sekala*/*niskala* do not necessarily govern but instead become realised and reconciled through such practices. Among these practices, *subak* approaches harken back to a historically successful model of merging the politics of local self-governance, the knowledge of religious and cultural histories, and the science of agriculture and ecological management. Similarly, music has been and continues to be an essential means of creating and sustaining community relations in Bali, even in a contemporary moment when religious contexts are transforming and as these relations extend increasingly across the globe. Relational practices are thus not remnants of an idyllic past. Rather, they are historical traditions to learn from and adapt as ways to navigate a changing present. Regularly shared artistic pursuits, then, are ways of drawing immediate human interactions together with the natural environment and beyond.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Interview participation occurred through informed consent in accordance with procedures standard in U.S. humanities research.

NOTES

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acclaimed in 29 countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. His scholarship includes the Article of the Year Award of American Music Teacher (MTNA journal) and other articles in refereed journals of Great Britain Hungary, Greece, Japan, China, and the U.S.

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1 Thomas Reuter (2018) observes the similarity between *Bali Mula* social organisation and that of indigenous people in Taiwan. Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin (2004), critiquing the anthropological distinction between "Bali Aga" and "Javanized Hindu-Balinese", discusses historical evidence of Islamic immigration and influence in the village of Sembiran.

2 *Leluhur orang Bali: Dari dunia babad dan sejarah* (Wikarman 1998, as cited in McDaniel 2013: 335).

3 Angela Français-Simbürger notes how architectural/geomantic conventions, genealogical origins, and religious practices do not neatly correspond for "Bali Aga" in Tenganan (1998: 61).

4 Threefold thinking does distinguish Balinese Hindu from Bali Aga ways of life in certain respects. Reuter (2002: 288) notes that "Many Bali Aga communities do not have the 'three essential village temples' (*kayangan tiga*, i.e., a *pura dalem*, a *pura bale agung*, and a *pura puseh*) that are officially required under Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia recommendations, though many have now renamed their existing idiosyncratic sanctuaries to create an appearance of conformity". A website for the village of Bugbug in East Bali portrays a sequence of three distinct cultural-religious periods, with Bugbug being connected to the first (Bali Mula, practicing animism), Bali Aga the second (Majapahit, following Shiva Buddha), and the current Balinese majority being the third (Balinese Hinduism, practicing *tri hita karana*) (Bugbug Village 2020). In an article discussing the Bali Mula of the village of Sukawana, Purwadi Soeriadiredja and Aliffiati (2017) do not associate *tri hita karana* with Bali Mula religious practices; rather, they harness the concept as a principle under which local people can follow distinctive religious traditions while maintaining social harmony with the surrounding Balinese and Indonesian sociopolitical contexts.

5 See Pickel-Chevalier and Ketut (2016: 20) and Siahaan (2016). Most sources discussing *tri hita karana* do not attribute the concept solely to Sutedja, though the concept's intellectual foundations emerge from the milieu in which he was working.

6 The inscription appears in a 1998 transcription and translation by I Wayan Ardika and Ni Luh Sutjiati Beratha (in Lansing 2006: 130).

7 See, for example, Robert Orsi's (2004) depiction of American Catholicism and Katherine Hagedorn's (2017) interpretation of sound in Afro-Cuban Regla de Ochá.

8 We would like to thank the anonymous reviewer who drew our attention to the connection with Sāṅkhya philosophy.

9 See Johnson (2002), Heimarck (2003), McGraw (2013), and Stepputat (2013).

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