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Walking Warriors: Battles of Culture and Ideology in the Balinese Gamelan Beleganjur World

MICHAEL B. BAKAN

In the years I lived on the island the air was constantly stirred by musical sounds. At night hills and valleys faintly echoed with the vibrant tones of great bronze gongs. By day drums thundered along the roads to the clash of cymbals as chanting processions of men and women carried offerings to the far-off sea or followed tall cremation towers to the village cremation grounds. (McPhee 1966:3)

Colin McPhee’s evocative portrait of drums thundering along roads to the clash of cymbals in elaborate processions, of vibrant-toned bronze gongs echoing in the night air, gloriously brings to life the sonic universe of the Balinese gamelan beleganjur. In pre-colonial Bali, the powerful sound and rhythmic intensity of processional beleganjur music were integral affective presences in most domains of religious ritual and state ceremony, and also in the contested spaces of inter-kingdom warfare. Gamelan beleganjur means “gamelan of walking warriors” (I Ketut Gedé Asnawa, pers. com. 1992), and in former times a primary task of beleganjur ensembles was to accompany armies into battle, inspiring soldiers to bravery and striking terror in the hearts of their enemies (Willner 1996[1992]:11). With a faint hum of gongs advancing like a distant storm before an explosion of lightning cymbals and thunderous drums, beleganjur heralded the impending doom of battle with foreboding power and force.

Today, beleganjur’s role in Hindu-Balinese religious life remains vital. In the all-important mortuary rituals ngaben (cremation) and memukur (post-cremation purification), processional beleganjur music is indispensable; from grand temple festivals (odalan) to exorcistic rites (mecaru) and majestic ceremonies in honor of the gods and deified ancestors (melis), too,
the functional presence of beleganjur sound is of crucial importance (see Bakan 1993 and in press; see also Eiseeman 1989).

In less direct ways, beleganjur's historical ties to the pageantry of pre-colonial Balinese royal state ceremony survive as well. Today processional beleganjur music is featured in myriad patriotic events dedicated to the celebration of Bali's status as a province of the modern Indonesian nation. In many cases, such events provide new contexts for the expression of beleganjur's historically war-like character in modern, peace-time Indonesian Bali.

Beleganjur contests, or lomba beleganjur, which have swept over the island in just over a decade since the first such event was held in Bali's capital city Denpasar in 1986, have provided the primary opportunities for such expression. The musical style that has arisen in connection with the contests, kreasi beleganjur, is flashy, virtuosic, innovative, and compositionally complex; in these respects, it stands in dramatic contrast to the quintessentially functional kuno (traditional, ancient) beleganjur style from which it derives. The ascend of the kreasi style has propelled the gamelan beleganjur to a position of prominence on the musical landscape of modern Bali, leading to beleganjur's recognition as "one of the arenas of the most intense innovation in Balinese arts in recent years" (Willner 1996[1992]:11). The new style has also motivated international scholarly and commercial interest in an important yet conspicuously neglected aspect of Bali's musical culture.3

The modern beleganjur contest is a symbolic battle of music that conflates the glory of Bali's noble warring past with a present emphasis on cultural representation of the values of Indonesia's New Order (Orde Baru), a regime whose rhetoric of democracy only superficially veils the authoritarian martial command of President Soeharto and his GOLKAR (Golongan Karya) administration.4 Bali's heroic battles of old have become important linking symbols to modern standards of nationalistic Indonesian virtue, and beleganjur has come to figure prominently in this symbolism.

In this article beleganjur's contemporary world will be depicted as a symbolic battlefield where Balinese tradisi (tradition) and Indonesian kenmodern (modernity) alternately clash and form uneasy alliances through contested negotiations over the identity and control of kebudayaan Bali (Balinese culture). On this battlefield of culture and ideology, Balinese people attempting to define and control the expression of their identity through a particular musical medium must contend with both the priorities of their own cultural pasts and the hegemonic dictates of a government-administered agenda of culture-appropriating nationalism wherein, as John Pemberton explains, to a "remarkable extent ... a rhetoric of culture enframes political will, delineates horizons of power" (1994:9).
Beleganjur and its world reflect, embody, and inform many of the central issues, challenges, and problems facing Balinese people in contemporary Indonesia. The music and the contests have become powerful vehicles for negotiating the terms of a (post)modern present against essentialized reconstructions of an idealized past. In the discussion that follows, I will endeavor to shed light on some of the processes and circumstances through which such terms have been negotiated.

Focus and Scope

At the outset, it is important to note that throughout this article my focus is primarily on the views and experiences of certain individuals who occupy professional positions at or near the center of the Balinese arts establishment. All are men with whom I worked closely during 1992 and 1995 field research in Bali, in the city of Denpasar and surrounding regions (in Badung, and to a lesser extent, Gianyar). My principal consultant for the work—the centerpoint of my network of friends, teachers, and colleagues—was composer and ethnomusicologist I Ketut Gedé Asnawa.

The main consultants for this study have all achieved wide recognition and distinction as musical performers and composers (and/or choreographers and dancers). Most belong to the faculties of the government arts conservatories, STSI (Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, Bali’s College of the Arts) and SMKI (Sekolah Menengah Kesenian Indonesia, the Balinese High School of Traditional Performing Arts), or work for other arts-related government bureaus based in the Denpasar area. The majority are graduates of the conservatory system that now employs them. Several have also received graduate degrees (in ethnomusicology, dance ethology, and interdisciplinary arts programs) from universities in the United States or Canada and a number have achieved international reputations as musicians, teachers, and scholars.²

In various capacities—as artists, government administrators, and teachers—such individuals have contributed actively to the construction of a “modern traditional” Balinese musical culture that plays into the negotiations by means of which Balinese society defines itself, both as Balinese and as Indonesian. Modern beleganjur is a product and symbol of this modern traditional Balinese culture; it is also, however, a product and symbol of the creative efforts, values, and priorities of the particular individuals who have been charged with the official task of making and regulating such culture. It is such people who are primarily “represented” here, largely to the exclusion of others (such as beleganjur musicians from outside the Denpasar/Badung region, female musicians, non-musicians belonging to the communities that support beleganjur ensembles, and so on), whose very different
perspectives would surely change the orientation and findings of the study to a significant degree if considered more fully.

This article, in its focus on one musical genre and its emphasis on the viewpoints and experiences of a few representatives of a small, centralized, elite faction within the broader society of Balinese music-makers, is in a sense quite limited in scope. In another sense, however, its reach is rather broad, encompassing a number of fundamental issues that emerge from modern-day Bali’s struggles to define its “culture” within and against a complexity of more or less defined political and ideological parameters.

The Gamelan Beleganjur and Its Music: A Brief Introduction

In its standard form, the gamelan beleganjur is a processional ensemble consisting of a variety of hanging and hand-held gongs, small tuned kettle gongs, eight pairs of crash cymbals, and two large drums; twenty-one musicians (plus eight gong-carriers) are employed (Figure 1). The various instruments may together form an independent ensemble set or may be abstracted from the instrumentarium of a gamelan gong (see Table 1).6

Whether heard in ritual contexts or in the modern kreasi contest style, beleganjur music is almost invariably rooted in a standard formal structure, or tabuh, known as gilak.7 Gilak is defined by an eight-beat gong cycle that

Figure 1. Beleganjur contest at Sanur Beach (Bali, 1995) (Photo by M. Bakan)
Table 1. Standard Instrumentation of the Gamelan Beleganjur

1. kendang lanang: male drum
2. kendang wadon: female drum, heavier and lower pitched than lanang
3. cengceng (cengceng kopyak): 8 pairs of crash cymbals; 8 players
4. reyong (bonang): gong-chime comprising 4 small hand-held, bossed kettle gongs; 4 players
5. ponggang: gong-chime comprising 2 medium-sized, hand-held, bossed kettle gongs; 2 players
6. bendê (bebendê): large, sunken-bossed hanging gong
7. kajar or kempluk: medium-sized hand-held gong, sunken-bossed (kajar) or bossed (kempluk)
8. kempli: like kempluk, but larger and lower in pitch
9. kempur: large, bossed hanging gong
10. gong lanang: very large, bossed hanging gong, male
11. gong wadon: largest and lowest-pitched hanging gong, female

normally repeats continuously throughout an entire beleganjur performance event. The particular sequence of gong tones within each cycle represents gilak's colotomic structure, which is outlined in Figure 2.

Each gilak cycle, or gongan, culminates with a stroke on one of the two gong ageng (great gongs), usually the lower-pitched, female gong wadon. The male gong lanang bisects the cycle at its midpoint, while the kempur and kempli subdivide the cycle at a higher rate of rhythmic density. The "omission" of kempur strokes between the main stroke of the gong wadon and that of the gong lanang, which creates a compelling rhythmic asymmetry, ensures the undisturbed resonance of the gong wadon.

The kajar (or the kempluk) provides a steady, eight-beat pulse that essentially coalesces the rhythms of the slower-moving punctuating gongs into a single composite part while serving as a point of reference for the

Figure 2. Basic Colotomic Structure of Gilak

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</tbody>
</table>

K = kajar, Kp = kempli, L = gong lanang, W = gong wadon, P = kempur, (P) = "omitted kempur"
fastest-played, or density referent instruments (see Hood 1971:114-16; Vetter 1981): kendang, reyong, and cengceng. These density referent-level instruments normally share a rate of rhythmic density four times as fast as the kajar’s. They sit at the top level of what may be described as an inverted pyramid of rhythmic activity, with each level of the pyramid representing a doubling or quadrupling of the rhythmic density of the one below it. The full galak beleganjur pyramid can be seen in Figure 3. The isolation of just four parts in Figure 4 makes the pyramidal structure more readily observable.

Located on the same plane of the pyramid as the kajar is the ponggang, which provides the music’s pokok, a two-toned ostinato core melody that repeats every gong cycle. Rapid, four-toned interlocking figurations in the reyong part elaborate the pokok, as in Example 1.

The ponggang and reyong together constitute the entire lagu (melodic) dimension of the music, which features a unique four-tone derivative of the pelog-type saib selisir (selisir scale or mode) heard in its full five-tone version in the gamelan gong kebyar.

Joining the reyong on the uppermost plane of the pyramid are the two kendang, leaders of the ensemble, and the eight cengeceng kopyak, whose interlocking patterns (kilitan) divide a continuous rhythmic stream of sound into between three and eight distinct parts. In contrast to the punctuating gongs and the ponggang, the kendang, cengceng, and reyong parts may enter and exit the musical texture at different points. These instruments alternate between playing either interlocking patterns that fill in the entire rhythmic texture or syncopated unison rhythms, collectively engaging in what Michael Tenzer describes as “...a three-way musical dialogue of commanding power” (1991:97). The complexity of this dialogue in kreas beleganjur—rhythmic, melodic, formal, and stylistic—is what primarily distinguishes the modern contest style from the older traditional forms (for more detailed analyses, see Bakan in press).

Figure 3. Full Inverted Pyramid of Rhythmic Activity (Gilak Beleganjur)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Cengceng</td>
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<td>Reyong</td>
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<td>Bendé</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ponggang</td>
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<td>Kempluk</td>
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</table>
Occasionally adding bursts of improvised rhythm to the musical conversation of kendang, cengceng, and reyong is the clangy-toned bendé (be-bendè), a relatively large sunken-bossed hanging gong played with a hard wooden beater. More often, however, this instrument provides a standard, syncopated, ostinato “counterpoint” rhythm to the underlying gong cycle pattern, as is illustrated in Figure 5.

The bendé and kajar, along with the kendang, are the only beleganjur instruments normally played with wooden beaters. The rest are struck with some form of padded or cord-wrapped mallet, with the exception of the cengceng, for which beaters are not used at all, except in experimental contexts. Beleganjur drumming (kendangan) always involves playing in cedangan style, which employs a combination of right hand mallet strokes and left hand palm and finger strokes. The interlocking patterns created by the male (lanang) and female (wadon) drum together produce a composite rhythmic texture characterized by dazzling speed, complexity, and timbral richness.

**Beleganjur in Context: Battles with Spirit Forces**

Despite having been largely neglected in the published scholarly literature, beleganjur is a music of great importance in Balinese ritual and social life. As Tenzer (1991:97) has noted, the gamelan beleganjur “is a fixture in virtually all Balinese processions. It is next to impossible to drive around Bali of an afternoon without encountering at least one of these boisterous marching bands bringing up the rear in a parade of colorfully dressed Ba-
linese." Asnawa goes so far as to claim that beleganjur is the one form of gamelan in the absence of which the religious obligations of a banjar, or Balinese village ward, cannot be met (pers. com. 1992). Regional diversity and the adaptable character of Hindu religious practice in Bali likely encourage exceptions to this “rule”; still, it might reasonably be asserted that the gamelan beleganjur is the lowest common denominator ensemble of banjar-based musical activity in a society where the banjar represents the central axis of a complexly integrated religious/sociopolitical system.

Beleganjur music, then, is an integral component of many facets of Hindu-Balinese religious practice. Whether employed in mortuary rituals, temple festivals, exorcistic purification rites, or other ritual contexts, its “enlivening and protective” powers (DeVale 1990) are central to its functional importance. These capacities are especially crucial in the battles between human and spiritual forces that largely define the terms of ritual activity in Bali. For example, in cremation processions, beleganjur is used not only to dictate the pace of procession and to generate energy and strength for carriers of the heavy cremation tower, but also to aid the soul of the deceased in its battles against adversarial spirit forces. The loud sound of beleganjur functions to fend off meddlesome bhutas and leyaks, spirit beings whose evil intentions might otherwise interfere with the ascent of departed souls to a place of peace and safety where they will await reincarnation. The energetic qualities of the music’s sound also provide a source of direct strength and inspiration to the departing soul itself, assisting on its perilous journey.

Beleganjur’s role in the procession at all of these functional levels is especially crucial at crossroads along the procession route, where evil spirits are believed to congregate with the greatest density. At such points, beleganjur music issues forth with unusually high energy and intensity as the tower is spun quickly around three times. The spinning of the tower serves two purposes: first, it confuses the bhutas and leyaks, who can only travel in straight lines; and second, it disorients the still-unliberated soul of the deceased, who is thus prevented from returning to the native banjar and haunting relatives and other villagers.

**Battleground #1: A Clash of Old and New**

In ritual contexts such as cremation processions, the tempo, form, mood, and character of beleganjur music have traditionally been dictated
almost exclusively by contextual demands. Prior to the emergence of contest-style kreasi beleganjur in 1986, the flexible, open-ended structural design of the basic gilak beleganjur form facilitated spontaneous invention of musical "arrangements" that had the inherent capacity to be shifted and altered immediately in accordance with functional requirements of a particular ritual event. The lead drummer of the ensemble, the juru kendang lanang, was charged with the task of translating musical needs into beleganjur sound. If the energy or pace of the procession lagged, he directed the ensemble to play at a faster tempo and with increased intensity; if the overall mood of the event seemed anxious and unsettled, he pulled the tempo back and the dynamic level down; if the tower-carriers appeared to be tiring under their heavy burden as they entered a crossroads, he cued a malpal passage, in which the motoric drive of drum and cymbal parts prompted a momentary rush of adrenaline for the physically challenging task at hand. Quality of musical performance was judged almost entirely in terms of the meeting of specific, context-determined needs, whether of human or spirit origin. Other criteria, such as virtuosity, musical originality, and compositional development, had little real relevance beyond potentially contributing to functional efficacy (Asnawa, pers. com. 1992).

Since the advent of kreasi style, however, new musical realities have transformed ritual spaces into grounds upon which are staged new forms of battle beyond the age-old encounters with evil spirits. In endeavoring to meet their religious obligations, contemporary Balinese must contend not only with spirit world antagonists, but also with the compromising forces of musical modernity. The immense popularity of the new kreasi style that has issued in the wake of the beleganjur contest phenomenon, especially among the teenage boys and young men who dominate the competitive beleganjur performance sphere, has had a sweeping impact on beleganjur performance in most every domain. This impact has certainly been greatest in Denpasar and in other heavily-populated areas, where beleganjur contests are extremely popular, but its significance is by no means limited to these areas. Today, even in sacred ritual contexts, opportunities to hear beleganjur played in a style that does not bear the distinctive mark of kreasi—where virtuosity and musical originality are prized and featured in musical arrangements whose forms are relatively inflexible—are rare; in Denpasar, they are almost non-existent. The malleable, function-driven traditional approach that formerly defined the compositional structuring of beleganjur performance events appears to have been rendered all but extinct in the city (Asnawa, pers. com. 1992).

The modern style of beleganjur music heard today during cremation processions and in other religious contexts is often conspicuously at odds with its environment. A portion of a procession calling for calmness and tranquility may be disrupted by loud and frantically fast kreasi pyrotechnics,
while a sudden need for music of energetic intensity may be thwarted by
the arrival of a slow, lyrical passage of a fixed, kreasi-style arrangement. Even
where the degree of inappropriateness is less severe, the fundamental in-
congruity between largely fixed begelanjur forms that have been designed
for contest performance and traditional religious settings demanding a sub-
tly complex and ever-changing interplay between music and its surround-
ing ritual activities remains detrimental to the proper achievement of reli-
gious purposes.

For many older Balinese, including composer I Wayan Beratha, now in
his mid-seventies, the potential consequences of this situation are alarm-
ing. During his long and illustrious career, Beratha has contributed prof-
doundly to the revolutionizing of Balinese music through his innovations
in gong kebyar and many other genres. On account of his central involve-
ment in the establishment and development of the Balinese arts conserva-
tories and other major cultural institutions such as the Bali Arts Festival—
and his more recent activities as a senior advisor in the development of an
array of neo-traditional genres, including kreasi begelanjur and kreasi ke-
lambatan—Beratha has also been a significant force in the shaping and
defining of Bali’s modern traditional culture more broadly. He has thus
promoted and actively contributed to the kinds of musical and cultural
change that have given rise to forms such as kreasi begelanjur for decades,
but he sees great danger in the misappropriation of new modes of expres-
sion for old purposes.

“Each type of ceremony has its own unique character, and the music
of the begelanjur should reflect that character,” Beratha explained to me
in 1992. “The mood for the cremation procession is one thing; for the tem-
pie festival, it is something else. Very holy processions like melis are dif-
ferent again. The style of the music needs to be different for each of these,
but nowadays, because [begelanjur groups] learn kreasi style, they always
use it, even though it is usually not right. We are afraid of this! Young peo-
ple like the strong and energetic character of the new style. They get car-
ried away and forget where they are. For example, in the melis [ceremo-
ny], at the same time as the begelanjur is playing we also have singing of
kidung (sacred verses). The begelanjur should be soft and calm to go along
with the kidung, but very often now, it is not. They play loud and fast and
that is not right. It is dangerous.”

So why have measures not been taken to protect against the potential
consequences of the inappropriate employment of kreasi style? “It is a
difficult question [to answer],” states Beratha. “The young people are very
excited by the new begelanjur music. They like to play it very much, and
this is good, because it means that they stay interested in the Balinese cul-
ture instead of just going to the discos and things like that. If we try to tell
them not to play their style, maybe they will not want to play any more for the ceremonies. We cannot take that chance. Even if we are not so happy with how they play the beleganjur all the time, and even if we are afraid that the wrong way of playing may be bad for the ceremony, it is still better than if they decide not to play. That would be worse. If they are staying involved with the traditions, we do not want to discourage them. That is the most important thing."

Beratha’s sentiments are shared by younger musical luminaries as well. The very individuals who pioneered kreasi beleganjur and helped to establish its prominence in the modern Balinese musicscape are often among the harshest critics of the new style’s indiscriminate use in ritual settings. Composer and kreasi beleganjur innovator I Komang Astita, some thirty years Beratha’s junior, is a case in point. "If a beleganjur group has worked up a piece in kreasi style," states Astita, "they will play in that style no matter what. The young people do not seem to care if this sets the wrong mood for the ceremony. The new style is exciting for them, so they want to play it all the time" (pers. com. 1992).

Inappropriate use of kreasi beleganjur style in religious contexts by the young musicians who dominate the beleganjur performance world is a source of major concern—even fear—for middle-aged and older Balinese Hindus. Critics such as Beratha and Astita warn that employment of modern-style music in ritual situations mitigates against the likelihood of the rituals achieving their desired spiritual ends (see also Herbst 1997:121-33). As a result, the delicate and vulnerable balance between human and spiritual forces essential to human survival may be threatened.

Nonetheless, at least in Denpasar, the wholesale misappropriation of kreasi style into ritualistic settings is generally tolerated in the interest of promoting an embracing of kebudayaan tradisional (traditional culture) by Balinese youth. Paradoxically, this compromising concession to modernity is seen as a necessary sacrifice to the continuance of Hindu-Balinese religious practices and values. Where the sustenance of traditional life is concerned, members of the Balinese establishment appear to be more comfortable relying on the benevolence of supernatural powers than wagering against the capricious fancies of youth in a rapidly acculturating society. Beleganjur contests and the flashy musical style of kreasi beleganjur have galvanized youth interest in tradisi, and this apparently outweighs all other considerations in the eyes of many Balinese, especially in urban centers such as Denpasar and heavily-touristed areas such as Kuta, Sanur, and Ubud, where alternative possibilities to conventional Balinese lifeways are most readily available to young people.

A clear indication of kreasi beleganjur’s perceived social value as a catalyst for the revitalization of youth interest in tradisi is evident in the fol-
Following anecdote told to me by I Wayan Rai. Rai is a highly respected composer and STSI faculty member who has been a major figure in the "cultural renaissance" of his native Ubud. In 1989, he produced Ubud's first belegenjur contest and organized a group from his own banjar to compete in the event. One of his nephews was a key member of that ensemble.

"When he was younger, he was quite a bad boy," Rai told me in 1992, referring to his nephew. "He would always get in trouble. All he wanted to do was ride his motorcycle and go to [the] disco. When I began to organize the first belegenjur contest for Ubud in 1989, I thought maybe I could get him involved, so I put him in our banjar's group. It was amazing. Right away, he really loved the belegenjur. He even got some friends to come. 'Put away the motorcycles and let's play,' he would tell them. Every day, he would go to the balé banjar [community center] to practice with the group. He would even come to the village's religious ceremonies so that he could play belegenjur. Playing in the contest was very exciting for him, and then, because the group had success, he got to play on television. We are so pleased. Instead of being 'motorcycle boy,' now he is 'belegenjur boy.' This is why belegenjur and the contests are so important. To make the young people interested in the traditional culture you have to make a program for them. You have to make particular events for them to practice for where they get to do things that they really like, things that make them excited. Belegenjur is very good that way."

The terms and priorities of Balinese cultural tradition and modernity are complexly negotiated in belegenjur's world. As we shall now explore, the mediation of Balinese cultural expression and Indonesian national ideology that defines the competitive belegenjur sphere is equally complex.

**A Conflation of Symbols: Kreasi Belegenjur and the Modern Contest Tradition**

On 20 September 1906 the Balinese kingdom of Badung fell to invading Dutch armies in an act of *puputan*. The *Puputan Badung* was among the earliest and most historically significant of a series of gruesome encounters between Balinese kingdoms and overpowering colonial military forces that occurred during the Dutch takeover of Bali between 1906 and 1908 (see Wiener 1995, Vickers 1989). The historian Willard Hanna offers a vivid recounting of this epoch-defining moment in Bali's history:

The Dutch troops, marching in orderly ranks along a long roadway, walled on either side, which led to the royal palace, were not surprised to find the town apparently deserted and flames and smoke rising over the puri [palace], the most disquieting factor being the sound of the wild beating of drums within their palace walls. As they drew closer, they observed a strange, silent procession emerging from the main gate of the puri. It was led by the Radja himself,
seated in his state palanquin carried by four bearers, dressed in white cremation garments but splendidly bejeweled and armed with a magnificent kris [sacred dagger]. The Radja was followed by the officials of his court, the armed guards, the priests, his wives, his children, and his retainers, likewise dressed in white, flowers in their hair, many of them almost as richly ornamented and as splendidly armed as the Radja himself.

One hundred paces from the startled Dutch, the Radja halted his bearers, stepped from his palanquin, gave the signal, and the ghastly ceremony began. A priest plunged his dagger into the Radja’s breast, and others of the company began turning their daggers upon themselves or upon one another. The Dutch troops, startled into action by a stray gunshot and reacting to attack by lance and spear, directed rifle and even artillery fire into the surging crowd. Some of the women mockingly threw jewels and gold to the soldiers, and as more and more persons kept emerging from the palace gate, the mounds of corpses rose higher and higher. Soon to the scene of carnage was added the spectacle of looting as the soldiers stripped the valuables from the corpses and then set themselves to sacking the palace ruins. It was a slaughter and self-slaughter of the innocents and a plundering of the dead made all the more appalling by reason of its recurrence that same afternoon in nearby Pematutan, a minor appendage of Badung (Hanna 1976:73).

The historic site of the Puputan Badung now sits in bustling downtown Denpasar, where each year the event is commemorated in a variety of parades, ceremonies, and contests held on “Puputan Day” (20 September) and during the weeks leading up to it. The Puputan Badung is memorialized as a defining moment of heroic martyrdom, the dominant symbol of a glorious past, and an inspiration for present and future challenges. Its commemorative celebrations conflate past, present, and future through their symbols and rhetoric. The Puputan itself and the “Golden Age” of Balinese monarchies that died with it are venerated amid celebration of the triumphs of the Indonesian revolution, national independence, and the New Order regime.

In 1986, a new type of event, a beleganjur contest, was added to the program of Puputan Week events. It was proposed and administered by the now-defunct Badung Young Artists’ Organization, HSR, with the aid of strong government endorsement.

In late July, HSR sent out notices to each of the hundreds of banjars in the Denpasar/Badung area, notifying them of the upcoming beleganjur contest and inviting them to register a group in the event. The notices were sent to the attention of two types of inter-related banjar organizations: the sekebe gong, or gamelan clubs, and the sekebe teruna, or male youth clubs, composed of unmarried young men of the banjar. Implicit in the tone of the invitations was an expectation that the competing beleganjur groups would be composed primarily, if not exclusively, of young male musicians in their teens and early twenties. A new, “elevated” beleganjur musical style,
designed to highlight the inherent masculinity and martally heroic spirit of beleganjur, was essentially prescribed in the Kreteria Lomba (Contest Criteria) that accompanied each invitation. Gaya laki-laki (male energy/style) and kepablawanan (heroic character) were to be featured explicitly in all aspects of performance, and were to be enhanced by the display of a variety of “heroic” items, from sacred daggers (kris) to the modern Indonesian flag.

"On the [flag],” Beratha explained to me during a 1992 interview, “red stands for bravery, strength, and courage; white symbolizes holiness and virtue. Thus, as Indonesians, we must always be brave and courageous in service of the righteous cause. This is to be kepablawanan. As Balinese, the same is true, and that is why the Puputan Badung is so important to us. The flag and the Puputan mean the same thing, and so does beleganjur. The music, the choreography, the feeling, the presentation—everything should be kepahlawanan. This is most important.” According to Beratha, the achievement of that proper kepahlawanan spirit issues directly from the intensity of the music’s predominant energy, gaya laki-laki: “The character of beleganjur is very appealing to [male] youth. Playing the music is a good way for them to express their feelings and use their gaya. It is very fitting for them. This is why the kreasi style became popular so quickly from the outset.”

Kreasi beleganjur’s popularity from the outset emerged within the context of a newly-devised beleganjur music that, while firmly tied to its ancient roots, departed from those roots in significant ways. Kreasi beleganjur as a distinctive genre was prescriptively invented in the original Kreteria Lomba prior to its realization as a musical phenomenon per se. This can be seen on at least three levels. First, the Kreteria specified that musical creativity and virtuosity would figure centrally in the evaluation of contest performances, with the result that traditional beleganjur style underwent a process of “kebyarization,” in which older functional musical priorities gave way to contrasting new aesthetic/demonstrative priorities closely related to those of the popular modern gong kebyar style of Balinese gamelan. Second, at a basic formal level, the Kreteria’s prescription of “pengawak” sections—that is, musically distinct slow movements—rafted a more “advanced” (structurally complex) type of musical design onto the basic traditional style. Third, the Kreteria’s specification that the contest’s musical performances were to be enhanced by the incorporation of choreographed gerak (movement)—flashy dance-like sequences executed by the musicians as they played—prescriptively ensured that the kreasi version of beleganjur would be treated as a musical object of aesthetic interest, as opposed to a functional component of ritual life essentially devoid of independent aesthetic significance.
With conscious intent, then, kreasi beleganjur was constructed on paper before emerging as a musical genre in sound. Its musical style, mode of performance, and ethos were first conceived by a committee of composers/cultural architects guided not only by aesthetic ideals but also by specific ideological goals that were subsumed under the rubric of a rhetoric of kebudayaan. The gamelan beleganjur's innate power as a symbol of noble war and death in an idealized Balinese past allowed for its smooth integration into the projected image of history already present in the Puputan Badung's commemorative bricolage; moreover, beleganjur music enhanced the potency of this image. Through the vehicle of the contest, beleganjur was drafted into the service of an essentialized Balinese history, and likewise into the service of the related domains of kebudayaan Bali and tradisi Bali. At the same time, through its transformation into a kreasi form, beleganjur became a symbol of progress.

The prescription implicit in the Kreteria Lomba worked; the original 1986 contest was a great success. Lomba Beleganjur Puputan Badung (LBPB) became an annual event, which from 1987 on came under the direct administrative control of the Badung bureau of the Indonesian government's Department of Education and Culture. The 1986 original also fostered the growth of a Bali-wide beleganjur contest phenomenon, serving as the model for numerous other lombas. By the early 1990s, lomba beleganjur was firmly entrenched as a major cultural institution throughout Bali, with government-sponsored contests being held in every region of the province, from remote mountain villages to large urban centers. The majority of these contests were presented in connection with local, regional, or national patriotic occasions, the greatest concentration occurring in the weeks leading up to Indonesian Independence Day on 17 August. A number of commercial kreasi beleganjur recordings, most featuring the championship groups of larger contests, were released on local cassette labels. Beginning in 1990, island-wide beleganjur contests featuring the champions of regional competitions from all over Bali entered onto the scene as well.

The ascent of kreasi beleganjur has continued through the 1990s. The phenomenon has brought a fresh, vital, exciting, and prominent new voice of musical expression to Bali's already abundantly rich musical life. It has also provided a new lens through which to view the complex processes involved in the construction and negotiation of kebudayaan Bali.

Culturally-Elevated Authenticity

The mass popular appeal of the new beleganjur style in Bali may be primarily attributable to the attractions of its music and choreography, or
to the great excitement generated by beleganjur contest events. As I will argue in this section, however, the prominent stature kreasi beleganjur has achieved as a government-sanctioned symbol of kebudayaan Bali—as an emblem of officialized culture—has had more to do with political postures than aesthetic attributes. In particular, the genre’s successful synthesis of tradisional and modern cultural ideals has rendered it a powerful vehicle for the promotion of New Order ideology.

Christopher Waterman writes of how music, through its power as a form of metaphor, “may help to transform the world by sustaining the illusion that it remains, in some deep and essential sense, the same” (1990:228). This particular aspect of music’s semiotic power, which has been understood and appreciated not just by ethnomusicologists but by musicians and politicians throughout the world and throughout history, has much significance relative to a consideration of kreasi beleganjur’s employment as a medium of political expression in modern Indonesia.

In its advocacy and sponsorship of kreasi beleganjur and a host of other neo-traditional musical genres known collectively as kreasi forms, the Indonesian government, largely through the agency of its Balinese cultural emissaries in the Department of Education and Culture and other administrative bureaus, has tapped into Bali’s rich musical heritage as source material for its broad-based, multi-leveled public construction of Indonesia as the nation of “unity in diversity.” Unity in Diversity, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, is the national motto of Indonesia; it is the semantic cornerstone of an ideology that presents an idealized vision of bountiful cultural diversity as the source of Indonesia’s unity and strength (see, for example, Dahlan and Walcan 1995).

Each cultural group within the multi-ethnic national fabric is officially encouraged to contribute to the betterment of the nation by maintaining its own distinctive tradisi while developing them in accordance with national goals. Development equates with improvement; any object of culture, be it a musical genre such as beleganjur or an ancient form of recited poetic verse, is, as R. Anderson Sutton explains, viewed as raw material in need of “upgrading” from “communal rural genre to packageable artistic product.” There is a “recurring theme in policy statements . . . that the arts as they currently exist are imperfect, in need of improvement, and can serve at best as the foundation for something new” (1991:189).

“Development, expansion, and preservation of traditional arts” is the slogan used to promote the idealized transformation of localized, pre-national cultural worlds of particular Indonesian islands into effectively contributing “diversities” within the unified Indonesian state. In a classic formulation of hegemonic order, almost any form of local cultural expression existing within the collective cultural diversity is allowed to survive and
encouraged to thrive, but only so long as it remains true to an essentialized vision of the source of its origin, yet malleable to the authoritarian will of Indonesian unity.

The locating of preservation at the end of this tripartite cultural improvement model is likely more than coincidental. Unity is the hinge upon which the door of Indonesia's celebrated cultural diversity swings open and shut. Groups that succeed in molding the products of their own cultural legacies into expressive genres that conform to the empowered elite's publicized image of the national culture garner material and symbolic rewards of government sponsorship and endorsement: prizes, certificates, representation at official state functions, and often money as well. Through the vehicles of their invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), such groups are granted the privilege of representing themselves not just as Balinese, Javanese, Sumbawans, or what have you, but as model Indonesians in a more global sense. They are the select Diversities chosen to symbolize Unity: the diverse Others who manifest the unity of the Indonesian collective Self. The stages upon which they perform may be local, national, or even international, but however modest or grand the scale, a status is accrued that sets the selected individual, group, village, region, or even entire province (for example, Bali) on a pedestal above its peers.

The efforts undertaken by agents of particular identified ethnic or cultural groups to develop, expand, and preserve specific traditional arts occur within the context of a larger political agenda of cultural nationalism. To meet this agenda's ideological challenges, an expressive form must remain grounded in the soil of a localized, historicized cultural tradition while reaching forward to celebrate and embrace the nationalistic values and priorities of a putatively modern, progressive Indonesia. Within this formula for successful cultural nationalism lies the implicit promise of a transformed (modern) world that remains in some deep and essential sense the same (traditional), at least for those clever enough to work within the parameters of the dominant ideology. Mastery of the cultural nationalism agenda in artistic expressions of kebudayaan depends upon the achievement of what can perhaps best be described as culturally-elevated authenticity, a term whose oxymoronic character I invoke here intentionally.

Bali's architects of modern kebudayaan tradisional have achieved great success in the arena of culturally-elevated authenticity. Many of the Balinese "elevated" traditional arts are important components of a more broadly constructed Indonesian kebudayaan, an essentialized "national culture" employed by government and corporate interests (often one and the same thing) in the marketing of Indonesia both to the rest of the world and to itself. As President Soeharto and his subordinates in the predominantly Javanese power elite well understand, Indonesia's present and future politi-
cal and economic good fortune—both internally and internationally—rely to a great extent on the positive public image of “Indonesian culture,” and that image, in turn, relies largely on the allure of kebudayaan Bali. Politically-fostered and publicly-imagined realizations of “Indonesia” are as closely tied to Bali as Bali’s own natural resources (beautiful terraced rice paddies, beautiful beaches, beautiful dancers) are to her cultural resources (beautiful music, dance, theater, art, and rituals) in the constructed versions of such imagined realizations.

Kreasi Beleganjur on the Battlefields of Culture

As potent expressions of culturally-elevated authenticity, the neo-traditional kreasi genres of Balinese gamelan music, such as kreasi beleganjur, have made major contributions to the constructed Indonesia of cultural nationalism. Kreasi beleganjur presents a convincingly modern yet profoundly traditional image of kebudayaan Bali, a cultural synthesis through which Balinese display themselves celebrating the integrity and meaningfulness of their own legacy while subscribing to the greater interests of the Indonesian state.

But the “well-wrought appearance of things” (Geertz 1973:400) normally manifest in the kreasi beleganjur world is not immune to problems. There are cracks beneath the smooth surface; there have been moments of breakdown when local cultural and national ideological priorities have failed to mesh, or even to meet halfway. At such moments, New Order authoritarian tendencies and the regime’s tremendous investment in kebudayaan as a medium for the enforcement of ideological will have on occasion inspired strong actions on the part of government representatives, actions seemingly undertaken with the intent of restricting and/or manipulating the political messages of beleganjur’s cultural expression.

As Clifford Geertz has noted, in Indonesian politics “A sharp distinction is made, propagated, and indeed enforced between the realm of ‘custom’ (folkslore, faith, costume, art), where variation is tolerated, even celebrated as a kind of spiritual richness, and that of the struggle for power, where any intrusion of such matters in any form at all is feared as a prelude to general upheaval” (1990:79). Kreasi beleganjur’s political value to New Order agendas is premised on its perception by the Balinese public as an apolitical product of kebudayaan. The genre’s proper political function is to make the existing hegemonic order appear to be a natural extension of local cultural interests, that is, to culturalize politics; its subversive potential, however, is to counter and challenge the government’s officially sanctioned image of the mutuality of indigenous Balinese values and New Order ideology, that is, to politicize culture. From the Indonesian govern-
ment's point of view, culturalization must be encouraged and implemented, while politicization must be systematically suppressed.

The remainder of this article will be devoted to an investigation of what happens when Balinese cultural expression and Indonesian political agendas fall out of step with one another on the battlegrounds of beleganjur's modern world. This matter will be explored through an examination of three situations in which the desired synthesis of local Balinese values and national Indonesian interests usually attributed to kreasi beleganjur was not achieved. The particular conditions, circumstances, issues, and outcomes emerging from the three situations examined vary greatly. In all three, however, the following features are evident: (1) there is a breaking down of order that throws tradisional Balinese and modern Indonesian priorities into confrontation with one another; (2) this breakdown either inspires or is initiated by some action on the part of government representatives, one that is undertaken with the apparent intent of forcibly molding modern beleganjur realities into the casts of propagated New Order ideals, thus ensuring the enhancement and/or protection of the existing order of power; and (3) individuals occupying prominent positions in the Balinese arts establishment (as defined at the outset of this article) are implicated in the struggle in one manner or another, and it is their perspectives that mainly shape the focus and interpretation of the discussion.

Battleground #2: Crossing the Line

Beyond technical competence and the proper evocation of "authenticity," a certain quality of creative daring tends to distinguish championship caliber beleganjur performances from the rest. The creative spark of champions is expressed in the language of gaya laki-laki, youthful masculine energy replete with both the courageous spirit of the idealized warrior and the mischievous irreverence of the stereotypical young male. These alternate aspects of laki-laki character play off of one another in the best beleganjur performances, the earnest expression of heroic virtue finding balance in creative moments of humorous display and light satire. Groups who achieve the right mix are favored by audiences and judges alike, but the line separating clever originality from unacceptable insubordination is a fine one, and those who cross it create problems both for themselves and the contest adjudicators.

Such problems are perhaps most likely to arise in relation to the performance and assessment of gerak, the elaborate choreographed sequences that set beleganjur music in physical motion. Gerak is a very important component of the contest beleganjur aesthetic. It is "the physical indication of how well the musicians feel the music," and "should have a feeling
of naturalness, of having come out of the music" (Rai, pers. com. 1992). It is also the domain of beleganjur performance in which the more humorous, brazen aspect of gaya laki-laki tends to become most clearly manifest.

The prescribed purposes of gerak are, first, to animate the kepahlawan-an spirit of the music, and second, to enhance the spectacle and excitement of the musical performance. The majority of gerak sequences are devoted to the production of rather serious-minded symbolic images of heroic, militaristic actions befitting beleganjur's overarching heroic character. Such sequences bear a close resemblance to (and may in fact be derived from in some instances) the stylized army-like formations of certain ancient ritual dances, especially Baris Gedé, in which martial movements and war cries figure prominently in a ritualized representation of royal Balinese armies of bygone eras (see Bandem and deBoer 1995: 18–21).

Most active in the choreography are the cengceng players. Swinging and twirling their cymbals through the air, moving quickly from one formation to another, forming a ring and circling around the two drummers at its center, and clashing cymbals with their neighbors, the eight juru cengceng engage in carefully coordinated sequences of energetic movements, poses, and stances intended to replicate the battle-like postures and actions of noble warriors, from swashbuckling to martial arts maneuvers.

While the heroic grandeur of kepahlawanan typically predominates in gerak, lighter subtexts may emerge. These may be satirical, comical, or topical. Sexually suggestive antics—subtle and not-so-subtle—may be featured: pelvic thrusts and gyrations, protruding backsides turned towards the audience, and playful caricatures of legendary nobles and warriors are used to poke fun at the lofty conventions and ideals of more standard kepahlawanan characterizations. A certain latitude is allowed for the "beleganjur boys" to have fun (such humorous antics are not present in the performances of women's beleganjur groups), showing off a bit for their male peers and female admirers and acting out in ways that run counter to the dominant sentiments of beleganjur's more serious symbolic images.

Such exhibitionism is understood as a natural product of gaya laki-laki, of the exuberance and playful charm of teenage boys and young bachelors. Furthermore, it is consistent with a broad tradition of satirical, sexual innuendo-laden "play-within-a-play" dramatic conventions found in many Balinese dance and theatrical genres (see Bandem and deBoer 1995). Employed judiciously, the irreverently humorous gerak routines can improve a group's chances of success in a beleganjur contest; employed indiscriminately, however, they can lead to serious consequences. An affront to the integrity of kreasi beleganjur implies an affront to the dignity of its kepahlawan ideals; and since kepahlawanan stands in reverence of both the noble past of Bali and, most critically, the exalted present of New Order
Indonesia (where nationalist political priorities dictate that a tight clamp be kept on public license for “satirical commentary” of any kind), mockery of kepahlawanan in any aspect of performance transcends aesthetic concerns and enters into the realm of immorality. A contest jury’s inference of a competing sekhe’s deliberate mockery of kepahlawanan ideals may lead to either overt or covert disciplinary actions.

Whether full-time government employees (most often the case) or government-appointed freelancers, beleganjur contest judges, at least in most major competitions, are assigned agents of cultural nationalism. As such, they are expected to be guided in their assessments of competing groups by the official premise that expressions of kebudayaan should always remain separate from expressions of *politik* (“politics”), a word “marked by a sinister tonality” in the Indonesian language (Pemberton 1994:4). As the following account illustrates, locating the moral limits of aesthetic expression, and the closely related political limits of cultural expression, can present problematic challenges of interpretation and negotiation.

Following a major lomba beleganjur in Denpasar in 1992, I was invited to a meeting of the contest adjudication committee by my friend Pak (a term of respect) “Gambir,” a member of the jury.¹ The purpose of the meeting was to determine the official outcome of the contest. At the beginning of the session, the raw score grades submitted by Gambir and his fourteen jury colleagues were tabulated. It was announced by the jury chairman that the groups from the banjars of “Hijau,” “Kuning,” and “Ungu” had finished in first, second, and third place, respectively. The floor was then opened for questions and comments.

At this point, Pak “Bundaran,” a senior member of the committee, stood up, cleared his throat, and announced that while he accorded with the rankings of the first- and third-place groups, he was disturbed by the prospect of Kuning being honored as *Juara II* (second-place champion). The group had certainly earned its high ranking on the basis of its musical merit, he explained, but its gerak presentation had been unacceptably *porno* (pornographic). Their lewd antics had mocked the essential spirit of kepahlawanan and thus of all things virtuous for which it stood, Bundaran claimed. Such mockery was inexcusable. Despite the laudable technical and creative achievements of their performance, Kuning had no rightful place in the championship ranks. Bundaran moved that the group be disqualified on account of the inappropriate, disrespectful character of its performance, a motion that was seconded by Gambir.

There was an awkward silence. Finally, Pak “Ayun,” another senior member of the jury, got up to speak. After graciously acknowledging the importance of Bundaran’s criticisms, he proceeded to argue against their validity. Kuning had perhaps been somewhat “overindulgent”, Ayun admit-
ted, especially in their gerak presentation, but they did not deserve the grave accusation of porno. In support of his assertion, Ayun pointed to the fact of the jury’s having ranked Kuning Juara II in the first place, asking rhetorically whether this could have happened were the performance in question so blatantly offensive as was now being suggested. The intention of Kuning, he concluded, had not been to tarnish the integrity of the event or its kepahlawan theme. The group’s supposed insubordination was at worst a product of youthful exuberance. A disqualification—even a demotion in the rankings—was uncalled for.

Heated debate ensued for well over an hour, after which time no acceptable solution seemed likely to be forthcoming. Finally, the chairman stepped into the fray with a proposed compromise solution. In his scheme, Kuning would be demoted only slightly, from second- to third-place champion (Juara III), while the original Juara III, Ungu, would be raised to the Juara II position. The standings would otherwise remain unchanged.

After further debate, the chairman’s proposal was eventually accepted and a consensus reached, but with seeming reluctance and discomfort on the part of all concerned. To those who had followed Bundaran and Gambir in supporting the idea of Kuning’s disqualification, the measures taken were apparently insufficient; but to those who had agreed with Ayun that there was not cause for even a demotion, let alone a disqualification, any adjustment at all in the original standings seemed a gratuitous and unnecessary concession.

After the meeting, Gambir drove me home. He was visibly upset at Kuning’s having maintained its standing among the contest’s three juara. The seeche’s loss of only one position in the standings, he asserted, was mere tokenism; it did not address the problem at all. Pak Bundaran was right. The Kuning group had grossly misrepresented kepahlawan and deserved a more severe punishment. The negative implications of their actions extended far beyond the issue of the contest’s integrity; they went beyond the realm of beleganjur altogether. “They have something to say,” complained Gambir, “but what they have to say is inappropriate. This kind of thing is impossible, out of the question, for the beleganjur.”

As he continued to speak, Gambir revealed that for him it was not what Kuning had done but how well they had in fact done it that was so disturbing. The precise execution of their choreography indicated that their disrespectful display was carefully thought out. This was not an instance of a group of over-exuberant teenagers getting a little out of hand, as Ayun had suggested was the case. Rather, it was a willful and deliberate statement, a defiant challenge to the core values of kepahlawan and everything for which they stood. Kuning was exploiting beleganjur, mocking the established order through willful sabotage of an honorable cultural institution,
the lomba beleganjur. Such mockery, Gambir asserted, debased not just the music and the contest but the sanctity of the patriotic historical event commemorated by the lomba and “the honor and dignity of both Balinese culture and the Indonesian nation” as well. The only thing more reprehensible than Kuning’s desecration of kepahlawan ideals, in his opinion, was the jury’s implicit endorsement of it, and in the aftermath of the meeting he expressed annoyance with himself for having ultimately buckled under the pressure of a will for consensus in a difficult situation.

Positioning Gambir’s reactions and comments in relation to current scholarly discourses on Indonesian cultural hegemony engaged earlier in this article, one can infer a frustration on his part with the jury’s failure (and by association, his own) to act responsibly on behalf of New Order imperatives of cultural nationalism. In Gambir’s mind, the jury chairman’s “solution” represented nothing more than a slap on Kuning’s wrist; it did not accord with the gravity of a defiant act whose blatant disregard for moral propriety implied, by extension, a subversive attack on New Order values. The responsible cultural nationalist must recognize challenges to the structures and values of New Order authoritarianism and assure that such challenges remain impossible in “cultural” events such as beleganjur contests. Kebudayaan must be used to mute the expression of dissent, not to provide a forum for its expression, however indirect or benign such expression may appear to some. By New Order standards, the satirical character of Kuning’s performance could be interpreted as a critique of established priorities of culture. Thus, recalling Geertz’s earlier-cited comments, it could also be interpreted as a critique of established priorities of political order, making it categorically unacceptable (1990:79).

As a proponent of the responsible implementation of cultural nationalism, Gambir found the jury’s response to Kuning’s irreverence inadequate at two levels: first, in coming to Kuning’s defense, Ayun and his supporters had either failed to recognize the seriousness of the group’s offense or, even worse, had neglected to acknowledge it; and second, the decision of the jury as a whole to demote the group by just one position in the standings represented a weak concession to compromise, to saving face under awkward circumstances.

In Gambir’s view, he and his peers on the jury had diminished their own integrity, implicitly condoning an insubordinate—and thus politically dangerous—act of cultural expression. Merely through a quality of defiant spirit, culture had become politicized in Kuning’s performance. This disturbed Gambir deeply. Despite their loss of one position in the rankings, Kuning had won this battle, he concluded. Via beleganjur, they had gotten away with the public presentation of a “statement” they should never have been allowed to make in the first place.16
Battleground #3: Custom-Crafted Culture

Consideration of certain other battles fought in the war zones of the beleganjur world moves our gaze upward in the hierarchy of Indonesian cultural-cum-political life. In the account which follows, we see that where the desired “naturalness” of culture’s correspondence to power is not self-perpetuating, political officials may endeavor to enforce naturalness, manipulating the constructed images of culture to insure the closest possible conformity with the New Order’s projected image of itself.

Shortly after my arrival in Bali in June of 1992, I was frustrated to discover that the largest Bali-wide beleganjur contest ever held had taken place just a few weeks earlier. Disappointed at having missed such an important event, I resolved to make do by documenting it as thoroughly as possible after the fact.

It was during an interview with Pak “Bucu,” a prominent Denpasar musician, that I first heard of the contest. I asked him what occasion had inspired the event.

“Oh, it was for the election,” he told me, referring to the recent Indonesian General Election in which Soeharto and GOLKAR had scored the latest in a long series of landslide victories. As part of its May election campaign, Bucu explained, GOLKAR had sponsored a grand beleganjur contest featuring top groups from all over Bali. He had been a member of the contest jury. There had been more groups and bigger prizes than in any previous lomba beleganjur, and the island-wide scope of the event had brought championship groups of district and regional contests from all eight Balinese regencies together in head-to-head competition for the first time.

“So who won?” I asked. Bucu’s answer surprised me.

“I don’t remember,” he said, the uncharacteristic edge in his voice prompting me to wonder whether I had inadvertently said or done something wrong. “Why don’t you ask somebody else about that,” he continued. “Let’s talk about something else.”

A few days later, the subject of the “GOLKAR contest” came up again during an interview with Pak “Julat,” a leading figure in the Balinese arts community and a prominent GOLKAR official. Julat informed me that he had been the chairman of the contest jury, and proudly announced that the group from his own native village, “Kelabu,” had won the championship. I noted this in my journal, along with a wealth of other information about the contest and its outcome that Julat was kind enough to share.

A week later I was enjoying a meal with my friend Pak “Petala,” director of the Banjar “Sirsak” gamelan club in Denpasar. He asked me whether I had heard about the “big beleganjur contest” held during the election campaign. I told him I had, then asked whether his group had competed. He seemed perplexed by the question.
"Of course we competed," he said, seemingly a little agitated. "We won. Didn’t you hear?"

I told him I had heard otherwise, that Julat had told me Kelabu had won. Petala laughed and shook his head. Sirsak had won, not Kelabu, he maintained.

Three days later, I was on my way to a wedding ceremony in Gianyar with Bucu’s brother, Pak Curam. Conversation turned to the subject of beleganjur contests and I asked Curam if he had attended the recent GOLKAR event. He informed me that he had served on the jury.

"Who won that contest anyhow?" I asked. I was completely unprepared for what happened next.

"That contest was just politics, not music!" Curam exclaimed, gesturing angrily with his right hand and nearly causing the car to swerve off the road. "It was not a good contest. I don’t even like to talk about it." He paused, regained his composure, then added quietly, "I think they still don’t know the results." Shaking his head in apparent disgust, Curam fell silent. Startled by the uncharacteristic outburst, I resolved to let the matter drop once and for all.

A month later, however, I was compelled to revisit the GOLKAR contest once again, when Pak GESIT, a music instructor at one of the conservatories, mentioned to me during an interview that the beleganjur group from his native village in northern Bali, "Mangga," had been crowned the contest's champions. This group, I recalled, had been credited as the second-place finishers on Julat’s original list.

What was going on here? How could such a simple question—Who won the contest—yield such a bewildering array of responses? According to Julat, Kelabu had won; Petala insisted that the championship had gone to Sirsak; Bucu claimed not to remember the results, despite having been on the jury; and Curam would have me believe that the outcome had not even been determined yet. Now, here was Gesit stating in no uncertain terms that Mangga had been victorious.

"So Mangga won the contest?" I asked Pak Gesit incredulously. He nodded. "What about Sirsak? Where did they finish?" I asked. There was an awkward pause.

"Well, they also placed first," Gesit finally responded.

"So it was a tie?"

"Not exactly."

"Then how were there two first-place champions?"

Gesit shifted and fidgeted. "Well, you see," he began hesitantly, "there were actually three champions. The contest, he went on to explain, had consisted of three separate sub-contests, with North, East, and West Bali, respectively, represented. Mangga had won the North, Sirsak the West.
Putting the pieces of the puzzle together quickly in my mind, I determined that Kelabu must have won the East. If so, all the troublesome contradictions of my data would be resolved. All versions of the contest results presented—Julat’s, Petala’s, and Gesit’s—would be revealed as equally (that is, partially) “true.” I surmised that the different versions of the contest results constructed all followed a consistent pattern: acknowledge one champion—that of the reporter’s native village—and omit mention of the other two. This was a seemingly simple method of privileging the “home team” and highlighting its accomplishments, a selective and strategic approach to reading and accounting for the actual facts of the contest’s outcome. As David Harmosh has observed, such compromises—where several things are simultaneously true and no one is telling “the truth”—occur frequently in Bali (pers. com. 1997). (One need look no further than the multiple, often profoundly different accounts of the origins of kecak or gong kebyar for evidence of this). Things were finally starting to make sense. Fully anticipating being able to tie up the loose ends of my research data on the Golkar contest, I asked Gesit who had won the East division. I posed the question more as a formality than as a genuine query; after all, I was quite certain of what his answer would be. In fact, I was so certain that I could not resist scribbling “Kelabu” in my notebook even before he replied.

“Logam,” Gesit stated matter-of-factly.

“Logam?” I blurted out, unable to believe what I had just heard.

“Yes,” Gesit confirmed.

Somewhat desperately, I implored Gesit to consider the possibility that his recollection might be inaccurate. I told him of how Pak Julat had listed Kelabu as the contest champion, a designation that made perfect sense provided that Kelabu had at least been a contest champion.

“No,” Gesit replied with firm conviction. “Pak Julat is wrong. He must have forgotten.”

In an instant my new-found optimism, my conviction that I had perhaps finally found the missing piece of information that would solve my dilemma, that would convert chaos into cultural formula, was summarily destroyed. Rather than becoming discouraged, though, I became ever more determined to get to the truth—the single objective truth—of the contest’s outcome. I attempted in vain to obtain permission to see government documents pertaining to the contest. I also pursued a second meeting with Julat—maybe he had just “forgotten” the actual standings, as Gesit suggested—but my telephone calls went unanswered.

Finally, two weeks after my conversation with Gesit, I succeeded in securing an appointment with the ever-busy Julat. He stood up to greet me when I entered his spacious office. I thanked him for taking the time to speak with me, then told him why I had been so persistent in pursuing this
meeting. Since our last interview, I had run into a rash of contradictions relating to the GOLKAR contest, I explained, and now I needed help sorting things out.

I began by asking whether the contest had been, in essence, "three contests in one" rather than a single event; he confirmed that it had.

"So then," I asked, "who were the three first-place champions?"

"Kelabu in the East, Mangga in the North, and Sirsak in the West," he replied without hesitation.

Mangga and Sirsak were thus confirmed as champions, but the Kelabu versus Logam roadblock still stood. Exasperated, I decided to cut to the chase. I confessed that the contest was becoming an albatross around the neck of my study, as there was still one glaringly ill-fitting piece: the discrepancy between his account of the contest's outcome and that of another of my trusted informants, who insisted that Logam, not Kelabu, had won the East division championship. I implored Julat to help me iron out this one remaining wrinkle.

Julat leaned back in his huge reclining chair, locked his thin, elegant hands behind his head, and stared pensively at the ceiling for a moment. Then, quickly and energetically, he snapped forward, pounded his fists on the desk and smiled at me.

"Yes, I can," he said. "You see, officially, Mangga, Sirsak, and Logam were the three Juara I of the contest, but this did not entirely correspond with the standings determined by the jury, which, as you know, I was the chairman of. After the contest, the jury met and decided the winners on the basis of the judge's grades. For the East division, Kelabu was chosen as champion. Logam came in second. I submitted these results to the government officials, who decided to wait until after the results of the election were in, and then to announce the winners of the beleganjur contest at a GOLKAR victory celebration. When the results were finally announced, they turned out to be a bit different than what we had submitted. Logam had been put into first place in the East, and Kelabu knocked down to second place. There were some other changes like this, as well. The reason for the changes had to do with the results of the election. Since GOLKAR had sponsored the contest, they felt that the winners should be groups that represented districts which had given the strongest support to GOLKAR in the election. They consulted the election results for each of the areas represented in the contest and took these into account in assessing the contest standings I had submitted on behalf of the jury. The area represented by the Logam group had given GOLKAR nearly unanimous support, with almost 100% of voters voting for them. Kelabu, on the other hand, came up with only a slim majority vote in favor of GOLKAR. When the [GOLKAR] party officials discovered this, they decided to overturn the jury's decisions
and to give the first prize to Logam instead of Kelabu. Does that answer your question?"

Actually, Julat’s disclosure of government tampering with the contest results answered several questions while raising a number of new ones. What had in actuality taken place seemed quite clear in many respects now: villages represented in the contest who had voted strongly in favor of GOLKAR had been rewarded; those whose support had been weak had been punished.

Likely motivations for the various "versions" of the contest results I had been offered also came into focus in light of Julat’s revelations. For individuals whose villages the adjusted results favored (Petala and Gesit), those "official" results were deemed perfectly fine. For those who did not have a partisan stake in the contest because their villages did not compete—namely, Bucu and Curam—total dissociation from the tainted event was apparently the best option; thus, Bucu “forgot” the results and Curam claimed they were as yet undetermined.

For Julat himself, the situation was the most complicated. Rightfully indignant at the demotion of his village in the contest’s standings on purely political grounds, he endeavored to re-establish integrity in two different ways in the accounts of the contest he provided during our two interviews. In my first conversation with him, Julat constructed the contest’s outcome in a manner that both restored to Kelabu its rightful claim to the championship and eliminated from the picture entirely the manipulation of contest results by government officials. In the second interview, faced with having to either acknowledge that Kelabu had not actually won or expose the politically-motivated foul play that had occurred, Julat took the second option, thereby privileging allegiance to his native village over all other priorities.17

But why had the GOLKAR officials bothered to meddle with the contest in the first place? And what did they achieve by doing so, given that the election had already been won anyhow?

Possible answers to these questions can be found in an analytical consideration of the institution of the General Election itself, perhaps the most revealing symbol of culture enframing political will in the entire Indonesian sphere. As John Pemberton suggests, national elections in New Order Indonesia have been centered far more on ritualizing democratic process than on involving the general populace in a democratic system (1994:5). The goal of elections has been to produce national celebrations of "political stability"—which is generally understood to equate with the unchallengeable and invulnerable dominance of the present political order—rather than to provide the Indonesian public with opportunities to take part in national referendums on how the country should be run and by whom.

With no apparent sense of irony, the General Election is known as Pesta
Démokrasi, that is, "Festival of Democracy"; it is a form of upacara national, or "national ritual" (ibid.). As President Soeharto himself has explained, "With one and only one road already mapped out, why should we then have nine different cars? The General Elections must serve the very purpose for which they are held, that is, to create political stability. Only these kinds of elections are of value to us" (quoted in Schwartz 1994:32).

The designated "car" is Soeharto's own. Elections function to prevent those outside of the Soeharto/GOLKAR circle from gaining access to real power or prominence in the governing of the nation. "Successing"—Pemberton's translation of the Indonesian term mensukseskan—which involves fixing election results or otherwise tampering with and manipulating the electoral process, is a method used to achieve this goal. As Pemberton explains, it is "the government's campaign imperative to mensukseskan the elections (to 'success' them), which means, in essence, to secure a victory already scored" (Pemberton 1994:4-5).

Successing is justified as a means towards the desired end of political stability. That Soeharto and GOLKAR will win is assumed (although occurrences during the recent 1997 General Election campaign suggest that the ground upon which this assumption rests is becoming increasingly shaky). Nonetheless, the margin of victory must be overwhelming to ensure the proper image of political stability; challengers can only be allowed to garner enough electoral support to maintain the public illusion that due democratic process has been served. As Adam Schwarz explains, "If 'only' nine hundred members of the People's Assembly voted for Soeharto... that would imply the existence of another 'power' to whom one hundred members owed their loyalty. This would be seen by Soeharto as a serious blow to his ruling mandate" (1994:46). Mensukseskan practices are enacted precisely to mitigate against such blows.

Successing may be a standard, even acceptable, practice in Indonesian politics. Still, any particular instance of it tends to be undertaken covertly. This appears to have less to do with government concerns over ethics per se than with a fear on the part of officials over possible exposure of poor political performance, or perhaps more accurately, poor performance of politics. In a situation where political stability truly exists, successing is unnecessary. Therefore, an instance of mensukseskan, if brought to public attention, carries with it the inherent danger of becoming a symbol of weakness and vulnerability in the existing structure of power relations.

The decision of government officials to tamper with the results of the 1992 GOLKAR beleganjur contest was clearly made within the context of a larger successing agenda. The original results arrived at by the contest jury were broken; they therefore needed to be fixed. By implicitly equating musical excellence with political virtue—making villages loyal to GOLKAR
into beleganjur champions—the "improved" results were better suited to the projection of the desired image in Indonesia's Festival of Democracy. But given that succeeding inevitably involves risk, it seems reasonable to ask why government officials would have deemed it worthwhile to tamper with something as ostensibly politically benign as a lomba beleganjur at all. The contest, like all such competitions, was essentially a celebration of Unity in Diversity, highlighting the unique character of kebudayaan Bali and the benevolence of a government committed to its support. On the surface, then, public perception of the event's success would seem unrelated to matters of partisan politics, given the purposefully apolitical nature of kebudayaan: its propagated separation from the struggle for power. An exciting, spectacular, well-produced, and well-attended beleganjur contest would have served GOLKAR's purposes adequately, regardless of the political leanings of the villages represented. If a correlation between contest standings and allegiance to GOLKAR were to emerge and could be publicized, so much the better. But why enforce it, especially when doing so might result in embarrassment?

Given the effort and risk involved, GOLKAR's decision to succeed the contest suggests how firmly entrenched cultural events such as lomba beleganjur are in the negotiation of political power, despite official rhetoric to the contrary. For the contest to stand as a cultural symbol of national priorities and ideals was apparently not sufficient; in GOLKAR's view, it had to stand as a microcosmic representation of the established order of power as well. In bending the contest to the dictates of its will, GOLKAR used the event as a lesson in the privileges and consequences of political control at two different levels. To members of the public unaware of their meddling, the GOLKAR officials propagated a hegemonic ideal of distinguished achievement being a natural outcome of loyalty to the power elite, of a world-as-it-should-be vision of a society committed to maintaining the status quo.

Paradoxically, a similar if somewhat more complexly layered message was likely conveyed to those who had knowledge of the politically motivated manipulation of the contest as well. Whether or not this select group was limited to individuals who had served on the contest jury, for those in the know GOLKAR's actions were likely meant to be interpreted not as signs of weakness, but rather, as signs of strength. The succeeding of the contest was a display of power, its arguably gratuitous employment serving to reinforce the premise that loyalty to GOLKAR is prerequisite to success of any kind in New Order Indonesia.

Battleground #4: Gender Bendé

Thus far in this section of the discussion, our focus has been on beleganjur battles fought over the control of kebudayaan Bali, battles in which
tradition was pitted against modernity and local Balinese interests against national Indonesian priorities. While significant as revealing cracks in the normally smooth surface of kreasi beleganjur's promoted ideals, such instances of conflict have not fundamentally challenged the genre's enduring status as a model Balinese symbol of Indonesian cultural nationalism. But a recent development, the advent of women's beleganjur groups, has presented such a challenge, problematizing the political priorities of beleganjur's cultural meaning profoundly and in a very public manner. In terms of issues of cultural convention and national progress, respectively, the act of women playing beleganjur is defiantly un-Balinese, yet quintessentially Indonesian. Women's beleganjur promotes and manifests nationally prescribed values of emansipasi, or women's emancipation, a crucial component of New Order public ideology; but in doing so, it violates the core integrity of beleganjur's character, at least in the view of some Balinese.

The brilliant young kreasi beleganjur composer I Ketut Suandita describes beleganjur as "the most masculine of Balinese genres"; in a similar vein, Wayan Beratha asserts that "Beleganjur is music for men, not for women." A broadly-held presumption of the music's essentially masculine character appears to have precluded even the thought of an entity such as "women's beleganjur" until quite recently. In a series of interviews conducted in Bali in 1992, I asked several leading beleganjur authorities (all male)—including Beratha, Asnawa, and I Nyoman Rembang—whether the growing popularity and prominence of women's gong kebyar performance organizations might signal the possible future emergence of women's beleganjur groups as well.18 Without exception, I was told that my speculations were preposterous, that even the notion of "women's beleganjur" was absurd.

Yet by 1994 beleganjur wanita—women's beleganjur—was a reality. In that year, the first performance of an all-women's beleganjur group was presented on the premiere public stage of kebudayaan Bali: the opening parade of the annual Bali Arts Festival (Pesta Kesetian Bali). The ensemble featured consisted of female employees of the Badung government. The following year, the parade again commenced with a beleganjur wanita performance, this time by a group representing the city government of Denpasar (see below). By 1996, additional women's groups, most of them offshoots of kebyar clubs, had been formed in several areas, including Kuta, Pengosekan, and Bitra.

As Sarah Willner has observed, "more and more gamelan wanita are playing beleganjur." She adds that "This development is an inroad into more traditionally masculine territory." (1996 [1992]:11). The assessment is accurate, but beleganjur wanita's inroad into—perhaps more accurately invasion of—masculine musical territory has deeper implications than Willner's statement would seem to suggest.
In contrast to men's kreasi beleganjur, women's beleganjur basically inverts the expected mutuality of Balinese cultural expression and Indonesian cultural nationalism, "deconstructing" beleganjur's foundational identification with Balinese maleness. In beleganjur wanita, the basic character of beleganjur music has been exploited for the sake of creating a startlingly unconventional women's performance medium. Here Balinese tradition and Indonesian modernity do not blend but rather clash, and it is from the very awkwardness of their conspicuous juxtaposition that the symbolic power of women's beleganjur in fact emerges.

The spectacle of women playing beleganjur is provocative, even disorienting, for many Balinese, women and men alike. "We have a word, soleh, meaning 'strange,'" explains I Wayan Dibia. "Sometimes things that are soleh, like women's beleganjur, are used to attract people's attention. It's something unusual so people will take notice" (pers. com. 1995). Belaganjur wanita is a form in which expectations are manipulated for effect; it powerfully symbolizes the government's idealized vision of emansipasi, while defying conventional Balinese cultural logic. In women's beleganjur, the integrity of local tradition does not align with, but rather surrenders to, the nation's "progress." It is a phenomenon that does not belong to Bali's pre-modern past, and it is for this very reason that it serves so powerfully—and controversially—as a symbol of Bali's postmodern Indonesian present.

Women's beleganjur has generated considerable tension and debate in its brief history, at least among representatives of the upper echelons of Denpasar's musical patriarchy, with whom I worked primarily during my research.\(^{19}\) The remaining portion of this article will briefly address arguments presented in support of and in opposition to women's beleganjur, focusing mainly on the positions of four such individuals: Asnawa, Beratha, Suandita, and Dibia. The voices and opinions of female musicians and other Balinese women (and of men from outside the elite ranks of the Balinese arts community as well) are largely absent from the present discussion. For more comprehensive documentation and discussion of their perspectives, see Bakan 1997/1998.

In a footnote from his classic article "Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," Clifford Geertz comments that "sexual differentiation is culturally extremely played down in Bali and most activities, formal and informal, involve the participation of men and women on equal ground" (1973:417-18, n. 4). This information is employed to provide a contextualizing reference for the cockfight itself, which, as Geertz explains earlier in the same note, "is unusual within Balinese culture in being a single-sex [male] public activity from which the other sex is totally and expressly excluded."
While not as formally regulated in its gender exclusivity as cockfighting, gamelan performance in Bali has also been an almost entirely male domain, at least historically. Iconographic evidence from centuries ago of women performing on gamelan-type instruments (see Vickers 1985), as well as a documented lineage of female gender players dating back to at least the 1950s (see Yasa et al. 1993:52), run counter to a direct historical dissociation between being female and playing gamelan.

The most significant challenge to this rule has been women’s kebyar (kebyar wanita), which was established as a bona fide musical-cultural phenomenon in the 1980s, but has roots dating back to Bali of the 1960s, and to the pioneering Javanese women’s gamelan performance organizations of the 1950s (see Willner 1996[1992], Yasa et al. 1993, and Bakan 1997/1998 on Bali; Scott-Maxwell 1996 and Soedarsono et al. 1987/1988 on Java). Through their performances at major public events, in the gamelan competitions of the Bali Arts Festival, and in a variety of other forums, kebyar wanita groups have been cast as proud symbols of a modernized Balinese musical culture committed to national emancipasi values. As I have argued elsewhere, however, in the symbolic domain of women’s kebyar, as in the realm of New Order emancipasi programs generally, ideological subtexts used to marginalize women and ensure the perpetuation of their social and political subordination have been at least as powerful in their impact as the more public cultural texts that serve to honor and celebrate the ostensibly progressive rights and opportunities of women in a modernized Indonesia (1997/1998; in press). The institution of women’s kebyar has been used to promote a women-can-do-anything-men-can-do ideal, but it has also effectively reinforced public belief in a variety of marginalizing suppositions rooted in conventional gender constructs.

Balinese women, on the basis of the performance competence levels of their kebyar groups, are portrayed as inherently inferior to men in not only musical ability but inherent musical capacity as well. This portrayal is seemingly taken as fact by a majority of Balinese women and men, and in my field research data women were actually more consistent in affirming its veracity than were men (see Bakan 1997/1998). Furthermore, the assumption is employed in support of another one that is widely held and that also traverses gender boundaries: a belief that women’s kebyar groups lack the capacity to achieve fully even the relatively limited musical potential they do possess without the guidance and direction of male leaders, whether as teachers, administrators, or sponsors. Balinese and broader Indonesian status hierarchies across a wide range of political and social institutions rely on similar assumptions to support claims of achieved emancipation in situations where women are in actuality cast as dependent on men and confined to marginalized positions (see Sears 1996, Scott-Maxwell 1996,

Kebayar wanita’s acceptance as an integral component of Balinese musical culture has been hard-won, and partial at best. Women’s kebyar performances are well-attended and enthusiastically received. The way they are appreciated by Balinese audiences, however, usually seems more linked to a combination of titillated fascination with the spectacle itself and recognition of what is being symbolized in terms of prescribed emancipasi ideals than with genuine musical interest on the part of audience members. My interviews and conversations with female musicians, male officials, and contest audience members (both women and men) at women’s gamelan performance events, as well as my observations of audience members’ reactions to such events, have consistently supported this assessment. So too does the fact that, at least as of the time that field research for the present project was completed (August 1995), no commercial recordings of women’s kebyar groups had been produced, despite a profusion of concerts and contests featuring women’s ensembles.

Women’s belegenjur has inherited the problems of women’s kebyar and magnified them exponentially. If the latter has disrupted norms of gender, the former has, in the view of some at least, grossly distorted—even caricatured—them. Belegenjur wanita has at once pushed the envelope of gender propriety to an awkward position and emboldened public pronouncements on the inherent musical inferiority of women. A direct outgrowth of women’s kebyar (the belegenjur groups are almost invariably composed of selected members of a larger kebyar club and are identified as a subset of that club when they perform), women’s belegenjur has expanded the range of what emancipasi implies for Balinese musical life and inflamed sentiments concerning what the rightful limits of such expansion should comprise. “The proper spirit of [belegenjur] music is masculine and bold,” Wayan Beratha told me in 1995, “and to have girls play it both cheapens the music and puts the girls in an awkward and inappropriate situation.” Elaborating on a similar theme in more explicit fashion, Wayan Dibia stated:

It’s true that there are no fixed restrictions [on what activities women, or men, can engage in]. But the norm that’s widely accepted, that’s so important. For example, it would be strange if suddenly men are taking care of the offerings [which are traditionally the duty of women]. . . . For me, belegenjur is like looking at rock music. I don’t think I would enjoy women playing belegenjur. Once I saw it, and I thought, “This is too much.”

I guess I’m conservative, but I have my reasons. With gong kebyar, the women are still seated. There’s still the grace and beauty of femininity. But to have women marching on the street, playing that loud [belegenjur] music, is
too much. Just like a woman dalang (shadow puppeteer); I would reject the idea of women [dalang] making groaning and grunting vocal sounds [like those made by male dalangs]. The woman dalang should explore the high voice, what is distinctive about a woman [performing in that context]. You have to give them more space to demonstrate what is special about women. This is why I reject the idea of developing women's beleganjur. There's just no room for that to happen... For me, watching a woman play that music is like watching a beautiful woman driving a big truck...

The way [women's] beleganjur is developing now is not satisfying. If it has to develop at all, it should be developing as something different that allows for the cultural expression of women to emerge, through its instrumentation, compositions, and so on. What is happening in Bali doesn't always fit with modernity. Pushing things beyond hurts the quality of our cultural expression (pers. com. 1995).

In the last portion of the above passage, Dibia appears to move from the particular issue of women's beleganjur to a more sweeping critique of the potential consequences of excess and insensitivity in the implementation of cultural nationalism. The particular problems of women's beleganjur are symptomatic of a much larger issue: the compromising of the integrity of "our cultural expression." The "pushing things beyond" that "hurts" occurs because the dictates of nationalist political will are being allowed to invade the soul of what makes Bali Balinese.

Dibia can by no measure be cast as a reactionary or a staunch conservative. For some three decades he has been at the cutting edge of Balinese artistic innovation as a choreographer, and has been an important force in defining the policies and practices of a modern Balinese artistic culture designed to fit the priorities of New Order-style cultural nationalism. Furthermore, Balinese cultural expression is itself neither static nor monolithic, and its flexibility extends to norms and conventions of gender. In dance and drama, for example, a profound transformation of possibilities for women performers across a diversity of genres has resulted in a situation where today even the brave, heroic dramatic male characters represented in forms such as arja, prembon, and gambuh can be acted/danced by females. For the most part, the historical shifts and changes in drama and dance gender representation possibilities, many of which were effected well before the establishment of the New Order regime, have had little or nothing to do with external pressures relating to the nation's interest per se.

Dibia's concerns about women's beleganjur, then, are rooted neither in a conservative's fear of artistic or cultural change nor in an inherent inflexibility of Balinese cultural expression itself. The real grounds for his criticisms appear to emerge from an identification in the specific case of women's beleganjur of a broader politics of culture that creates a climate of insensitivity, one in which the gratuitous sacrifice of a culture's integri-
ty of expression is becoming all too customary. Again, there are certain lines that should not be crossed, and in Dibia's opinion, women's beleganjur has crossed one such line. For him, the gross misappropriation of Balinese cultural property evidenced in beleganjur wanita is as unbecoming as the odd visual spectacle of women playing beleganjur itself; grace, subtlety, and elegance are found wanting in both.

Ketut Suandita's perspective on beleganjur wanita stands in direct contrast to those of both Dibia and Beratha. As an individual who has been directly involved in both women's and men's beleganjur in the 1990s, and in women's kebyar as well, his position is an important one to consider in the present discussion. In 1990, Suandita, a prodigiously talented twenty-year-old STSI music student at the time, led a men's kreasi beleganjur group from his native banjar of Kehen to the prestigious LBPB championship. In 1991 and 1992, two other groups under his direction, the first representing Sedang and the second Meranggi, were also crowned champions of the LBPB. This unprecedented string of three consecutive victories in Bali's most prestigious beleganjur contest helped Suandita achieve recognition and distinction as one of Bali's leading young musical artists.

In 1994, Suandita was appointed to organize and direct a women's kebyar group, Kencana Wiguna, for the annual Bali Arts Festival women's gamelan competition. The group, representing Kodya Denpasar, won the contest championship. Following this success, Suandita received a government appointment to prepare a Kencana Wiguna-derived women's beleganjur ensemble for the aforementioned performance in the 1995 Bali Arts Festival opening parade. President Soeharto himself was in the audience.

In Suandita's view, "It's important to have [women's beleganjur]. It's an experimental thing, a symbol of emanisipasi. If women can play beleganjur, it really shows something, because it's the most masculine of Balinese genres. It's a new idea. It captures attention and it says something important about how our society is changing. It's exciting to be involved with this. It's exciting and satisfying [for me] to be a part of it . . . [Balinese society] has to be emanisipasi. Girls and boys have to be treated on the same level. We need to make new forms to reflect this equality, like the women's beleganjur" (pers. com. 1995).

Suandita's pronouncements articulate the spirit of the official, government-promoted stance on beleganjur wanita. This same stance is likewise articulated, and with remarkable consistency, by female beleganjur musicians with whom I have spoken. For example, Ni Made Puspawati, a drummer in the Kencana Wiguna group, states proudly that beleganjur wanita provides proof that "in Bali, anyone can do anything, boy or girl." Ni Nanik Kormaniati of Badung, who also performs as a beleganjur drummer and has been a fixture on the women's kebyar competition scene
for over a decade as well, expresses the same view in nearly identical terms, also noting beleganjur wanita's significance as a uniquely appropriate medium for the expression of a certain bold, courageous aspect of female character.

Located somewhere between the highly critical views towards women's beleganjur held by Beratha and Dibia and the strong endorsements of Suandita, Puspawati, and Kormaniati is the more moderate and ambivalent perspective of Asnawa, the individual most often credited with the 1986 "invention" of kreasi beleganjur. As was noted earlier, in 1992 Asnawa was unequivocal in dismissing outright the possibility that women's beleganjur might ever be a part of Bali's musical future. By 1995, however, his views on the matter had changed considerably; he claimed to "like the idea of it, women playing beleganjur," and told me that he was even considering drafting a proposal for the first-ever government-sponsored women's beleganjur contest.

Still, though, Asnawa approached the subject of women's beleganjur with skepticism. It remained for him, as it did for Beratha and Dibia, less an inroad into masculine territory than an invasion thereof. But Asnawa's discomfort was rooted neither in concern over inappropriate distortions of gender boundaries nor in frustration with beleganjur's misappropriation by an agenda driven by cultural nationalism. Rather, it was a product of aesthetic disenchantment with the awkwardness of a form in which the externally-imposed ideological prescription was simply being handled poorly. Unlike Dibia and Beratha, Asnawa accepted beleganjur wanita's right to an existence. The main problem from his perspective was how to improve it, how to transform it into a more dignified expression of Balinese womanhood and of Balinese culture more generally. In his words:

The gamelan beleganjur does not only play the strong character music. There are also softer styles, [even] in the traditional beleganjur music. We have to create music that is appropriate for the women. That is the challenge. I think if you take strong, masculine music and have women play that music, it's nonsense. It has to be appropriate, . . . We have to create appropriate form and appeal; the etiquette of how women carry the drum, how they walk, their costumes; these are important. The biggest problem is probably the carrying of the gong. How can you have women carrying gongs [and still being feminine]? I don't know. As for the costume, maybe it can be something "semi," between man and woman. That's going to take some work . . .

For the women's beleganjur, we can keep the form of beleganjur, but the theme should be different. The kepahlawanan theme is appropriate for the [men] but for the women, we have Sriandhi, the female warrior [of the Mahabharata]. She's an appropriate symbol for the women, still heroic, but heroic "women's style" . . . In terms of theme, I don't care. We can establish new ones [that are more consistent with appropriate images of women]; for example,
themes related to] beleganjur accompanying wedding processions or for ceremonies such as odalan (temple ceremonies) (pers. com. 1995).

One may infer from Asnawa's comments that the key to wrestling power over Balinese cultural expression away from insensitive nationalist ideologies is to be found in a more flexible Balinese dialogue with kebudayaan Bali itself. In some sense, he believes, kreasi beleganjur has locked beleganjur in the hold of the heroic image of kepahlawan, where gaya laki-laki animates a militaristic form of masculine valor. But as he rightly points out, in real Balinese tradition, beleganjur can stand for many things other than kepahlawan, and if beleganjur's non-"heroic" modes of expression were to be explored in creative and open-minded ways, women's beleganjur could perhaps develop in a manner befitting not only the Indonesian nationalist's values of emancipation but the Balinese culturalist's values of tradisi as well. Rather than highlighting the facile notion that women are operating in a radically unconventional context, women's beleganjur could instead be used as an illustration of the inherent flexibility and adaptability of the context itself. In Asnawa's envisioned world of women's beleganjur, the integrity of Balinese women cleverly subverts the authority of nationalist will while still essentially subscribing to it.

"The best it can be"

Before concluding this discussion, I should acknowledge my realization that the cultural and ideological "battles" examined in this study likely have little or no bearing on what beleganjur means to the vast majority of women, men, girls, and boys who play the music, who belong to the sekehes, who perform in the demonstrations and competitions.

"Since childhood, I had a feeling I really wanted to play [beleganjur] music," Puspayati told me on a hot August afternoon in 1995. "I saw the boys playing and I thought, 'I really want to try.' But initially, the head of the village didn't allow it. 'Maybe wait a couple years and we'll make a [women's] group,' he would say." Eventually he did, and now Puspayati plays beleganjur. She enjoys it. The desire to play, she says, "comes from a feeling in myself. I did it for myself, but I wanted to play with good players, the best possible. The quality is important. It must be the best it can be" (see Figure 6).

Puspayati's sentiments are heartfelt and impassioned. It means a great deal to her both to play beleganjur and to have the opportunity to do so. Perhaps she is aware of the struggles for power, control, and authority over beleganjur's meanings and messages, of "battles" such as those we have explored in this article; or perhaps she is not. In either case, for Puspayati, to play beleganjur is to do something meaningful, important, and enjoyable.
Fortunately, neither the motivations of politicians and cultural officials nor the analyses of cultural theorists can do much to change that.

Conclusion

This article has examined how a traditional music of battle, beleganjur, has become a modern site of symbolic battle in the forging of contemporary Balinese identity. In its alternate promotion and defiance of important values relating to such identity makers and markers as tradisi, kemodéman, kebudayaan Bali, cultural nationalism, and Indonesian nationhood, beleganjur has become an important forum for negotiating power and authority through the medium of culture. For men and women who play beleganjur, creative individuals responsible for shaping and defining the parameters of its expression, and government officials committed to its exploitation as a political tool of cultural nationalism, control over a form of musical culture invested in struggles over what it means to be a Balinese Indonesian are at stake. The alliances and conflicts that animate beleganjur's modern life inform perspectives on the larger battles that articulate the efforts of Balinese people to rectify their present and future with the legacy of their past, and to define their place in an Indonesian nation where
the enframing of culture by political will assures that the battle grounds on which the terms of culture are negotiated will always be contested and volatile.21

Notes
1. I would like to express my gratitude to Douglass Seaton, David Harnish, and Edward Herbst for their careful readings of earlier versions of this article and for their insightful criticisms and suggestions; to my many friends and colleagues in Bali whose words and ideas have helped shape this article; and especially to my teachers I Ketut Gedé Asnawa and I Ketut Sukarata. The field research for this article was conducted in Bali in 1992 and 1995 (although data and findings from additional fieldwork expeditions in 1989, 1990, and 1994 also enter into the discussion directly or indirectly). The main field interviews cited were with I Komang Astita (2 July 1992), I Wayan Rai (21 July 1992), I Nyoman Rembang (20 August 1992), I Wayan Beratha (18 September 1992 and 20 May 1995), Ni Made Puspawati (4 August 1995), Ni Naniek Kormaniati (7 August 1995), I Ketut Suandita (11 August 1995), and I Wayan Dibia (12 August 1995). The interviews with Astita, Rai, and Dibia were conducted mainly in English; those with the other consultants listed in Indonesian. Quotations and information drawn from a large number of interviews and conversations with Asnawa (1992–95) are found throughout the text. To him and to I Made Lila Arsana I owe a debt of tremendous gratitude for assisting me with interview translations and for setting up many interview sessions as well. While I have received much assistance with this article, I take full responsibility for its contents, including any mistranslations, misquotations, or misrepresentations.

2. Formal beleganjur contests belong to a broad category of competitive music-making events in Bali. A great variety of different types of gamelan competitions are produced: gong kebyar, angklung, jegog, and many other ensembles and styles are featured. Balinese music competitions today are typically linked to cultural nationalism programs sponsored by the Indonesian government. It should be noted, however, that the legacy of gamelan competitions in Bali is a long one, dating back through the kebyar contests of the Dutch colonial period in the early 1900s to court gamelan contests between the ensembles of rival kingdoms in pre-colonial times.

3. World Music Library/King Records’ Balaganjur of Pande and Angklung of Sidan, Bali (KICC 5197), which was released in 1995 and features Gong Kumala [sic] Budaya of Banjar Pande, Desa Sumerta, Denpasar, is the first internationally-distributed commercial recording primarily dedicated to beleganjur music. The CD features both an award-winning example of kreasi beleganjur (the composition “Jaya Sakti”) and a traditional-style example identified simply as “Balaganjur Kuno.” The spelling “balaganjur” seen in the title is one of three that is generally used, the others being “beleganjur” (see DeVale 1990, Baken 1995 and 1995/1994), and “beleganjur” (see Tenzer 1991, most commercial beleganjur cassettes, and this and other recent writings of mine).


5. For example, Asnawa holds the M.A. in ethnomusicology from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where he studied with Mantle Hood; I Wayan Rai received
the Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from the same institution under Flood; I Komang Astita holds the M.A. from San Diego State University; I Wayan Dibya, the Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles.

6. The standard modern form is the beleganjur bebonangan. Antecedent forms of the ensemble, which are rarely heard in Bali today, are the beleganjur pepongongan and the beleganjur bebateran (see Bakan in press and 1993:97-106). Typically, the larger ensemble from which a set of beleganjur instruments is abstracted is a gong kebyar (one equipped with the requisite number of congeg kopyak). The other, rarer forms of gamelan gong, such as the gong gedé, contain the full complement of beleganjur instruments as well. Most banjars that own one of the larger types of gamelan treat beleganjur as a subset of the bigger ensemble. Increasingly, however (especially in Denpasar and the surrounding environs), sekubars who compete in beleganjur contests are inclined to purchase a separate set of instruments specifically designated for beleganjur performance.

7. Other tabuh, such as tabuh tela, may be used occasionally, especially in the playing of compositions adapted from other gamelan repertoires (see Bakan in press and 1993:172-74).

8. Note that in the Figures the gong wadon stroke is indicated at the culmination point of the gongan (which is also the commencement point of the next cycle) while the gong lanang stroke falls at the gongan’s mid-point. According to I Ketut Gedé Anawa, this is the correct order of gong tones in gilak beleganjur. It should be noted, however, that the order is often reversed in practice. Also note that throughout this article, gong (in italics) refers specifically to the gong ageng. Gong (unitalicized) refers to any instrument of the gong type. In Bali, only the gong ageng are actually called gongs. All other gong-type instruments are known by their specific names (such as kempur, kemong).

9. Technically, the proper name for the instrument identified here as "rejong" is bonang, and this instrument actually provides the basis of the full name of the standard modern beleganjur ensemble, beleganjur bebonangan. In practice, however, the term rejong is used far more frequently than the term bonang (at least among Balinese people with whom I spoke during the course of my research).

10. In such "unison" textures, the kendang wadon, the congeg gong, and the four rejong pots (frequently played on their edges with the wooden back ends of the mallets) are typically struck together, with each unison note anticipated by a single stroke on the kendang lanang.


12. In theory, every banjar should possess three gamelans: a gamelan gong (now usually of the kebyar type), a gamelan angklung, and a beleganjur. In practice, however, many modern banjars (especially in Denpasar) cannot afford to purchase all three types. Some must make do with only a beleganjur in their banjar-centered ritual activities, adapting repertoires from other gamelan forms to the limited tonal resources of the beleganjur (see Bakan in press and 1993:91-99, 172-74).

13. It should be noted that the "pengawak" of a kreasi beleganjur work does not conform to the classic formal design of pengawak movements in other Balinese gamelan genres (see Bakan in press).

14. Anawa, who at the time was vice-president of HSR, was the principal author of the Kreteria Lomba; Beratha acted as a senior consultant on the committee that drafted the document.

15. I have used pseudonyms in this and the following section.

16. Correspondence with Edward Herbst concerning an earlier draft of this article has prompted me to speculate that the dispute which erupted between the two factions of the jury may have been caused, at least partially, by disparities in the different adjudicators' in-
terpretations of cultural nationalism's parameters, especially relative to the particular case of kreasi beleganjur. The tenience of Ayun and his supporters towards Kuning was perhaps the result of a conception of appropriate bounds of humor guided mainly by traditional Balinese perspectives. The more severe position of Bundaran and his allies may have reflected stricter values relating to New Order notions of appropriate demeanor.

17. Elsewhere I use the different accounts of the contest outlined here as the basis for a detailed discussion of multidimensional aspects and priorities implicated in the strategies Balinese individuals use to define and represent their personal identities (in press). My central argument in that work is that in instances where different "components" of identity are brought into conflict with one another, identification with and allegiance to the native village typically take precedence over all other identity definition priorities.


19. While men remain firmly in control of the policies, programs, and institutions of the central Balinese musical establishment (including those related to the women's gamelan movement), a few women, most notably the composers Ni Ketut Suriatini and Desak Made Suartak Laksnu, have achieved some status and influence in elite music establishment circles. Both are on the music faculties of STSI and I can recall at least one instance where Suriatini served as a jury member for a prestigious men's beleganjur contest.

20. Actually, there are some fixed restrictions. For example, a woman is prohibited from playing gamelan in a temple during her menstrual period.

21. This article went to press before the recent political unrest that led to Soeharto's resignation.

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“Tails Out”: Social Phenomenology and the Ethnographic Representation of Technology in Music-Making

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Encountering recording

There is a phenomenon known as print-through, characteristic of magnetic (analog) audio tape, whereby any stored signal is transferred through adjacent layers when the tape is wound on a reel. According to sound engineer John Woram,

Since magnetic tape is stored on reels, each segment is wound between two other segments. The tape’s magnetic field may be sufficient to partially magnetize these segments, resulting in print-through: an audible pre- and post-echo of the signal on the two tape layers that come in contact with it. On many recordings, the program itself will mask the print-through, especially the post-echoes. However, print-through may be noticeable at the beginning and end of a recording, and during sudden changes in dynamic level, where a quiet passage is not loud enough to mask the echo of a loud passage immediately before or after it.

Since print-through is usually greatest on the outer tape layer it is advisable to store tapes tails out; that is, without rewinding after playing. This way, the worst print-through comes as a post-echo and stands the greatest possibility of being masked by the program itself.\(^1\) (1982:267)

Audible print-through has both epistemological and phenomenological ramifications for music. It places in question the autonomous status that formalist theories (such as those of Immanuel Kant, Eduard Hanslick, and Nelson Goodman), through their obsession with musical structure, have granted the musical text, performances of the text, and reproductions of performances of the text. Simultaneously, print-through elasticizes the boundaries drawn around standard conceptions of encounters with music; one’s way of experiencing a given musical work needs not—in practice, likely does not—begin with the first note and end with the last.

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