



Review Essay

Critical Reflections on Religion and Media in Contemporary Bali



Richard Fox, *Critical Reflections on Religion and Media in Contemporary Bali*

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RICHARD FOX'S *Critical Reflections* is a carefully wrought, closely argued, intertextual study that explores different scholarly frameworks and approaches to Balinese religion via Old Javanese texts and more contemporary media and television programming performance. This is not a book for light reading, nor is it a book one can open and start randomly on any page. It is a textual labyrinth that is so closely and carefully argued and reasoned from within each section that one must read it from the very beginning of the book, or at least at the beginning of a given section, in order to slowly make one's way through the literary twists and turns guided by the author to reach the opening at the other end of this textual maze. Each section builds new perspectives on Balinese religion and media based on a critique of scholarly debates and Fox's application of critical theory to bring new insights to this investigation.

Fox's approach exemplifies postmodernist critiques of premodernist and modernist writings (SILVERMAN 1990, 1) through the critical lens of reason reminiscent of Enlightenment dialectics, whereby the critic gains "power over the consciousness of others who may be less fluent in the language of

reason” (DOCHERTY 1993, 6). One concern with this approach can be a separation of theory and practice, also termed *gnosis* and *praxis*, but Fox sidesteps this potential drawback: he incorporates both elements—theory and practice—through his theoretical critiques of Old Javanese texts, New Order ideologies, his published scholarship on Bali, and his exploration of the practical component in his later discussion of *topeng pajegan* (a one-man masked dance drama) and the transcribed text based on oral performance. The practices produce and support the textual or philological meanings seen in revered texts as well as manifesting cultural ideologies disseminated by the government (50). “The questions driving my ethnography were organized around a desire to assess the degree to which the state bureaucratic model of Hindu religiosity was being replicated in local performances” (50). “The text” is also “reinterpreted as a performative accomplishment that ‘produces’ what it claims merely to represent” (49–50).

In his introduction to postmodernism, Docherty traces postmodernist critique to a legacy of Enlightenment reasoning, noting the concerns voiced by Adorno and Horkheimer when he paraphrases that “the material content of the world becomes a merely formal conceptual set of categories ... and something—non-conceptual reality itself—gets lost in the translation” (DOCHERTY 1993, 5, 6). Fortunately, Fox provides a performance DVD so that the audiovisual content will not be lost. While the music is beyond the scope of this study, it is clearly audible, though not visible, in the DVD; the camera is focused on the impressive *topeng pajegan* performer, inadvertently capturing the ritual elements that cross his path. It is interesting to note the gender roles in this footage. The male artist performs despite passersby or ritual intrusions on the performance space; given the ceremonial context for this performance this is no doubt commonplace and to be expected. The girls and women can be seen watching the performance or circumambulating the temple and courtyard space with offerings and holy water as they fulfill certain religious requirements for the occasion. Women can also be heard chanting in the background.

Fox is concerned that scholarship on Balinese religion and culture frequently relies on a common categorization of three main time periods: the colonial period under the Dutch, the New Order, and post-New Order Indonesia, yet Fox also utilizes these distinctions in his “intervention analysis” (see 155, footnote 47), knowingly subscribing to the same circumscribed boundaries for his own analytical categories and examples. Fox’s primary focus on Old Javanese texts, albeit later editions, could stimulate further investigations into earlier time periods, but he is concerned with the meanings attributed to this literature, not the actual texts. For example, Fox raises the issue of “circularity” in the relationship between original texts and subsequent manuscript copies that both serve to reinforce the other. The copy is needed to locate or recreate the original, and the original authorizes the later copies. He also considers “the appearance of substance” versus text as a “performative accomplishment” that becomes naturalized over time and through “sedimented repetition” (49–50). He returns to the theme of substantialism later

when he questions the contradictions between scholarly objectivity and distance versus the close encounters of personal fieldwork, considering whether Fabian's critique of anthropological authority could be "extended to philological representations of 'the Old Javanese text'" (167–68).

While challenging, this book has much to admire in its literary depth and philosophical deftness. For example, part three, "The Mode of Knowing" (159–79), reminds me of "Pictures at an Exhibition"¹ in its portrayal of one intellectual filter after another: visual imagery, corruption (sexual, textual, or cultural), judgment (scholarly and simultaneously religious), and other approaches. One section traces the "picture," another the scholar's "judgments." These shifting views purposely complicate our understanding of the scholarly process whereby these Old Javanese texts are interpreted via textual criticism, corruption, or fetishistic pleasure. However, rather than associating "the Old Javanese text" with domination or corruption of the feminine when viewed through the lens of Western scientific thought, I suggest we consider a reversal of this paradigm whereby feminine knowledge becomes that which transcends rational thought, rather than the other way around (177). In fact, protagonists from Old Javanese texts and Hindu epic literature, such as Sutasoma and Arjuna, are taught to meditate and find inner power through concentration in order to conquer their enemies. This is hardly a "Western" paradigm. While many specialists in Old Javanese texts may exhibit colonialist or orientalist thought, and it is wise to be cognizant of these ideological filters, the object under scrutiny remains an Eastern literary tradition whose literary conceits may transcend Western scientific thought or control.²

To introduce and critique Fox's arguments, I will consider some of his primary frameworks and key concerns. First, to orient the reader, the chapters are grouped as follows: chapters 1, 2, and 3 form the introduction; chapters 4 and 5 make up part one ("Articulation: The Hindu Community on TV"); chapters 6 and 7 form part two ("Dissemination: From Transmission to Performativity"); chapters 8 and 9 form part three ("Hegemony: The Reiteration of Norms"); and chapter 10 contains the concluding remarks.

In chapter 1, Fox wants the reader to consider how media representations of culture or religion influence the questions we ask and the answers we receive (12). How is social class articulated, and how do social groups become political entities? In chapter 1 he raises these issues of articulation and mediation (16–17). He wants the reader to consider how the medium of the message affects the message (18). Fox lays out his argument, emphasizing the need to distinguish between different kinds of media (19), questioning: "Is it safe to assume a degree of commensurability between, on the one hand, 'the Balinese' with whom we work when conducting field research and, on the other, 'the Balinese' as a discursive figure in the *Bali Post*?" (18). He begins to indicate his theoretical concerns, sources, and chapter trajectory for the three introductory chapters.

Fox begins his investigation by theorizing and historicizing the phrase *Ajeg Bali* (a slogan that may be translated variously as "Bali standing strong" [RHOADS 2007], "Strong and everlasting Bali" [PICARD 2008] or "Bali erect" [SANTIKARMA

2003]; cited in Fox, page 10) since 2002, in particular after the bombings in a Kuta nightclub. He considers the “scholarly consensus” portrayed by PICARD (2000), SANTIKARMA (2003), and COUTEAU (2003), and the development of a wealthy bourgeoisie under the New Order of former President Sukarto, who resigned in May 1998 (12–14). He draws upon LACLAU and MOUFFE’s (2001) retheorization of hegemony to consider “the articulatory practices through which political identities ... become intelligible” (16), including the articulatory practice of *Ajeng Bali*. This interest in the underlying political orientation is also indicative of a postmodernist enterprise. In reference to chapter 3, Fox concludes: “I shall argue that prevailing scholarly understandings of Balinese tradition in general—and of *Ajeng Bali* in particular—are both logically and politically fraught, not to mention empirically questionable” (20). Fox returns to his political agenda at the very end of the book, where he concludes that “the larger point to be taken from both Laclau and our *topeng pajegan* is that there can be no representation of ‘the Balinese’—or any other collectivity—that does not engender a political project” (308).

In chapter 2, Fox concentrates his argument around the phrase *Tat Twam Asi* (see below). He points out that the Balinese state is creating certain self-fashioned images through the media, using the phrases and identifications surrounding *Ajeng Bali* and *Tat Twam Asi* (23). An article in the national newspaper *Kompas* interpreted *Tat Twam Asi* as “I am him and he is me, meaning ‘Don’t do harm to another person ... because in effect that means we’re also doing harm to ourselves’” (22). Thus this phrase gains social significance for society. But the Sanskrit dictum reflects a more mystical interpretation: “Thou art that,” meaning that one’s inner self is identified “with the cosmic principle”—the interpretation of this great saying from the *Chandogya Upanisad* clearly emphasizes the religious significance of this inner identification with the divine (21). Which meaning was intended when this phrase was inscribed on wreaths sent in response to suicide bombings in Bali in 2005? Fox’s approach in this section harkens back to Hayden White in terms of its focus on the *discourses* rather than the material embodiments of culture. He agrees with Picard’s attempts “to historicize—and thereby denaturalize—the terms” (38). One could apply the “circularity” concern to this situation as well, since scholarship with any degree of fieldwork is meant to represent beliefs and practices of local actors within ethnographic scholarship (fieldwork informs scholarship), and yet prior scholarship always already influences and impinges on perspectives taken in fieldwork (scholarship informs fieldwork), therefore influencing the newly-written accounts as well. The practice both produces and supports the textual or philological meanings seen in revered texts, as well as helping to disseminate the cultural ideologies espoused by the government. “As a result, philological authority appears less the product of universal reason, and more the outcome of practices that are situated in historically specific relations of power and knowledge” (50).

One could apply the issue of “circularity” to the scholarly record as well. Fox indicates the importance of Vickers and Picard to subsequent scholarship on Bali.³ He therefore reinterprets them in detail, yet by focusing on Vickers and Picard,

Fox furthers this closed circle, or one might better say spiral, even as he draws the spiral inward or outward to a new level of interpretation. While the reinterpretation is critical, staying within these prescribed limits restricts the scholarly view from noticing other sources that might inform the “sedimented” (50) perspectives in new and different ways.

Given Fox’s interest in Balinese oral and written discourses, he should certainly have made use of my book on precisely this topic (HEIMARCK 2003). Several of the terms Fox highlights (*rwa bhinéda* [equivalent to *rwa bhinneda* in HEIMARCK 2003]; *Om Amighmam Astu* [“Om, let there be no obstacles,” or “may there be no hindrances”]) have been investigated and translated in my study and would have provided an important expansion on Fox’s translation of these terms.⁴ Fox translates *rwa bhinéda* as “the two that are different” (242), but I have translated *rwa bhinéda* to mean “the existence [or coexistence] of opposites,” as explained to me by the great *gender wayang* master Bapak I Wayan Loceng. Bapak Loceng explained that “both sides of a duality are necessary in order for life to continue; you cannot have good without bad, gods without demons, hot without cold” (HEIMARCK 2003, 78), in which case Fox’s opposition of *tat twam asi* and *rwa bhinéda* no longer holds with such distinction. “I am you, and you are me” becomes a means to realizing the political strategy of “Unity in Diversity” or *rwa bhinéda*—“the existence of opposites.” As I indicate, the presence of both gods and demons in Balinese temple statues, or the merging or interlocking of the *polos* (basic melody part) and *sangsih* (counterpart), which are differently tuned yet played together, tangibly or musically represent this core Balinese philosophy; they are different, and yet they coexist.⁵

With regard to “balance” in Balinese culture, I describe the meaning of *Tri Hita Karana*⁶ from the *lontar* (palm-leaf) manuscript *Prakempa* as encompassing “three main aspects, the balance of human life with God, the balance of human life with nature, and the balance of humans with each other” (HEIMARCK 2003, 195). Yet this manuscript appeared much earlier than the scholarship Fox decried for focusing too much on “balance and harmony” (287–90). *Prakempa* was written in Bali in the second decade of the twentieth century, completed circa 1923. So clearly this concept does predate the later scholarship cited by Fox. While I agree with Fox that political agendas may pull the strings of cultural priorities at times, it is useful to place certain philosophical or cultural agendas in historical perspective.

Fox hints at the “disjuncture between ... the lived realities of those people residing in Bali, and ... their representation as subjects of ‘Balineseness’” (38). But he hesitates from taking the next step, which in my view is a natural one, to recognize that it is the variations of culture *as practiced* that counter such monological claims. He aims to document historical connections as well as “political commitments entailed in our representations of the past” (29). For example, Fox describes and considers the governor’s depiction of the first nightclub bombings in 2002 “as an offence to *Tat Twam Asi*” (28), given the unraveling of social solidarity they implied.

Fox raises the concern over Picard’s use of the generalizing term “the Balinese” when he refers to the intellectuals controlling the terms of the cultural debate, yet Fox also frequently resorts to the use of this monolithic term. For example, in part

three Fox concentrates on a *topeng pajegan* performance as a means of exploring “Balinese” reflections “on their own lives and circumstances” (50), yet because the village and actors are given pseudonyms, even this example remains something of an unverifiable abstraction. Despite his incisive criticism of Picard’s use of this essentializing term, “Balinese” reflections, “Balinese identity,” and even “the Balinese” (49) surface periodically in Fox’s discussion. In this respect, highlighting the work of one artist in Bali can help to counter this generalizing tendency (HEIMARCK 2015). Fortunately Fox’s textual investigation and transcription as well as his accompanying DVD provide both documentation and a high quality illustration of the *topeng pajegan* performance event used in his study.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the new Balinese identity movement as well as the slogan *Ajég Bali* (31). Fox provides an astute critique of the scholarly pretense that attributes authority to a literary elite who are presumed to speak for the illiterate or silent majority. Furthermore, Fox suggests that ethnographic encounters, interviews, and fieldwork with individuals serve as an alternative to relying on published views, given the “incommensurability” between the scholarly versions of reality and actual peoples’ lives. Through repeated citations in ongoing cycles of published literature, the bourgeois “mythologie” becomes an assumed reality, yet the people living those lives may see and interpret the meaning of their daily actions or cultural traditions differently. That is why anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and ethnologists generally have relied on *fieldwork* with living representatives of a culture, rather than rely solely on published or archival sources as a historian or armchair musicologist might have done.

All published sources represent an author’s view and/or a political intention; how those views and intentions relate to the village voices and urban views (HEIMARCK 2003) is another matter. This gap between discourse and dialogue, scholarly or historical narrative and interviews, is one of the crucial disjunctures highlighted by Fox, as he continues to focus our attention on “the problem of mediation” (34). Beyond these critical frameworks, one might ask, what is the role of the scholar or the minister once people begin to interpret their culture and their religion for themselves? It becomes a *polyphony* of voices from the ground up, as documented in HEIMARCK (2003).

As noted earlier, Fox highlights a tripartite periodization of Bali’s history, “from ‘colonial times through Suharto’s New Order (1966–1998) to post-Suharto *reformasi*’” (34), often distilled to “colonization, Indonesianisation and touristification” (34). Alternatively, he notes another framework that is organized around the bombings of 2002 as a defining moment (35). Fox limits himself primarily to the same timeframe (other than an occasional Sanskrit or Old Javanese reference that stems from an earlier period). He cites Dutch scholars GOUDRIAAN and HOOYKAAS (1971) among others, official New Order slogans, and more recent iterations of culture in newer media, such as television and newspapers. In my estimation, with regard to Balinese Hinduism, or Hindu-Buddhism in the archipelago now known as the Republic of Indonesia, this time frame does not fully encompass

the study of religion in the region, since many important religious developments occurred in ancient times; consider the Buddhist monument Borobudur, with over five hundred Buddha statues from the ninth century in Java or the Buddhist center of learning known as Srivijaya active from the seventh to the twelfth centuries. TEEUW suggests that the study of Old Javanese language and literature can help us “to know and comprehend” premodern Indonesian culture (1975, 60, cited on page 142). But is the “context” really to be gleaned from the text? Citing ASAD (1993) on page 207, Fox suggests that religion could be broken down into more specific components, and in this regard I would suggest BECKER (1993) for detailed information on the particular religious sects in early Java that may also be found in Bali.

We must question the degree to which Balinese religion relies on or is defined by the Old Javanese texts, in particular the *kakawin* literature.⁷ It would be interesting to hear more about the different genres such as the *tutur* texts (texts that provide philosophical and religious instruction) he mentions briefly (see Fox’s reference to RUBINSTEIN [2000] on pages 204–205) and the priestly texts documented by HOOYKAAS (1964), rather than literary texts. While certain texts may be utilized in Balinese performing arts, and these performances are required for temple festivals and religious ceremonies, the religion is not necessarily defined in them. *Tutur* texts are more explicitly instructional and therefore have more bearing on ritual practices or esoteric beliefs than literary texts. The discourses Fox investigates concerning the purity of the Buddhist religion as described in *Sutasoma* seem to assume that the literary text is a clear indication of the religion as practiced, but they are not necessarily synonymous. *Sutasoma* could be purely Buddhist or Hindu-Buddhist according to the source for this text, and while it might represent a religious ideal, it is not necessarily a true indication of the widespread religious practices at that time. *Arjuna Wiwaha* (“the temptation of Arjuna”—the story of Arjuna Wiwaha in which several nymphs try to seduce him to come out of his meditation, but he remains steadfast) is often performed in shadow play performances in Bali, and Balinese performers may express an understanding that meditation can increase one’s divine charm or *taksu* in performance, but that does not mean that all Balinese performers meditate daily; in most cases, they do not. The poetic ideal should not be conflated with religious practices in different time periods and locations: from fourteenth-century Java to twenty-first century Bali and everything in between. Fox concurs: “There is no good reason to assume commensurability between the archived world of the intelligentsia and the lives of those whom they presumed to address and represent” (40).

Another important assumption that surfaces repeatedly in Fox’s formulations of scholarly debates is the assumption that the alteration of “epidemic” to “AIDS” by a Balinese actor/performer was due to a “lack of understanding of their own texts” (see 178, 183) rather than a conscious adaptation of the original text to add contemporary relevance to a given performance for the Balinese contemporary audience (see 140–41). To these negations of Balinese agency, I would counter that Balinese performers should be credited with the conscious agency to choose to indicate a particular twentieth-century epidemic cited specifically as AIDS, rather than use

the general and less poignant term “epidemic.” This contemporary extemporizing makes classical art forms relevant and is frequently encountered in the humor and commentary of Balinese puppeteers and other theatrical artists in Bali. In fact, Balinese culture does allow for variations; meanings, musical notes, and performed commentaries should not be set in stone and repeated exactly regardless of current relevancies or inspired elaborations. It is this adaptation of the general term translated as “epidemic” that causes Fox to cite scholars repeatedly through the first few parts of the book who state unabashedly that Balinese in general “don’t seem to know their own texts and therefore they don’t really know their own religion!”⁸ This is repeated far too many times with the false assumption indicated above, and only countered at last on page 212, where he finally suggests that performance variations could be interpreted differently. “On such an approach, and not a moment too soon, the scholarly notion that the ‘ordinary people of Bali do not know well enough the essential traits of their own religion’ would begin to look rather odd indeed” (212). Which finally leads him to conclude part two by suggesting that “any given articulation ... will only be as stable as the instituted practices that sustain it” (212). In other words, how can one say that a particular early Kawi text is essential for understanding Balinese religion, if it is not an important part of their religious practices? And if a given text is an important part of religious practices, is it not important to understand the relationship between the two?

In part three, Fox begins his more ethnographic section based on fieldwork conducted in three visits between September 2006 and December 2008. He wants to assess “the degree to which the state bureaucratic model of Hindu religiosity was being replicated in local performances” (50).

RETURNING TO FOX’S MAIN POINT

Fox has made many points along the way in his extensive critique on approaches to media and religion of Bali through the media of Old Javanese texts, television programming, live performances, and scholarship, but has he made his primary point about the importance of focusing our critical eye on the media/ or medium of transmission itself? I believe he has. Clearly, Fox’s attention to languages, literature, and the religious significance thereof has enabled a critical investigation of the role of the Old Javanese/Kawi texts to convey religious meanings relevant to or adapted by contemporary Balinese actors. He has also explored the historical and political dimensions of New Order ideals and Hindu reformist principles through the medium of religious programming on Balinese television. Finally, knowledge of the *Bali Post* newspaper articles enabled Fox’s insights to attempt to identify textual sources for the written transcription of a live *topeng pajegan* performance he witnessed and recorded. Clearly, Fox’s willingness to research and utilize different forms of media *has* proven immensely useful to his investigations and has opened the door to further interdisciplinary and highly critical studies in this vein.

Other scholars should remember that to be critical is not to air individual petty grievances concerning job acquisitions or corruption, or to label every musical interval backwards and forwards, as if that will concretize the subject. Rather, to be critical is to be aware of our perspectives and suppositions in writing and in theorizing or documenting a given topic, such as distinguishing monological discourse from dialogical discourses for example, and in this sense, Fox's *Reflections* is truly critical. He raises the awareness time and time again of the underlying assumptions behind various written or spoken claims. Fox pinpoints the weaknesses in others' arguments around him, but he fortunately is also able to turn a critical eye on himself (304).

Fox looks at the "critical frameworks of 'dialogue' and 'discourse' that underpin the representation of the interviews and the historical narrative respectively in Allen and Palermo's account" (34), but he would have found much more extensive coverage of these frameworks in my study.⁹ He investigates Picard's formulation of the intellectual Balinese who comment on the rest of the population in their discourse on what it means to be Balinese (38–42). This concept that the rest of the population is not included in the scholarly discourse is not entirely accurate. Decades ago, when monological discourse was the norm and taken for granted, many people were left out of the discourse as there was little dialogue represented. But since dialogical discourses have developed and gained some traction in the scholarly world, this dichotomy is not as fast and firm. It is possible for a wide range of performers and individuals to be included in a given formulation through interview citations that draw the local performers and culture bearers into the scholarly debate. In fact, this is the fundamental premise of HEIMARCK (2003). In ethnographic fieldwork and publications it is not only possible but common to draw a range of people into the discussion and cite them accordingly. This does not subvert all scholarly control, but it does work against the exclusion of "the rest of the population" (40).

As Arjun Appadurai states, "We are now aware that with media, each time we are tempted to speak of the 'global village,' we must be reminded that media create communities with 'no sense of place' (Meyrowitz 1985)" (APPADURAI 1990, 2). This is not the case with Fox's discussion of media because the texts, television programs, newspaper articles, and performance he discusses are rooted in Bali specifically. The geographic spread travels mainly to Java in consideration of the Old Javanese texts and to Europe or America with regard to published scholarship, although the "community" under discussion is still primarily that of Balinese intellectual, religious, or performance communities.

RHETORICAL STYLE

In the manner of an erudite Sherlock Holmes novel, Fox develops his argument step by step through a series of questions he poses and proceeds to answer in each section of the book. In this way, he seems to be tracing his thought process for us, or at least he implies as much. Fox periodically returns to the ques-

tions he has posed and those he is posing for the next chapter, summarizing the development thus far to keep the reader abreast of his reasoning. This rhetorical device moves at times slowly through each twist and turn in the scholarly literature, shining a light on what he considers to be faulty reasoning in favor of his own depictions based on translations of Balinese television programs, newspaper articles, scholarly texts, and performance transcriptions and translations as well as etymological derivations of certain Balinese terms. The truly cinematic effect occurs at the very end of chapter 9, where the pace suddenly lurches to an unexpected conclusion. After nearly three hundred pages of closely argued points, this sudden twist has the effect of a gun going off and one of the protagonists being killed in the next room. The conclusion Fox suggests here has potentially shattering implications (albeit introduced previously by EMIGH [2008]), when he implies that previous scholars may have been used by their interlocutors to revise an unsavory image of Indonesia as a land of massacres such as those that occurred in 1965–1966, just prior to the founding of the College of the Arts in Denpasar. Certainly the question is well put, as we ought to consider at times who is using whom in our ethnographic relationships (scholar-civil servant/author/performer), particularly since many if not most of these Western scholars were not well versed in Balinese dialects, Old Javanese-Kawi, or Sanskrit. This is Fox's final shot and it does hit the mark with precision yet again. This hit is all the more startling to the reader because it is the only point in the entire book for which one is unprepared. This quickening of the pace is presaged by Fox's willingness to just say "no" to a previous argument, without reasoning every facet as he has done before (290). Clearly Fox's arguments represent the core of this book of "critical reflections," therefore I will summarize some of his main theoretical thrusts below, inserting my own questions to his conclusions as we proceed; first, the exclusions.

Fox purposely does not tell the reader who he interviewed or which village they were in (see 138). Is this necessary? Does this further his scholarly investigation? Clearly, it is difficult to check back on his information if we do not know the individuals cited or the village where fieldwork was conducted. Fox intends to counter the star system created by citing individuals in our scholarship (preface, x), as well as the tendency to unduly conflate the words of one individual with the perspectives of a broader community as a whole. While this is a pressure that accompanies authoring an opinion that is subsequently published and widely read, is it true that these Balinese performers and intellectuals or even civil servants would not prefer the renown and possible tourism that might come from more explicit citations? Who is Fox really protecting? Given the internal conflict cited within the village under study, it becomes more evident why Fox may have chosen anonymity for his subjects.

Nonetheless, I do not subscribe to the anonymizing idea that all villages are interchangeable and all Balinese should be cited in general terms. By citing individuals explicitly and accurately as I have done, they must be accountable for their words and ideas and also credited for them. If they change their mind over time, so be it—

they can change the record just as scientists build on and revise previous hypotheses and prior publications. In my estimation, making Balinese individuals less accountable does not make the record more reliable, it actually reduces the credibility and accountability of their words, to the detriment of the scholarly record.

Fox raises the concern of hegemonic discourses, but he does not include a wide range of Balinese individuals to counter this domination from above. It would have helped to have some biographical background on the scholars cited. This would help clarify their specific backgrounds (Dutch, Javanese, Balinese). It would also locate them within particular historical and intellectual traditions.¹⁰ To his credit, in his fieldwork Fox did rely on various discussion groups to determine his performance text translation and this extended his network on the ground.

Fox's genealogical analyses clearly derive from Foucauldian investigations and demonstrate strong language skills confirmed by careful fieldwork techniques based on interviews, discussion groups, translations, and conversations concerning the translations with Balinese performers and scholars, field recordings, and an awareness of not only the scholarly trail but also various media in Bali: newspapers, television programs, and performances. Fox's strong underlying premise is quietly revealed when he cites Foucault: "there is nothing but interpretations" (FOUCAULT 1990, 66, cited here on page 262, footnote 95), as opposed to a representation of reality in some way: lived experience, the world, and so on. These investigations of articulations, representations, and performed texts expose certain hegemonic practices in line with New Order imperatives such as those theorized by GRAMSCI (1971): "The cultivation of a collective political will (such as 'the Hindu community') through 'intellectual and moral leadership'" (cited on page 263). Nonetheless, an individual performer's commentaries may serve to counter hegemonic official discourse.

While Fox is reticent to prioritize performance texts over literary scholarship (his forté I believe, though well matched by his onsite investigations), his argument occasionally hints at such a consideration. Take, for example, his recognition that the authority of the literary texts gain "historical continuity through performance" (296). The contrast between the New Order teachings extracted from the religious television programming and the importance of ceremonial rites as emphasized in the *topeng* recitations is not insignificant as it may highlight some of the *rwa bhinéda* differences between official discourse and village practices and beliefs. These different segments of society (political and religious, social and spiritual, traditional and modern) come together in varying ways through village or urban performances for political or ceremonial occasions. I would take Fox's argument one step further to suggest that the Balinese artists have the potential to convey individual preferences and priorities in their choice of text(s), clearly in their individual commentaries, and also in humor. Kudos to Fox on his deft uncovering of the *Bali Post* articles that provided a historical outline in keeping with the *topeng* performance he witnessed and transcribed. His keen intention to locate a textual source for the performance—while revealing his scholarly priorities—in this case provided some beneficial results. One can only imagine countless hours were dedicated to reviewing the television programs, local resources, and broader

scholarship, as well as confirming his transcriptions with various groups of Balinese performers and intellectuals.

Still we must return to the question of how “New Order articulations” or televised articulations relate to the lives of those they are meant to represent (see 296 and 50 respectively). Fox relies heavily on Laclau’s “logic of articulation” (307) throughout the book, as articulation is his term of choice to represent both written scholarship and oral discourse.¹¹

ISSUE OF BALINESE AGENCY OR PASSIVE RECEPTION OF CULTURE

Fox states:

I examine the position of contemporary Bali and “the Balinese” in these accounts, and argue that the latter figure, at best, as an inert medium for the preservation of ancient (Javanese or Indian) splendor (49).

Balinese agency is further negated: “Although the Balinese have written, read and studied *kakawin* themselves, it would appear that in most cases the poet’s original ‘expression’ of his ‘aesthetic feeling’ has been ‘not always understood in all its peculiarities and intricacies’” (158–59; referring back to his previous citation of ZOETMULDER 1974, 24, and reference to SCHUMACHER 1995, 498, on page 139). This argument is repeated far too many times before it is finally questioned on page 212. As a specialist on Bali frequently surrounded by scholars who specialize in Javanese arts, I have heard this appropriation far too many times. While common within Javanese rhetoric, or Javanist scholars (American or European) certainly, I believe Fox needs to bring his own theoretical strands together more quickly here to clarify that the performance commentaries he hints at later are not “getting the text wrong,” but rather, reinterpreting classical texts and making them relevant to contemporary Balinese society. Balinese actors, intellectuals, and priests are not simply repeating and copying (as per the scribes) Old Javanese ideas and texts, but rather, they are actively engaged in adapting and interpreting these texts for their own communities. Some Balinese priests, performers, linguists, scholars, and intellectuals do read and understand Kawi, just not all of them. This is a good reason why these generic terms and generalizations for the entire population in the context of anonymous references do not work, except to the extent that they are used by Fox to highlight the perspectives of certain scholars (see, for example, 149: “On to Bali where, for example, the language is no longer understood [Zoetmulder] and the full significance of the text has been lost [Santoso]”). While I do not believe that Fox truly accepts this argument, particularly as espoused by Dutch scholars and an occasional linguist, I do believe that he repeated these claims too frequently to further his own investigation before openly questioning the veracity of such statements.

PAYING HOMAGE

By focusing on and tracing scholarly perspectives over material content¹²—with the exception of his concentration on the literary and spoken text for a *topeng pajegan* performance—Fox is slowly introducing the reader to the analytical process of scholarly interpretation. He investigates critical assumptions and prior frameworks and conclusions, calling many assumptions of the scholarly enterprise into question throughout this meticulously reasoned book. This book provides an excellent example of scholarly reasoning for graduate students and scholars alike. I would recommend this book for graduate students learning to question the trail of assumptions in their own scholarly discipline. He is essentially teaching people how to think, whether or not they agree with every statement he makes. In this regard, Fox's careful clarification of his thought process along the way, his reiteration of the questions he is asking, the reasoning he is using to investigate the given questions, and the problems he sees in previous solutions to these problems, is his way of documenting the intellectual process of closely argued scholarly reasoning. Following his reasoning, and questioning his reasoning, as he questions those that preceded him, engages the up-and-coming scholar in an important thought process, useful for the training of any intellectual. Again, it is not a question of the content he describes, or even a question of whether or not one agrees with Fox's conclusions along the way, but rather the *process of questioning* that he offers to an unprecedented degree. For this reason, this book should be required reading for a wide array of graduate students in related fields: ethnomusicology, anthropology, religious studies, critical theory, Asian studies, European history, comparative literature, and more.

The main point of such a detailed review is for the scholarly community to engage with Fox's critical insights and intellectual debates to make this valuable and weighty tome *productive* for future scholarly debate. That is the greatest tribute we can pay to Fox's razor-sharp intellect. He concludes his aim as follows: "This book has tried to show how closer attention to media—and the ways in which different articulations of society are *mediated*—will help us to recognize the commitments that are implicit in our work, and perhaps push us toward more responsible forms of intellectual practice" (308).

NOTES

1. Modest Petrovitch Mussorgsky, "Pictures at an Exhibition" (1874), consists of ten musical sketches for the piano that musically characterize a selection of drawings and watercolors by Victor Hartmann, who died in 1873. Orchestrated in 1922 by Maurice Ravel. Mussorgsky moves from one painting to the next through musical intermezzos and promenades, and Fox moves from one intellectual concept to the next through a series of twists and turns in perspective.

2. On Javanese *kakawin* (a poem in the Old Javanese language, composed according to Sanskrit metrical principles) as a source of Balinese culture see RUBINSTEIN (2000) and Fox, page 186. To suggest a more "Bali-centric approach to *kakawin*," some more recent scholars shifted the term used from "Old Javanese" language and literature, to "Kawi scholars" to

move “emphasis away from Javanese provenance toward aspects of ‘the Balinese tradition’” (183, footnote 5). HUNTER has discussed “Kawi in the Context of Mabasas,” stating that “the *mabasas* text is thus at once a translation and a ‘localization’ of the Old Javanese text, a record of the past, but also a re-interpretation in terms of contemporary institutions” (1988, 330, cited in Fox, page 202). Fox gives an example of localization through a story in which the local circumstances informed the story selected and words of advice proffered (284).

3. Fox provides a list of publications for each, but for the purpose of this review I will include bibliographic references for just two of their works, VICKERS (1989) and PICARD (2000).

4. See HEIMARCK 2003, 29, 78–79, 142–43, and 242. The formula *awighnam astu* is mentioned in Fox (268) and discussed in HEIMARCK 2003, 188–91.

5. Even in the *topeng* transcription of Fox, the actor goes on to explain *rwa bhinéda* further: “You can’t separate the bad from the good. They’re indeed as one” (242).

6. A *Tri Hita Karana* is a three-part Balinese belief which maintains that philosophy (*tattwa*), ethics (*susila*), and religion (*upacara*) are all inextricably connected and cannot be separated. Consequently, one must strive to think good thoughts, do good deeds, and say good things.

7. Fox states: “To the extent that Old Javanese texts such as the *Sutasoma* are taken to represent the religion of Bali, one’s ability to comment authoritatively on that religion will depend on a claim to textual knowledge” (140).

8. See page 203 for example, which cites SWELLENGREBEL’s (1960) conclusion that “the ordinary people of Bali do not know well enough the essential traits of their own religion”; also page 145 for a related inference based on earlier iterations in this text, and again on page 178. It becomes clear that Swellengrebel cited “an unnamed Balinese commentator” for this ongoing claim (183).

9. For a discussion of different aspects related to these terms see HEIMARCK (2003), xvi, 4, 19–23, 97, 132–33, 155–59, 162–65, 171, 174–77, 202–203, 230–32, 243, 285 (note 26), 285–86 (note 32); and xvi, 4, 16–18, 21–23, 25, 27–28, 30, 73–74, 80–84, 147–49, 172–73, 182, 239, 241, and 287 (note 45). The role of *tari lepas* (free dance forms) to open the *topeng pajegan* in Fox’s performance (268–69) also has similarities to the opening *lagu lepas* (free pieces that occur in the musical overture to the shadow play and are not tied to the dramatic story line) played by *gender wayang* players before the shadow play story begins (HEIMARCK 2003, 89). Beyond their aesthetic function and appeal, these “free” pieces also draw the audience for the upcoming dramatic performance (here *topeng pajegan* or *wayang kulit* [shadow puppet theater that uses carved leather puppets]).

10. See my discussion of musical biography as a useful genre in HEIMARCK (2015).

11. See pages 47–48 for an outline of some of the articulatory sets of relations Fox explores.

12. Fox acknowledges on page 182, footnote 2, that he is focusing on the “scholarly discourses of ‘the Old Javanese text,’” that is, I presume, rather than the content. This focus on scholarly discourses, including commentaries and editions of Old Javanese texts, unquestionably places his focus in a much later time period than the original texts.

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