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I Nyoman Darma Putra and Helen Creese

MORE THAN JUST ‘NUMPANG NAMPANG’

Women’s participation in interactive textual singing on Balinese radio and television

The singing and interpretation of religious and literary texts (makidung) has historically been a male dominated activity in Bali. In the last decade, however, since makidung programmes on radio and television have become popular, the participation of women in makidung activity has been substantial, with the number of female participants surpassing that of men. In this article, which forms part of a broader wide-ranging study of contemporary textual singing practices in Bali, we present some preliminary findings on the participation and motivation of women in textual singing programmes in the broadcast media. Women take part in on-air textual singing for a variety of personal, religious and social reasons. We show that, in spite of some elements of ‘self-promotion’ (numpang nampang) as participants seek to build their reputations as skilful practitioners, the participation and motivation of women in on-air interactive textual singing has been instrumental in fostering strong interest in Bali’s textual heritage.

Introduction

On 2 March 2003, the cultural commentator Kadek Suartaya (2003) published a think-piece in the Bali Post’s Sunday edition under the headline ‘When Textual Singing Becomes “Self-promotion”’ (‘Ketika manembang menumpang ‘nampang’). Suartaya lamented that the explosion of textual singing and interpretation on radio and television and as a performance on-stage ran the risk of undermining the serious study of Bali’s traditional literary

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heritage and threatened its core aesthetic, moral and religious values. He argued that textual singing had become ‘a pseudo-artistic endeavour’ (bersifat semu semata), in which participants sought only their ‘moment of fame’ (numpang nampang) in the media spotlight.¹ Had the mania for (traditional) literature – which had swept like a virus (virus kegilaan sastra) through Bali in the late 1990s via radio air waves – indeed been engulfed by the trappings of popular culture, rather than fulfilling its earlier promise to attract ‘honest, loyal, involved, even militant, radio listeners’ (Adnyana 1999)? Had its adherents fallen victim to a cult of self-promotion and media celebrity as live-to-air interactive textual interpretation entered an expanded media space following the launch of Bali’s first private television station, Bali TV, in May 2002?²

A decade later, the explosion of interactive radio and television textual singing shows no signs of abating. Although traces of these earlier concerns about the threat of on-air textual activity still linger amongst some practitioners and commentators, the didactic, religious and social functions of textual singing in ritual and community contexts have been reinforced and strengthened through its presence in the broadcast media. Not only has membership of the on-air interactive textual singing community expanded numerically and geographically, its base has become more inclusive in terms of gender and class. In this article, which forms part of a broader, wide-ranging study of contemporary textual singing practices in Bali, we present some preliminary findings on textual singing on radio and television. We show that, in spite of some elements of numpang nampang as participants seek to build their reputations as skilful practitioners, rather than being a threat to traditional culture and values, on-air interactive textual singing has been instrumental in fostering strong interest in Bali’s textual heritage. In particular, we turn our ‘spotlight’ on women as an increasingly active force in the on-air textual singing community in order to plot recent patterns in their participation in what has traditionally been a field dominated by men, as well as to document their expectations and motivations as they have embraced the ‘electronic stage’ (panggung elektronik; Putra 1998) as a primary site for textual singing and interpretation.

**Textual singing in Bali**

Textual singing, the oral performance and interpretation of Balinese religious and literary texts, is an integral part of contemporary religious, ritual and cultural life in Bali. Myriad terms that reflect differences in genre and purpose are used to refer to singing and interpreting texts; for convenience, we will gloss them all here with single umbrella term *makidung.*² *Makidung* involves the singing and interpretation in highly stylised languages and formats of textual works drawn from Bali’s rich literary

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¹No English expression readily encapsulates the nuances of numpang nampang, which encompasses the notion of showing off one’s talent while seeking public exposure and recognition.

²These terms include makakawin or makekawin (also mabebasan, mapepaosan) for kakawin, makidung, and mageguritan for kidung and geguritan respectively, although makidung has wider currency as a general term for the process of textual vocalisation. Terms such as masanti, magegitaan, gegitaan, *gita santi* all of which refer to the singing of sacred songs, emphasise the religious character of the activity; groups that perform *gita santi* are called *seka santi* or pesantian. General terms are also used, including
tradition. New works also continue to be composed. In *makidung*, poetical texts, written in Kawi (Old and Middle Javanese) or Balinese, are sung line by line or phrase by phrase by one participant, the ‘reader’ or *pangewacen*, and then interpreted into modern Balinese by another, the ‘interpreter’ or *paneges*. Although prose texts are also vocalised (*palawakiya*), the principal interpretive tradition revolves around works of poetry belonging to three distinct genres that are differentiated by thematic concerns, metrical form, melodic style and language:

- *kakawin* composed in Sanskrit-derived metres (called *sekar agung* or ‘great metres’), written in Old Javanese, utilising Indian epic themes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata;
- *kidung* written in indigenous metres in Middle Javanese (*sekar madya* or ‘middle metres’), concerned with the exploits of legendary Javanese kings and religious themes; and
- *geguritan* in indigenous Balinese metres (*sekar alit* or ‘small metres’), predominantly written in Balinese, and dealing with every imaginable subject from local heroes to wars, from religion to drug addiction, from the retelling of classical stories to political and contemporary events.

In contemporary Bali, textual singing takes place in three principal arenas:

- within the *desa pakraman* (customary village unit), the hub of all ritual, religious and community activities;
- in local and regional government- and community-sponsored activities and competitions such as the annual Balinese and triennial national Utsawa Dharma Gita festivals which showcase the leading groups from schools, universities and local communities;
- on radio and television in interactive and pre-recorded programming.

The rapid growth of textual singing and interpretation in the broadcast media in the past decade has been paralleled by its expansion in ritual and social domains more generally. Today, almost no ritual is held in Bali without a textual singing performance to accompany rites during temple festivals, life cycle rituals, and at ceremonies that mark other auspicious days. As one of our informants, Cok Nila, noted: ‘a textual singing performance has become trendy, it completes the ritual’. More elaborate rituals have become possible because improved economic circumstances mean that communities and individuals can better afford to invite textual singing groups to participate.

*magending* ‘to sing’ and *matembang* (from *tembang*) ‘to sing a verse’. A more detailed description of the differences in usage is provided in Putra 2009: 250.

Increasingly, textual singing clips of performances and rituals are making their way onto the internet. A basic internet video search, using keywords such as *makekawin*, *makidung* and *gaguritan* (using the spelling *gaguritan* rather than *geguritan* since *gaguritan* links principally to traditional Javanese performance sites), will provide multiple links for interested readers who are not familiar with the format of this textual practice.

‘Masanti sedang ngetrend, melengkapi yadnya’; interviewed by Wayan Lamopia, 7 April 2012. Although most interactive textual singing participants seek some kind of public or community recognition, in this study only the on-air names (*nama udara*) of interviewees are used and only public media figures are identified by name.
This change also reflects greater community awareness that textual singing is a necessary component of a ritual. More orthodox and prescriptive doctrines that now underpin Balinese Hindu religion have created commonalities of practice in all aspects of ritual life. Contemporary ritual practice now recognises that a complete ritual requires five voices (panca suara / panca gita). These voices are that of the priest in reciting mantras, the priest’s bell (genta), the gamelan, the wooden drum (kulkul), and textual singing, makidung (Figure 1).

In addition, participating in the singing and interpretation of sacred verses in rituals (masanti) has become an accepted way for individuals, women and men but increasingly women whose ritual labour roles have traditionally centred on the preparation of offerings, to fulfil their voluntary service (ngayah) obligations:

When there is work (karya) needed for a ceremony, participants in ngayah masanti are accorded a special place; we are respected. Ngayah now does not necessarily have to be undertaken by donating money, not just by making offerings, not only by presenting offerings, but also with masanti (singing sacred songs).

This capacity to meet the religious and social obligations of ngayah through textual singing activity ensures that practitioners and enthusiasts have ready access to opportunities for practice and performance in their local communities. Each of Bali’s 1,485 customary villages (desa pakraman) has a number of textual singing groups to support ritual and community activities at the banjar (ward) level, and there are now thousands of these groups all over Bali. In addition, groups are found in schools and universities, in government offices, housing complexes, and in businesses such as hotels, banks and restaurants. Strong institutional and community support for textual singing within local communities dates back to the late 1960s, when a semi-government consultative and development council for cultural affairs, Listibiya Bali (Lembaga Pertimbangan dan Pembinaan Kebudayaan), was established in 1969 to promote the development of Balinese culture, including textual singing. A decade later, in recognition of the limited success Listibiya had achieved in fostering makidung, a separate organisation, Widya Sabha (Assembly of Learning), was set up with the sole purpose of supporting textual singing and organising clubs and competitions (Rubinstein 1993: 102–12), a role that has continued to the present.

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5Established understanding and practice are reinforced in religious discourse in the media. For example, in an interactive discussion on RRI Denpasar (29 July 2011) on the topic ‘Nilai Tutur dalam Kehidupan Semi Mabebanas Masyarakat Bali merupakan Pengejawantahan Ajeg Bali’ (The value of moral advice in the artistic life of mabebasan in Balinese society as an embodiment of Ajeg Bali), one of the three speakers in the programme, Drs. I Made Surada, M.Ag., emphasised that makidung is an essential voice in the context of rituals. Orthodox practice, rigorous classificatory schemes and precise terminology also underpin the religious education curriculum in schools. Knowledge of the five voices is taught as part of the year 7 SMP (junior high school) Hindu Religion syllabus (Midastra et al. 2007).

Competitions at every level of the administrative hierarchy that showcase *makidung* have also been influential in promoting wider interest in textual singing. *Makidung* competitions date back to the pre-war period, at least in North Bali (Rubinstein 1993: 91–4), and the New Order legacy of the ‘competition culture’, which characterised institutionalised regional culture and performance throughout the Suharto years was, and remains, as prevalent in Bali as elsewhere in Indonesia. This sustained local level institutional support dating back to the early 1970s has had a significant impact on maintaining and nurturing grassroots participation in textual singing and interpretation. A village must have a textual singing group in order to represent their area in village-level competitions, the first stage in the journey to the annual provincial or triennial national level Utsawa Dharma Gita (sacred textual singing) competition. Today, Widya Sabha, while no longer part of Listibiya, has been incorporated into the organisational structure of the *desa pakraman* and its branches in every village work tirelessly to promote and develop textual singing.

Although our focus here is on only one of the three major sites for *makidung*, that is, the broadcast media, in practice, as many of our interviews with women participants reveal, the three sites are not discrete and many textual singing practitioners deploy their skills and efforts across multiple sites and formats. *Makidung* on radio and television, particularly in its interactive mode, nevertheless brings distinctive features to the practice of this ancient textual tradition. Interactive textual singing on radio and television in Bali thus provides a rich case study of the ways in which a non-western and non-modern cultural form has responded to global technologies and of how the use of those same technologies has assisted its development. Moreover, our focus on the active
participation of women provides insights into the ways in which new modes of access are able to cut across traditional gender and social boundaries.

The media context

The media landscape in Indonesia has changed markedly since the fall of the New Order in 1998 which became a pivotal moment in redefining the roles and functions of the print and broadcast media in Indonesia and opening the floodgates for greater freedom of expression (D’Haenens et al. 1999; Kitley 2000; Sen 2003; Sen and Hill 2000; 2011). In the wake of the collapse of Suharto’s New Order regime, and particularly following the changes to licensing regulations in 1999 (Law 40/1999), new electronic and print media outlets sprang up all over the country (Jurriëns 2006, 2009; Kakiailatu 2007). After the passage of Broadcasting Law 32/2002, the number of radio stations in Bali increased from 29 in 2002 to 82 in December 2011. Four private television stations – Bali TV, Dewata TV, Bali Music Channel (BMC-TV), and Alam TV Bali which focuses on environmental issues – now operate alongside the long-standing government station, TVRI Bali. Many Balinese also have access to the numerous nationwide private television channels and cable network services. Balinese, like Indonesians more generally, therefore enjoy a rich choice of global, national and local programming. As a growing body of international research on the intersections of traditional cultures and globalisation has highlighted (Murphy and Kraidy 2003; Abbas and Erni 2005; Anushiravani and Hassanli 2008; Thussu 2009; Kraidy 2010), responses to transnational agendas in globalisation and cultural and political change are multifaceted and complex. In Indonesia, even as global culture has extended its reach, localised, regional cultural programmes have, nevertheless, continued to flourish, including in the broadcast media. The recent collection of essays published in Sen and Hill (2011) demonstrates the diversity of media forms in contemporary Indonesia.

The roots of regional cultural programming on television and radio extend deeply into the New Order period, with its cultural agenda of ‘unity in diversity’ that sought to repress difference, not always successfully, by supporting the broadcasting of local cultural performances as part of national culture on state radio and television. New Order cultural policy and the institutionalisation and homogenisation of regional cultures have been voluminously documented and analysed, as Jones (2012) demonstrates in his recent comprehensive overview of the field. However constrained the policy context may have been, resistance and dynamism were, nevertheless, defining characteristics of cultural production and media programming even during the New Order period, as a considerable number of comparative studies across a wide spectrum of cultural forms and media attest (Lindsay 1997; Putra 1998; Nilan 2000; Creese 2000, 2009; Weintraub 2001; Arps 2003; Derks 2004; Suryadi 2005; Jurriëns 2006, 2009; Hobart, M. 2006; Mrázek 2008). It is therefore not surprising that in the 15 years since the end of the New Order, far from disappearing, so-called traditional cultural forms, like makidung, have readily found a place alongside modern and global cultural forms of expression.

7These figures are based on data provided by the Komisi Penyiaran Daerah (KPID) Bali (2011). In reality, the total number of stations at any time remains somewhat fluid, as licences periodically lapse and renewals are sometimes delayed.
in Indonesia’s progress towards decentralisation and democratisation. The survival, even florescence of textual singing, not only in its customary ritual and literary contexts but also in its transformation into a vibrant form of ‘popular culture’ in the broadcast media, brings into play complex factors that intersect with the politics of local and national identity, concepts of participatory democracy and freedom of speech and, most important for the current study, changes in technology.

The ‘regional turn’ since 1998, which stems from the coincidence of broadcasting law reform and decentralisation in the Reformasi (Reform) era, is driving the media-led revitalisation of traditional cultural forms in many parts of Indonesia. Indeed, since the fall of the New Order, the broadcast media, which are widely recognised as key sites for modernity and cultural globalisation, somewhat paradoxically, have served increasingly as a vehicle for the revival of local tradition (adat), religious values and the construction of inwardly focused regional identities. Textual singing and interpretation programming on radio and television has been part of Balinese cultural broadcasting since the 1970s and has a long history in its interactive, participatory mode. The pioneering and longest running programme of this type, Dagang Gantal, has been broadcast continuously on Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Denpasar since 1991. The programme’s founders, Jero Wayan Murniashih and Sang Ketut Sandiyasa still present this two-hour programme five days a week (Putra 1998, 2009; Creese 2009). Like many of their listeners, they have adopted on-air names, and are known as Luh Camplung and Gede Tomat respectively. Since 2002, however, when Bali TV, owned by the powerful Bali Post Media Group, was established, local private radio and television stations with overt agendas for promoting Balinese culture and identity have been important players in fostering and sustaining Balinese textual singing traditions. In addition to the two national RRI radio stations in Denpasar and Singaraja, about 15 private radio stations located throughout Bali currently broadcast regular textual singing programmes in interactive, live and/or pre-recorded mode. An estimated total of 175 hours of textual singing is programmed each week, of which some 150 hours are interactive. Three of the five Balinese television stations, TVRI Bali, Bali TV and Dewata TV, also regularly broadcast makidung programmes.

The relatively large number of radio stations and their geographical spread throughout the island are significant factors in the increased popularity of on-air makidung simply because they provide ready access for anyone wishing to listen to textual singing programmes or to participate in interactive textual singing. The phenomenal growth in participation, however, is far more complex than the mere presence of this critical mass of local broadcasting outlets. At the heart of this transformation lies the interactive nature of contemporary textual singing programmes. Production values on both radio and television are basic. All radio broadcasts follow a similar format incorporating commentary, chat and interactive listener phone-in – or rather sing-in – segments. Listeners call in to sing a verse on-air and to hear the interpretation which is usually provided by the programme presenter. Interpretations are not translations but expanded commentary on both the literal and symbolic or political meaning of the text. Presenters, such as Dagang Gantal’s Luh Camplung and Gede Tomat, have become celebrities.
well respected performers and receive regular commissions through their prominent on-air personalities. Gede Tomat also hosts interactive makidung on TVRI Bali’s Gegirang (Entertainment) programme (Figure 2), and was formerly a presenter on Dewata TV’s interactive programme before it was taken off-air in 2009.

Listeners interact with the hosts but only rarely with each other; there is little dialogue between even regular participants. Each caller sings their selected verse, the presenter provides the interpretation, and after a brief interchange of pleasantries, then takes the next call. The dominant genre for interactive makidung is geguritan, not only because geguritan poetry is written in Balinese and therefore readily understood by its listeners but also because its metrical structure — comprising a set number of lines with a fixed number of syllables in each line — is both familiar and relatively simple to master. Short metres in particular lend themselves well to the brief period of on-air time available to each caller. Some radio stations, such as Radio Genta Bali, also dedicate programming time to the more difficult but more prestigious singing of kakawin and kidung. Its flagship Dharma Gita programme provides an on-air interactive forum for the singing of sekar madya, sekar agung and palawakiya on Thursday and Friday each week. Radio Yudha (Denpasar), RRI Singaraja, and Radio Dunia Bokasi (Klungkung) also accommodate the needs of all participants by allocating particular days of the week to the singing of works in Kawi rather than Balinese.

On the two weekly live interactive television programmes, Kidung Interaktif (Interactive singing) on Bali TV and Gegirang on TVRI, pesantian (textual singing) groups are
invited to the studio to perform. For these performances, the invited groups adopt the practices of ritual singing: group members wear a uniform of coordinated traditional clothing, and the offerings, incense and other requisites that would accompany a ritual performance are incorporated. The singing is accompanied by a live or recorded geguntangan instrumental ensemble. Each week’s guest group performs a number of verses (pupuh) in different metrical styles, with the singing and interpretation shared around the members of the group. Viewers are then invited to phone-in to sing a verse which may be interpreted either by one of the group members or by the studio host. Production values are simple and televised interactive makidung is often little more than interactive radio with pictures. Productions are regularly enlivened by competition quizzes about programme content; occasionally viewers are invited to take the role of interpreter rather than singer. Bali TV’s Kidung Interaktif is presented by Luh Suci (Luh Nengah Suciati) who also works as a presenter on Radio Global’s Dharma Kanti.

Advances in telephone technology and its relative accessibility to Balinese from across the social spectrum, ensures open, cheap access to interactive radio and television programmes. When RRI’s Dagang Gantal began on 14 August 1991, its listeners sent in verses by letter or postcard for the radio presenters in the studio to sing and interpret. Sometimes listeners came to the RRI Studio in Denpasar and joined the presenters in singing and interpreting texts live to air. A number of radio stations still incorporate live performance in their programming. In the early 1990s, when Dagang Gantal began broadcasting, few households had a telephone. According to Luh Camplung, listeners who wanted to participate in the programme normally had to use public telephones. The advent of mobile phone technology allowed listeners to phone in from wherever they happened to be located at the time the programmes went to air.

The growth in the popularity of on-air textual singing programmes is explained in part by its accessibility and social inclusiveness. In contrast to other forms of interactive media participation, for example in reality TV shows elsewhere in Indonesia and globally such as in the Middle East (Kraidy 2010), audience involvement in interactive textual singing on-air does not require access to sophisticated global technology. Although textual singing has some internet presence through uploaded videos and printed material, in its interactive mode it remains virtually an internet-free zone. None of the local radio stations has streaming and the cost of computers and internet services is beyond the means of many makidung participants. Nevertheless, interactive makidung does provide a forum for its practitioners to express social and political concerns in similar ways to regular callers on talk-back programmes. Participants frequently compose new poems in which they voice their concerns by singing on air. In spite of the important role the internet has played in post-New Order processes of democratisation and enhanced freedom of expression in Indonesia (Hill and Sen 2005; Sen and Hill 2011), textual singing in contemporary Bali suggests that radio continues to occupy a key role in local level democratisation and freedom of expression in Indonesia (Lindsay 1997; Jurriëns 2007, 2011; Birowo 2011). To join interactive makidung, all that is required is telephone access. On-air participants do not need to leave their homes or workplaces and it is not uncommon to hear programmes being broadcast in garages, shops, warungs and offices. The technological ‘revolution’ that has underpinned the growth in interactive textual singing has been the shift to mobile phone
As we will explore below, the combination of free-to-air radio and television and cheap mobile phone access provides a ubiquitous, accessible and affordable technology that has facilitated contact among its listening or viewing communities.

The textual singing project

We are currently 18 months into a three-year project funded by the Australian Research Council to investigate contemporary textual singing interpretation practices in Bali. As noted above, our project encompasses all aspects of this cultural formation and the on-air format is just one of three major sites. We have been recording programmes from three television stations and seven radio stations in Denpasar, Badung, Gianyar and Tabanan since February 2011. The stations and their weekly programming schedules are detailed in Table 1.

Between February 2011 and July 2012, we recorded 996 hours of interactive singing on radio involving 5,457 callers (Table 2). Although we have aimed for the comprehensive collection of programmes from each of these stations, there has been considerable fluctuation in the volume of programmes recorded for individual stations, due to operational, technical and other factors, including weather events that occasionally interrupt broadcasts. Most callers to interactive makidung programmes on radio call in to their local station. Because RRI Denpasar has a more extensive broadcasting technology. As we will explore below, the combination of free-to-air radio and television and cheap mobile phone access provides a ubiquitous, accessible and affordable technology that has facilitated contact among its listening or viewing communities.

**TABLE 1** Interactive textual singing programmes on selected radio station in South Bali, 2011–12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Programme duration (hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RRI Denpasar</td>
<td>Denpasar</td>
<td>Dagang Gantal</td>
<td>Monday-Friday</td>
<td>10.00-12.00</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Genta Bali</td>
<td>Denpasar</td>
<td>Dharma Gita</td>
<td>Monday-Saturday</td>
<td>19.00-20.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Gelora</td>
<td>Gianyar</td>
<td>Lila Cita</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>10.00-12.00</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Mandala</td>
<td>Gianyar</td>
<td>Malila Cita</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>15.00-17.00</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Jegeg Bali</td>
<td>Gianyar</td>
<td>Gita Santi</td>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>12.00-15.00</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Heartline Bali</td>
<td>Gianyar</td>
<td>Magegitaan</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>15.00-17.00</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Global</td>
<td>Tabanan</td>
<td>Darma Kanti</td>
<td>Monday-Saturday</td>
<td>18.00-19.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVRI Bali</td>
<td>Denpasar</td>
<td>Gegirang</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>19.00-20.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bali TV</td>
<td>Denpasar</td>
<td>Kidung Interaktif</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>14.30-15.30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other kinds of what might seem quite dated technology are also used for off-air interactive makidung. Including short wave radio, called HT (handy-talky) radio and in Jembrana (West Bali), where access to radio broadcasts is limited, a highly localised house-to-house intercom system called Kontek (contact) provides interactive makidung for local enthusiasts. For a description of the development of short-wave radio makidung clubs, see Manda 2002; Rai Putra 2002; Putra 2009: 256.

*Hour* here indicates hour or part thereof as some of the programmes run for only 45 or 50 minutes and there are numerous variations in the length of individual programmes over time.
range, however, callers to its flagship Dagang Gantal programme come from all over Bali as well as sometimes from the Balinese makidung diaspora on the neighbouring island of Lombok. Bali TV’s Kidung Interaktif programme is also accessed by some viewers via satellite television from even further afield, such as from Java (including Jakarta), Sumatra, and Sulawesi. As Table 1 shows, the length of the radio programmes devoted to makidung varies between one and three hours. Over time, changes have been made to individual programmes. For example, Dagang Gantal, which in 1991 was originally broadcast for 30 minutes, became so popular it was gradually extended to two hours. So high is the demand to participate in phone-in kidung interactive on RRI Denpasar, the main presenters, Luh Campung and I Gede Tomat, were forced to institute a roster system that restricted participation to listeners from a certain geographical location on different days of the week. Exceptions are made only for beginners and listeners calling for the first time (Putra 2009: 256–7). In its current format, the first hour of the weekday Dagang Gantal programme is now devoted to phone-in chat and textual singing restricted to the second hour.

The weekly interactive television programmes Gegirang on TVRI Bali and Bali TV’s Kidung Interaktif have also been recorded regularly. In addition to Kidung Interaktif, Bali TV also broadcasts a pre-recorded 30-minute makidung programme four days per week called Gita Shanti (Singing of peace), from Monday to Thursday. Dewata TV, which began operations in 2007, formerly presented an interactive programme but since 2009 has broadcast only a weekly one-hour pre-recorded programme called Tembang Guntang (Songs with Guntang ensemble).11

**Women’s participation in textual singing**

Amongst the aims of our larger project is the consideration of the social distribution of contemporary makidung and of issues of class/caste and gender in enabling or restricting participation in textual singing and interpretation. Textual singing and interpretation,

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11After Dewata TV was bought by Kompas TV Jakarta in mid-2011, the time available for local programming has been reduced. Nevertheless, the broadcasting of Tembang Guntang has continued.
particularly of *kakawin* and *kidung* have historically been dominated by elderly men from the three high-caste groups known as the *triwangsa* who make up less than 10% of the Balinese population. The dominance of elderly men is unsurprising since the study of revered texts and the acquisition of knowledge are activities deemed most appropriate to the later stages of life, a time when experience and wisdom enable greater understanding and insight. In Bali’s patriarchal social structure, ritual and ceremonial leadership was, and in many areas remains, predominantly the responsibility of male heads of households. As Rubinstein (1993: 90–1; 2000: 15–38) has demonstrated, however, there is considerable evidence that even though ownership and the study of traditional texts was concentrated amongst the *triwangsa*, textual literacy in the first half of the 20th century (as well as back into the pre-colonial period in so far as the scant sources available can attest), ordinary Balinese who comprise the *anak jaba* caste, also participated actively in textual singing prior to World War II.

Although there was considerable regional variation between practices in the north and south of the island, evidence from the late 1930s indicates that women, even young women and girls were able to participate in textual singing competitions (Bhadra 1937: 6 cited in Rubinstein 1993: 95). In the absence of reliable comparative baseline data it is difficult to measure specific changes in the age and gender of participants, but the anecdotal evidence indicates that there has been a highly visible, and therefore significant, rise in the participation of women in textual singing in both the ritual and competition domains. In contrast to Balinese society more generally where gendered roles continue to prescribe and proscribe behaviour, this anecdotal evidence confirms the findings that there has been a marked increase in women’s participation in many sectors of economic, educational, religious and cultural life in the last 30 years (Bakan 1997; Davies, 2007; Diamond, 2008; Goodlander 2012).

The level of participation by women in interactive *makidung* programmes today is striking. Table 2 maps female participation on each of the seven radio stations that we are monitoring in our study. Over the 18 months of the study, we have increased the range of stations, so that some stations are better represented than others and there is considerable variation in the number of recorded programmes per station. Our data collection and analyses are ongoing, but the overall mean for female participation is 51.6% (2,841 of the 5,457 callers), with the rates for individual stations ranging from 41.9% on Radio Genta, represented by only 16 hours of recording, to 65.3% on both Heartline and Jegeg Bali. These figures provide clear evidence that women are active participants in on-air interactive textual singing throughout South Bali.12

Similar findings on the rate of female participation in *makidung* on television are evident from our analysis to date of 53 hours of programming, mainly from Bali TV (43 hours). On television, women participate both as members of textual singing groups (*pesantian*) that perform in the first half of the programme and as callers in the interactive phone-in segments that follow. Table 3 shows that 47.3% of the *pesantian* group members appearing on Bali TV’s weekly *Kidung Interaktif*, and 67.2% of callers to the programme, are women. The higher participation rate for women callers to *Kidung Interaktif* suggests that programme scheduling has an impact on women’s participation.

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12The total number of callers is higher than the number of individual participants since many participants phone in regularly and others are involved with more than one station.
In contrast to radio programmes which can run relatively unobtrusively in the background even in the workplace, participants in interactive television are more likely to be at home when they call. Bali TV’s programme is broadcast mid afternoon when women may be more likely to be watching television than men, while TVRI’s Gegirang programme is broadcast at 7.00pm (see Table 1). From our findings to date we are unable to document any changes in participation rates over time. As we extend our data collection and analysis, clearer patterns may emerge.

Interviews

In order to address why women participate so actively in on-air makidung programmes, we interviewed 16 makidung participants from Gianyar (11), Tabanan (4) and Denpasar (1). Their places of residence were not directly relevant since most also joined programmes outside their immediate geographic location, but the largest number of active callers we interviewed were from Gianyar where four local radio stations provide access to interactive makidung programmes seven days a week (see Table 1). We also interviewed the two most well-known female presenters currently on-air, Luh Camplung (Figure 3) from Dagang Gantal and Luh Suci (Figure 4) from Bali TV.

Like the presenters, many participants use on-air names rather than their personal names. The use of on-air names is not primarily a device to disguise their individual identities, which would negate any benefits of being on-air by diluting the potential to become ‘known’, for there is little doubt that gaining renown (numpang nampang), even locally, is one motivating factor for participants. The names are, in any case, often easily recognised within their own communities. Instead, for regular callers, these names are call-signs integral to developing an on-air persona. Balinese personal names commonly change at different life stages and many of the participants, who are now in their fifties or older, make use on-air of personal names that indicate their status as grandparents, with honorifics such as Dadong, Odah or Ninik (all meaning ‘grandmother’) followed by the names of their firstborn grandchildren, for example, our informants Ninik Ita and Odah Gusde. Men frequently adopt the male equivalent, identifying themselves as Pekak, or its abbreviated form Kak ‘grandfather’.

In identifying potential participants, we first located a single caller through her on-air name and then used snowball sampling to make contact with other participants. Many were surprised that their participation in textual singing programmes on radio would be of interest to researchers, but were gratified to hear that we were frequently

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Television station</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>No. of programmes</th>
<th>No. of group members</th>
<th>No. (%) of female group members</th>
<th>No. of callers</th>
<th>No. (%) of female callers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bali TV</td>
<td>Jan 2011–July 2012</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>123 (47.3%)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>111 (67.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVRI</td>
<td>April–July 2012</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32 (56.1%)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>29 (54.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>155 (48.9%)</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>140 (64.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
listening to them sing on radio. Others were happy we were paying attention to on-air textual singing which is sometimes regarded as of lower value or status in comparison with competition singing or ritual performance. Those we interviewed were older women whose ages ranged from 42 to 61 years. They came from a cross-section of caste and class groups and included members of the triwangsa, with caste titles such as Ida Ayu, Cokorda and Anak Agung as well as ordinary Balinese (anak jaba). Some were well-off; others struggled economically. Interviews were conducted in Balinese and Indonesian or, a mix of both.
Women's motivation for textual singing

Contemporary makidung in its multiple formats has its genesis in enduring cultural traditions that have owed their survival to their dynamic nature: radio and television broadcasting represent merely the latest manifestations in a chain of media — stone inscriptions, temple walls, palm leaves, paper, computers — on which poets have sought to record and share their art through performance in ritual, ceremony and spectacle. To appear on radio and particularly on television is indeed to put oneself before the public gaze. The care that pesantian groups take with presentation, with fine clothing and elaborate hairstyles and make-up, might indeed be seen as mere frippery; the return of individuals again and again to the television studio or to the airwaves might smack of arrogance and self-aggrandisement, the presentation of sacrosanct textual works in media-length sound bites might equally be considered the thin edge of the cultural wedge, but in dismissing interactive makidung as pseudo-artistic self-promotion (numpang nampang), Suartaya failed to recognise that on-air makidung is not an isolated media activity but is instead closely interconnected with the broader religious and social networks of textual singing and interpretation outlined above.

The central question we ask in the second part of this article is why are women participating in interactive makidung on-air on such a scale? The reasons are complex but our informants identified three main reasons for their involvement: to provide entertainment and solace, to fulfil their personal spiritual and community religious needs and to give voice to their socio-political concerns. These three broad categories, the aesthetic, the religious and the political, reflect with surprising acuity, the three principal functions of kakawin composition in the Javanese Indic textual tradition (Zoetmulder 1974: 173–85; Supomo 1996: 13–32) and, later, the Balinese tradition (Creese 2004: 17–28), when poets built their ‘temples of words’ (candi ning bhasa) to serve the gods, created poetry that would serve their royal patrons and the political order and above all sought to provide entertainment and pleasure to all who read or heard their poems.

To a large extent, makidung appeals to men and women for the same reasons. At the same time, there are gendered nuances to women’s participation and it is to these that we now turn. Enjoyment is a primary motivation for women’s participation. Most of our informants identified three main reasons for their involvement: to provide entertainment and solace, to fulfil their personal spiritual and community religious needs and to give voice to their socio-political concerns. These three broad categories, the aesthetic, the religious and the political, reflect with surprising acuity, the three principal functions of kakawin composition in the Javanese Indic textual tradition (Zoetmulder 1974: 173–85; Supomo 1996: 13–32) and, later, the Balinese tradition (Creese 2004: 17–28), when poets built their ‘temples of words’ (candi ning bhasa) to serve the gods, created poetry that would serve their royal patrons and the political order and above all sought to provide entertainment and pleasure to all who read or heard their poems.

To a large extent, makidung appeals to men and women for the same reasons. At the same time, there are gendered nuances to women’s participation and it is to these that we now turn. Enjoyment is a primary motivation for women’s participation. Most of our informants take part simply because they like it and they derive personal satisfaction from singing and in becoming part of a community of practice that is built on interactive on-air textual singing. But they are also motivated by a strong sense of moral and religious commitment and by issues concerned with the cultural politics of Balinese identity.

Entertainment

Interactive textual singing programmes are lively affairs, characterised by friendly and open on-air dialogue between presenters and callers, peppered with jokes and personal greetings before getting down to the business of textual singing and interpretation. A number of informants indicated just how much pleasure they gained from participating as listeners and as callers. Some sought nothing more than entertainment to fill their spare moments between household chores and caring for grandchildren. Odah Gusde, aged 60, is a self-employed rice seller from Denpasar. She is a former janger dancer, with considerable experience in singing. When she first joined in interactive
makidung, she quickly learnt enough basic tembang (textual melodies) to be able to join in. Participation for her was principally a form of entertainment and a way to enjoy her life in her (not too) old age. She said:

What else do I need to do? I worked hard to raise my son and daughter. I did it without my husband, who died a long time ago. Both of our children have got married and they have their own lives. They do not need my support anymore, and I am unable to do so anyway as I am getting old. Working hard will not make me rich. I just work to make enough to eat, and enjoy the rest of my life.13

Ninik Ita from Tabanan, who is also 60 years old, had also only found time to turn her attention to new activities when the burden of family responsibilities eased. She has been a regular participant in makidung on radio and television since the 1990s:

When I was little, I never learnt to sing. After I got married, I was occupied with family matters. We had many children, four children. There was almost no time for me to think of learning to sing. At that time I knew nothing about literature.14

Like Ninik Ita, a number of other participants indicated that they had learned how to sing by listening to makidung on radio and television. For them the radio format provided a window to a new or long-forgotten skill, in a non-threatening way that allowed them to gradually gain confidence. Some reported that they felt more confident in taking part in interactive makidung on the radio because they were mature-age beginners and felt less embarrassed on radio where no one could see their faces. Novice women callers often ask for guidance from the presenter when they are on-air on interactive programme, prefacing their attempt to sing with the now standard phrase: ‘please take my hand if I tremble’ (tolong kedetin yen tyang srandang-srendeng). Many praised the radio and TV presenters for the on-air guidance they offered and for their timely assistance when they had difficulty singing a verse.

Dadong Edi, (55 years) from Batubulan in Gianyar, is a good example of a self-taught makidung enthusiast, who learnt her makidung skills exclusively from radio. At home every day looking after her grandchild, she used to listen regularly to the radio programmes and when she felt confident enough, she started calling in to the Gianyar-based station, Jegeg Bali, to sing on air. She noted how grateful she was to the presenter on Jegeg Bali Radio who had patiently guided her performance on-air. This interaction had given her the confidence to sing and to continue to

make regular phone calls. Dadong Edi has continued to be an active participant in *makidung*, both on-air and off-air. She commented that participating made her ‘happy’ (demen).

Bali TV’s *Kidung Interaktif* host, Luh Suci, remarked that she actively encourages women to come forward and not to feel shy about seeking mastery of traditional literature and *makidung*. She uses her skills as an educator to guide new learners. Luh Camplung observed that the number of women taking part was evidence that learning how to *makidung* was not as difficult as many imagined. Even beginners come to *makidung* with some knowledge of melody and format and of textual interpretation since textual singing is a deeply embedded cultural practice to which most Balinese are exposed from childhood in the ritual and ceremony of religious life. Many have also been life-long listeners and viewers of traditional performance genres, including wayang, and traditional forms of dance and drama, where the words of the noble characters are uttered in Kawi and interpreted into the everyday and the topical by the companion and comic figures, the *panasar* (Hobart, A. 1987; Tatu 2007; Fox 2011).

After more than 20 years as *Dagang Gantal’s* presenter, Luh Camplung is proud to see that there are now more women able to *makidung* than men. Men, however, she notes, dominate textual interpreting and women seem reluctant to become translators. As more women become more proficient this situation may change. There does not seem to be any impediment to women becoming interpreters because of their gender. It is not common for male participants to have skills both as singers and interpreters. As Rubinstein (1993: 88) notes, readers rarely function as translators, but aspiring translators usually commence their training as readers.

The function of *makidung* as a form of entertainment can extend to more tangible benefits. The centuries-old function of literature as a means to soothe cares (*penglipur lara*), prevalent throughout the Indonesian and Malay world (Sweeney 1987; Supomo 1996, 2000), retains its potency. Participants, men and women, speak of their participation in *makidung* as a medicine (*obat*) for their cares and, for some women, participation provides relief from their day-to-day cares and the stresses of daily life.

Ninik Darma, a 61-year old fruit seller at Sukawati market, is a widow. She started participating in interactive *makidung* in 2009, not long after her husband died. After her husband’s death, Ninik Darma found that participating in the programmes eased her troubles:

> When my husband was still alive, if there was a problem, we could solve it in the family, with my husband. Now I do not have husband. My main motivation is for entertainment. In fact, I never go out anywhere after my work at the market. If nothing else, it can quickly relieve my feelings of confusion.17

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16 Interviewed by I Nyoman Sudirga, 3 June 2010.
Ninik Darma noted further that she did not worry about the costs of participating in interactive makidung. For her, whatever the cost of the phone-calls, participation in an activity that enhanced her wellbeing was far better than allowing herself to become sick or stressed and having to see a doctor which would cost as much (dibandingkan sakit dan ke dokter, banyak juga habisnya).

For Bu Mangku, a souvenir seller at the Sukawati Arts market, the benefits of makidung are even more tangible. She was born into an artistic family; both her grandfather and mother were dancers and she had been interested in textual singing as a child. She had only become serious about textual singing when she was 35 years old. At that time she developed respiratory problems (sesak nafas) and attributes her cure to the beneficial effects of the breathing exercises (olah vokal) associated with makidung. Now 45, she has been participating in makidung for a decade.

With breathing exercises, my breathing became fine. It means that my respiratory problem was cured by this medicine: with magending, with dharma santi, with breathing exercises, I became healthy.

For Ibu Kris (age 43) from Gianyar, who runs a motorbike service, listening to interactive radio programmes allows her to take a break (masliahaan) from her labours. She also participates in makidung activities as a means of escape from her business worries. Ibu Kris commented that when her garage is quiet she automatically becomes stressed because without customers, she has no income. But, she explains, ‘at least if we can magending, no one will ever know that we do not have money’ (yen suba magending saru ten ngelah pipis).

For many with limited financial means, the benefits of participation outweigh considerations of cost. Fixed telephone lines are both difficult to obtain and expensive and no longer a preferred option. Many participants rely on mobile phones. The costs of on-air participation can be contained by restricting the number of calls made, but many participants also reduce costs by having more than one type of service: a mobile phone and a flexi phone. Dadong Lelakut (lelakut means ‘scarecrow’; she once lived in the middle of the rice fields) from Batubulan, who has no telephone connection in her house, explained:

When I phone-in, I use this one, the flexi phone. I do not have a telephone connection in my house. I do not have one. To sing two verses of ginada [a short metre of only seven lines] costs IDR3,000. If I used simpati [a mobile phone provider], I pay

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18Interviewed by Wayan Lamopia, 27 July 2011.
20Interviewed by Wayan Lamopia, 8 August, 2011.
21A flexi phone works like a fixed phone but has the portability of a mobile phone. It is cheaper than a mobile phone plan because it allows calls to be made within a single area code zone for the cost of a local fixed line call. The flexi rate can be transferred to another area code; all other calls are charged at national phone rates.
22IDR3,000 is approximately USD0.30. In August 2012 the exchange rate was USD1 to IDR9,625.
a flat rate of IDR6,000. Whenever I phone-in to sing, I always use the flexi. Most people who like to do [interactive] makidung would have two phones. The flexi phone is for makidung, whereas the mobile is to receive [SMS] notifications of missed calls.\textsuperscript{23}

Her careful use of different mobile phones for different purposes, and the flexi phone local call rate, help to reduce her costs. By contrast, Ninik Ita, whom we met earlier, lives comfortably. Her daughter takes care of her mobile phone bills, and she is unperturbed by the costs involved. ‘When I was beginning to learn how to sing through interactive [makidung], I did not worry about my pulsa (telephone credit). Not like her,’ she added pointing to her friend who joined her during the interview.\textsuperscript{24} Ninik Darma, the fruit seller at Sukawati market, whose monthly phone bills for her shop and home average IDR1 million per month, also noted that she was prepared to make sacrifices to ensure she could participate. So important to her well-being and happiness is participation in makidung that she has recently spent IDR5 million (a not inconsiderable sum) on a short-wave radio (HT) in order to communicate and sing with her interactive makidung networks and friends outside of radio broadcasting.

Religion and ritual labour

Although, as we have seen, many women enjoy their participation in interactive makidung on air, their involvement is not solely for personal gratification since, by their very nature, the texts sung during makidung have serious religious or social purposes. This apparent paradox between the core ritual and didactic functions of the texts, on the one hand, and talk-back radio as a form of popular entertainment, on the other, deserves comment. In Bali, the distinctions between sacred and secular are blurred and makidung participants can acquit their religious and social obligations to perform ritual work (ngayah) in ceremonies and at temple festivals through textual singing. Moreover, it should be noted that the sacred is not necessarily solemn since the gods and ancestors too, like and expect, to be entertained and to hear and enjoy the five voices (panca gita), including makidung. In the desa pakraman, textual singing mobilises social networks for those who belong to its communities of practice.

For many regular on-air participants, membership of the virtual community of the radio and television air waves may lead to participation in makidung in the real world. Invitations to join with others in voluntary community service are announced frequently on air by both presenters and callers. Active participants may be expressly invited by name, often their on-air name, to join with other enthusiasts in voluntary community service. Participants, whose identities are known, or whose on-air names are recognisable, may also be invited to perform ngayah in their own neighbourhoods or immediate community


\textsuperscript{24}Dugase mara-mara mauruk, tyang sing medalem pulsa, ten sekadi Ida, pedaleme pulsan. Interviewed by I Wayan Suardiana, 22 January 2012.
environments. Cok Nila from Gianyar, who is an active interactive on-air participant and, at 42, the youngest of the women we interviewed, noted that ‘through singing on radio . . . our names become known and we are invited to ngayah’. Similarly, Dadong Edi, the self-taught enthusiast from Gianyar whose on-air experiences are recounted above, has been able to extend her makidung participation into her local community after being invited to join a group and becoming involved in textual singing at rituals and ceremonies. She has formed new friendships beyond the boundaries of her own village. Having only three years of primary school education, her strong desire to be able to read the texts with her new-found friends, has enabled her to develop her general literacy skills.

Undertaking ngayah through textual signing is a personal commitment well-suited to older people in local communities, including those who have only recently developed the skill to participate. Bu Mangku, who was convinced that makidung had acted as the medicine that had cured her breathing problems, has been actively involved in on-air and village makidung for 10 years. She commented further:

Now I am old. What else should I be doing? If we go to a temple (festival), rather than sitting around discussing other people isn’t it better to do makidung? Afterwards, we go home; we are tired when we get there and then sleep well. [Through makidung] we receive medicine, and meet our ritual labour obligations (ngayah).25

In a process that mirrors the characteristics of community radio more generally, from time to time, the virtual community of interactive makidung on radio takes a more concrete form. For example, during the anniversaries of the radio station or other occasions when they are invited to the studio, active on-air participants have a chance to meet each other face to face and to replace on-air names with real names. Together, members of the interactive makidung community on radio can share in ritual singing that underpins the core sacred purpose of textual activity. Loosely organised makidung groups have been set up by several radio stations, including RRI Denpasar, Jegeg Bali, Yudha Bali and Radio Global. Like textual singing groups in villages, these groups also regularly volunteer to perform makidung activities as ngayah at festivals in major temples such as Besakih, Batur, Samuan Tiga in Bali and also at the Semeru temple in East Java. Listeners to RRI Denpasar’s Dagang Gantal have a long-established pesantian and support group called Pasuwitrang Dagang Gantal (Friends of Dagang Gantal). Luh Camplung observed that, following the formation of the group in the early 1990s, she felt it needed a more well-defined purpose and had conceived the idea of organising ritual pilgrimages (acara dharma yatra). A group of over 500 Dagang Gantal participants had visited Pura Lempuyang, one of Bali’s major temples, then temples at Lumajang in East Java and a number of other temples in Bali.26 Recently, Pasuwitrang Dagang Gantal organised a pilgrimage (tirta yatra) which visited six temples in Lombok from 22–24 June 2012 (Figure 5). Over 100 members participated. The group travelled by bus and participants met their own costs of IDR 350,000 to cover the costs of transportation including


26 Interviewed by Helen Creese and Windhu Sancaya, 8 June 2012.
ferries, meals, accommodation and the cost of the offerings. More well-to-do members sponsored some of the costs for those unable to afford them.

Social concerns and cultural preservation

In addition to the aesthetic and religious dimensions of makidung practice, members of the on-air makidung community are keenly aware of their shared cultural and ethnic identity. For many participants, interactive textual singing on-air provides an opportunity to articulate the importance of the preservation of Balinese culture and traditional literature. Ketut Sari from Gianyar, for example, commented that she participates in makidung in order to:

build our culture so that it will not fade away, so that our culture does not continue to disappear. It’s called ‘civilising Balinese culture’. As Balinese, that is our task.27

Her statement resonates with the deeply entrenched discourse of the past decade about the preservation of Balinese religious and cultural identities that has been built around the concept of ajeg Bali, ‘to make Bali stand strong’ (Allen and Palermo 2005; Schulte Nordholt 2007; Lewis and Lewis 2009). Since ajeg Bali was promulgated as a catch phrase during the inauguration of Bali TV in May 2002, it has been promoted intensely by members of the Bali Post Media Group on Bali TV, Radio Global, Genta Bali FM,

Suara Besakih and Singaraja FM. Support for on-air textual singing programmes has been part of that platform. In on-air textual singing programmes, aesthetic, media and political interests coincide, for not only has traditional Balinese literature been provided with a new performative space on air, but the broadcasting companies have also been able to produce relatively low-cost interactive programmes with local content to support the dynamic construction of regional identities. The government radio station RRI Denpasar has also adopted the term \textit{ajeg} Bali to demonstrate its commitment to promoting Balinese culture. The slogan has been incorporated into the second line of its \textit{Dagang Gantal} jingle: ‘My greetings to all RRI Denpasar listeners; through the arts we keep Bali standing strong’ (\textit{Atur titiang pambilasa RRI Denpasar/ Antuk seni mengajegkan Bali}).

For many of its adherents, practising \textit{makidung} is a means to contribute directly to the preservation of Balinese culture. \textit{Makidung} maps neatly onto \textit{ajeg} Bali agendas. It is neither a pan-Indonesian cultural form in which all members of the nation state can participate, nor is it accessible to tourism. Its practitioners require highly specific cultural capital, namely knowledge of the languages of the texts, Balinese – and for \textit{kakawin} and \textit{kidung} also the more esoteric Kawi, mastery of traditional metrical forms and melodies and familiarity with Balinese cultural and religious practices. In other words, even as it becomes more inclusive at the local level cutting across boundaries of class, caste and gender, it remains completely exclusive, keeping at bay all non-Balinese. Although its grip on public discourse has loosened in recent years, \textit{ajeg} Bali is a recurrent theme amongst interactive textual singing participants.

The core moralising and didactic purposes of \textit{makidung} are demonstrated further in the kinds of texts that participants select to sing from the vast repertoire of classical material. There is a long tradition in Balinese public discourse of moral and social guidance drawn directly from traditional texts that are still deemed to offer culturally appropriate solutions to the challenges of daily life in the modern world. During phone-in segments on radio and television, callers are restricted to a single verse. The verse is referred to only by the name of the metre and, unless it is one of the more well-known classic works, it is not always possible to identify the text being used. The emphasis is on the sung performance and its interpretation. In general, however, texts read by women do not differ markedly from those selected by men. Many contain moral and religious advice. Nevertheless, when verses are taken from narrative poems, both male and female singers will choose to articulate the voice of a character of their own gender. Presenters and participants on-air always try to include topical references either by selecting a relevant stanza from available works or by creating new poems that comment on current issues.

In addition to the singing of extracts from well-known texts, there is an active culture of new compositions with overt didactic and political agendas regularly presented in interactive \textit{makidung} on both radio and television. In line with other traditional performance genres in Bali and elsewhere in Indonesia, \textit{makidung} affords an opportunity for social and political critique. The more open climate in contemporary Indonesia allows more freedom to contest and to criticise, but traditional cultural forms like \textit{makidung}, in which thinly disguised references to the foibles and misdeeds of the powerful appear, retain their appeal because \textit{makidung} is, above all else, a verbal art form, where displays of literary dexterity are prized.
In this article, we have examined some of the motivations that shape the participation of women in textual singing and interpretation in interactive programmes in the broadcast media. While we would not rule out the allure of numpang nampang, a moment of fame in the media, there is no evidence to support the view that this consideration is a significant factor in women’s participation. Instead, women regard on-air makidung as just one form of the expression of their art, one that complements their contributions to textual singing in ritual and institutional contexts. Enjoyment of a shared passion for Balinese traditional literature is a strong motivating factor, but is overlayed by the religious and social concerns that are held to lie at the heart of Balinese cultural identity. Rather than posing a threat, women’s participation in on-air makidung contributes to the maintenance and development of a vibrant makidung culture. The broadcast media provide an accessible and affordable forum that fosters the involvement of women from all classes and castes, but seemingly only from older age groups; all our participants were middle-aged or elderly. Large numbers of young women and girls (as well as young men and boys) are active participants in makidung in community and institutional settings but seem to be completely absent from its performance in the broadcast media. We have yet to investigate, and to tell, their story.

Our research indicates that there are few formal barriers to women’s participation in on-air textual singing programmes. Female participation rates are currently higher than those for men on both radio and television programmes broadcast on nearly all the stations we have surveyed. We have touched on only some aspects of why textual singing on-air holds such appeal for these women. The next chapter in this story will be to document what kinds of texts women (and men) choose to read, the thematic concerns of the texts they sing and the focus of their new compositions, as well as to consider more closely the roles of women in makidung in the other major sites in which contemporary textual singing takes place in Bali.

References


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