Longing for the Unseen: Connecting to a Balinese Imagined Community through Offerings and Contemporary Art

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine a group of painterly projects by the Balinese artists I Ketut Budiana, Cokorda Isteri Mas Astiti, and I Wayan Bendi, whose works visually convey offerings, ritual practices and ceremonies, and assert individual and communal identities. These artists employ visual imagination in their paintings to articulate personal views and underline problems in the socio-political environment around them. The theoretical concept of 'imagined communities,' developed by Benedict Anderson, can be used to consider how individuals within a nation, city, or province experience a personal connection to other members of their group or socio-political system, but also to worlds beyond the material one. Rituals and offerings connect individuals existing in the seen or material realm with beings from an unseen realm, including ancestors, spirits, and divine beings, to generate a larger Balinese imagined community. The Balinese artists discussed in this paper intervene in the framing of a national identity, by defining their beliefs and ritual practices through a unique cosmological perspective that embraces this notion of imagined communities as expressed in visual form.

Balinese offerings and modern visual representations of offerings and cosmological themes reflect a connection between seen and unseen worlds. I contrast the idea of balancing seen and unseen dimensions, a Balinese world-view, with the scholar Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities.[1] I postulate that offerings and rituals connect individuals existing in a seen (*sekala*) realm with beings from an unseen *(niskala)* realm in a Balinese imagined community, and, as we shall see, this world view is expressed in art by I Ketut Budiana, Cokorda Isteri Mas Astiti, and I Wayan Bendi.[2] The anthropologist Hildred Geertz argues that: "In Bali, power is acquired by producing or reproducing connections with the invisible world of spirits."[3] It is not surprising, then, that ritual practices designed to connect individuals with the *niskala* world still take place today, in both earlier as well as new forms adapted to contemporary life. Through visual media, these three Balinese artists assert their unique religious and socio-cultural identities in relation to a nationally-driven agenda as well as in response to regional, local and global frameworks.

Cosmologies in Bali draw on a range of diverse religious philosophies and histories, integrating ideas from Hinduism and Buddhism with practices and views indigenous to the area and connected to geographic sites. Natural spaces including mountains, lakes, oceans, and seas as well as temples built near these sites and in residential or city spaces: all play a crucial role in many of the beliefs and practices in Bali. Daily activities, including prayers and giving offerings, as well as larger ceremonies such as tooth filings, weddings, temple performances, and cremations are also ways that people affirm and express their religious views in Bali.

Because of Bali's geographic separation as an island and its unique religion and history, I contend that the concept of imagined communities is highly applicable. Pre-Indic and indigenous[4] practices on the island have become largely

hidden within much of the earlier and-dominant scholarship because of the colonial and postcolonial narrative of a 'Hindu Bali.' Offerings are an ephemeral art form that counters this assumption and serves as a means for people to connect with unseen members of Balinese society. Furthermore, the highly sensory, kinesthetic and performative dimension of making and giving offerings adds another layer in a process of accessing and understanding an unseen world. Religious activities and the practice of giving offerings to ancestors, spirits and deities allows Balinese people, as individuals and as a collective, to communicate with an unseen world that is integral to their imagined community.

I discuss offerings as an art form by considering various types of offerings, their material and visual qualities, as well as how they are used in three artistic projects by the Balinese painters, I Ketut Budiana, Cokorda Isteri Mas Astiti, and I Wayan Bendi. In one work, I Ketut Budiana (b. 1950, Gianyar) depicts the figure of Rangda as a mother-goddess with references to the Indonesian national flag, thus conveying cosmological ideas that are unique to Bali. Cokorda Isteri Mas Astiti (b. 1948, Gianyar) visually articulates tensions between Bali and tourism, which references national and global issues as well as highlighting the gendered dimensions of making offerings. Finally, a painting by I Wayan Bendi (b. 1950, Batuan) represents groups of people in Bali, as well as tourists and the Indonesian government 'invading' their space, to convey how ritual practices support Bali as socially and spiritually autonomous, but not isolated from globalization. These artistic examples each speak differently to how unseen beings connect to Balinese society in multiple ways. I employ the concept of 'imagined communities' as a way to interpret and understand the possible meanings embedded in these works.

Understanding Bali's Religious History and Political Culture

Bali, a province and island within Indonesia, has a singular history and artistic, cultural and religious practices that interlink with its socio-political systems. Today, Bali is known as an area with a predominantly Hindu population that exists as a minority group within the Muslim-majority nation of Indonesia. The Balinese are descended from Austronesian-speaking peoples who migrated along sea routes between 1500 and 1000 B.C.E.[5] Although not covered extensively in historical accounts of the island, early, pre-Indic inhabitants of Bali had their own distinct practices centered on a connection to spirits, nature, and ancestors.[6] Hindu and Buddhist ideas from Indic areas were first introduced through trade, and the indigenous inhabitants of Bali integrated them with their beliefs and practices in the 12th century and possibly earlier.[7] Balinese artistic and religious practices trace the island's early, pre-Indic cultural dimensions along with historical shifts and contact with outside cultures.

Dutch colonization of Bali came relatively late, especially when compared to that of the island of Java and other areas of the Indonesian archipelago. In 1597, the first Dutch East Indies ship stopped at the island of Bali.[8] However, different Balinese kingdoms maintained their independence until the early 20th century.[9] The Netherlands gained full control of Bali in 1908 when they attacked the last Balinese ruling clan in Klungkung. This battle, which was also a mass ritual suicide known as a *puputan*, highlights the resistance that colonizers encountered during their brutal invasion of the island.[10] Political tensions during World War II and the Japanese occupation of Indonesia eventually led to a rebellion and the formation of an independent Indonesian nation in 1945 under the first president Sukarno (1945-1967).[11]

Following the establishment of Indonesia as an independent nation the government promoted the idea of a connection amongst its citizens through

the national motto of 'unity in diversity'. In contrast, Bali, one of Indonesia's thirty-four provinces, exemplifies a local or regional community and political system which, to some degree, is autonomous from the nation.[12] These regional differences are partly because many Balinese have avoided conversion to Islam and Christianity and maintained a form of their earlier religious practices which are a synthesis of Hinduism, Buddhism, and spiritual practices indigenous to the island.

Balinese people have encountered challenges as a religious minority who had to convince the Indonesian government that they were sufficiently 'Hindu'. In order to do this, many practices in Bali underwent a process that has been referred to as 're-Hinduizing';[13] this process involved re-structuring the religious texts and ritual practices to reflect an 'orthodox' form of Hinduism.[14] To the Indonesian government, Bali's form of Hinduism did not appear to be centered on the national religious model of a belief in one God or focus on a single religious text like the Quran.[15] This policy demonstrates the Indonesian government's unease with spiritual practices that diverge in form and appearance from the dominant Islamic-oriented expectations. Balinese religion is fluid and dynamic, although the island is often presented to visitors as 'a paradise' that has remained untouched by time. Adrian Vickers underscores how this strategic construction of Bali as a 'paradise' began with Dutch colonization.[16] This history of nostalgia surrounding the island still persists today and has been mobilized as early as the 1950's by the Indonesian nation to promote tourism.[17] However, while practices on the island have been maintained, they are not static but rather have been adapted and changed in response to economic and political shifts as well as globalization. Art forms and cultural practices often reveal how 'traditions' in Bali are constantly shifting and being re-shaped.[18] In this way, I propose that considering *how* Balinese cosmological ideas link to systems of governance offers a new way to understand political, religious and creative processes in Bali and Indonesia.

Challenging the Nation: Beyond an Indonesian 'Imagined Community'

Bali might be viewed as its own semi-autonomous and complex imagined community and, specifically, beings who inhabit the seen (or *sekala)* and unseen (or *niskala)* realms together should be viewed as part of an imagined community of Bali. In his book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [first edition published in 1983], Benedict Anderson examines how a sense of connection amongst citizens develops in multiple nations. Anderson emphasizes the role of community and kinship in his theory of imagined communities, and defines it, as follows:

> The nation (…) is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.[19]

Anderson describes nations as imagined communities because individuals in a given country believe in and feel a sense of familial connection with other citizens, although they might never meet them in person. Anderson clarifies that the 'imagined' status of a nation does not mean that it is 'fabricated' but rather that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (…) are imagined."[20] For example, he explains that on the island of Java, "Javanese villagers have always known that they are connected to people they have never seen, but these ties were imagined…as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship."[21] The role of imagination here reveals how the beliefs, emotions and practices of individuals in a group can drive a nation forward, or in contrast, uncover conflicts and frictions within it. It is important to emphasize that imagined does not equate to 'made up,' and I am not suggesting that the unseen world is unreal. Rather, I employ the theory of 'imagined communities' to assert that unseen beings have a real presence in Balinese ceremonies and ritual activities. Visual imagination specifically, and in the case of the artworks examined in this paper, indicates ways that individuals are further (re)considering ideas of the nation.

The concept of imagined communities primarily describes how people within the same culturally and ethnically diverse but mainly geo-politically defined nation feel an intimate connection to their countrymen. However, an imagined community can be expanded beyond a nation and applied to smaller groups and cultures. Ruth McVey challenges the nationally defined boundary and argues that Anderson intended the idea of 'nation' to mean "a sense of togetherness, a striving towards the realization of a common self."[22] Later scholarship further identifies the complexities in applying the concept of imagined communities to national and social groups. According to Rita Padawangi, "cities, not just countries are also sites of imagined communities."[23] She adds that the spatial dimension of imagined communities identifies groups and communities through mapping.[24] Similarly, Bali's syncretic religious and artistic practices distinguish it from other provinces and areas of Indonesia,[25] and as an island it is also physically autonomous. This further demonstrates the need to acknowledge Bali as an imagined community distinct from the Indonesian nation.

The conceptual framework underpinning the idea of imagined communities pivots on individual citizens or members of a country, region, province, or group ascribing to a sense of belonging. This raises the question: does a national imagined community encompass all ethnicities, minorities or religions, or only those defined as acceptable by the government? One example of this concern is a statement made in 1985 by Martono, a former Minister of Transmigration. He described the ultimate goal of the Indonesian government was to "integrate all the ethnic groups into one nation, the Indonesian nation. The different ethnic groups will in the long run disappear because of integration and there will be one kind of man, 'Indonesian'."[26] In contrast to this statement, after Indonesia's second President Suharto (who was in office from 1968 to 1998)[27] resigned, there was a strong political movement amongst youth and other Balinese people in support of

Megawati Sukarnoputri,[28] a female politician who later became Indonesia's fifth president. Because Megawati's party was more provincially aligned, this helped shift the representation in parliament to a more populist and pro-Bali focus. The aim of the political rallying was to increase the representation of Balinese cultural institutions.[29] This account demonstrates that Bali is a crucial example of how multiple imagined communities exist in relation to the Indonesian nation. It should be noted that when I refer to 'Balinese imagined communities' this is also a broad classification since different villages, groups, individual people and unseen beings in Bali are all highly diverse. One could further propose that there are multiple imagined communities within Bali, although this is a topic reserved for future development.

Anderson's theory can be applied more broadly than to nations and their visible inhabitants. Balinese cosmologies, which includes unseen beings such as deities, spirits and ancestors, expands on the idea of imagined communities and reshapes conceptions of nationhood. In addition, I suggest that visual and cultural practices, and many artworks offer critiques of national identity or serve to strengthen Balinese imagined communities. To this end, I employ the theory of imagined communities to un-pack the multi-valent political, religious, and cultural messages in these artworks.

Bridging the Seen (*sekala*) and Unseen (*niskala*) Dimensions

Considering the imagined communities' theory in relation to Balinese art and religion provides a means to discuss how unseen or *niskala* beings are linked to Balinese society in the material or *sekala* realm. Central to this claim is the observation that rituals and ceremonies connect Balinese people to members of their unseen *(niskala)* realm and that these spiritual practices support Bali as its own imagined community. To do this, I will focus on a painting by Balinese

contemporary artist I Ketut Budiana, who critiques the Indonesian nation by referencing the national flag in relation to Balinese religious cosmologies (fig. 1).

  Niskala is a Sanskrit word[30] that is used in Bali to mean 'invisible or intangible'; *sekala* refers to that which is seen, visible, physical, and tangible. Fred Eiseman describes the *niskala* as "that which cannot be sensed directly, but which can only be felt within" in contrast to the *sekala* which is physically tangible through the senses.[31] Since *niskala* means 'unseen' and 'intangible', this idea encompasses a whole range of beings existing at different levels and tied to different regions and communities in Bali. According to Geertz: "The phrase "*niskala* beings" can be used to refer to everyone from the highest deities (Siwa, Wisnu, and the like) down through local gods (the gods of Pura Desa Batuan) to the littlest imps and spooks that inhabit small streams and clumps of brush."[32] Ancestors are also part of this unseen classification, and often take on a deified status with shrines devoted to them located in the northeast corners of residential compounds.[33] These "*niskala* inhabitants of Bali"[34] as Geertz refers to them, are so central to rituals and daily practices on the island that they cannot be separated or even considered in isolation from the lives of Balinese peoples. They are, quite literally, members of the community.

  The seen and unseen dimensions are a complex system which challenges an easy definition or classification of Balinese religion.[35] Geertz also notes that the *niskala* realm is closely linked to a world view unique to Bali that involves connection and communication with unseen beings. Rituals (and ritual arts) also link people living in material realities and spaces (considered the Middle World in the Balinese cosmology of the Three Worlds) with unseen beings and immaterial realities (located in the Upper and Lower Worlds).[36] The Three Worlds system, or *Tribawana*, used in Bali and other parts of Indonesia, offers a different kind of 'mapping' that identifies worlds and dimensions in relation to the island's

imagined community. For example, temples in Bali offer a space for people to connect with *niskala* beings in the Lower and Upper worlds through performance and ritual activities.[37]

Eiseman argues that Balinese people are mindful of unseen forces, both beneficent and dangerous ones, as well as mystical powers that are present in temples, cemeteries, mountains, cremation grounds and motor vehicles. The balancing between seen and unseen realms that occurs through rituals also reveals that there is a thin line separating these worlds.[38] *Niskala* beings constitute an intangible, ephemeral population that is nonetheless central and active in everyday rituals and activities, as well as special ceremonies and events that occur on the island. An analysis of different artistic projects reveals how religious ceremonies and offerings support a Balinese social system that is deeply connected to a larger unseen world.

In his painting titled *Merah-Putih* (1998) (fig. 1), the Balinese artist I Ketut Budiana (b. 1950) conveys the idea of balancing seen and unseen dimensions. The iconography of red and white is multi-valent throughout Indonesia and so also in Bali. Not only does it allude to the national flag, it also conveys philosophies indigenous to Bali and other areas of Indonesia. White and red can symbolize dualities such as purity and blood, male and female, sky and earth. The idea of duality and balance is also visually conveyed in the black and white or red and white checked patterned fabric adorning statues outside of temples in Bali. In this work, Budiana depicts a female monster-figure with a white 'two-faced/headed' body and tongue dripping a thick, red, stream of blood or fire. The iconographic features of this being recall the many images of Rangda, a uniquely Balinese interpretation of the Hindu goddess Kali who is central in many religious performances.[39] This painting clearly suggests notions of duality that are important to Balinese religious practices; this duality is only resolved by

temporarily uniting opposing forces through rituals and ceremonies performed by the Balinese in the material/*sekala* and middle world.[40] According to Stephen, there are multiple Balinese cosmological implications in this image; for example, the downward movement of fire suggests an inversion of elements that reflects the Kali Yuga age.[41]

By representing the central figure as a destructive mother-goddess, Budiana includes the presence of an unseen being in *Merah-Putih*.[42] This painting acts as a kind of microcosmic illustration of a larger Balinese world order, with the red and white colors reflecting the idea of balancing dualities in the three worlds. Budiana's painting can be read as conveying socio-political imbalances between Bali and the larger world. Although Stephen questions if the artwork is directly political,[43] with a title like "Merah-Putih" the connotations to the red and white
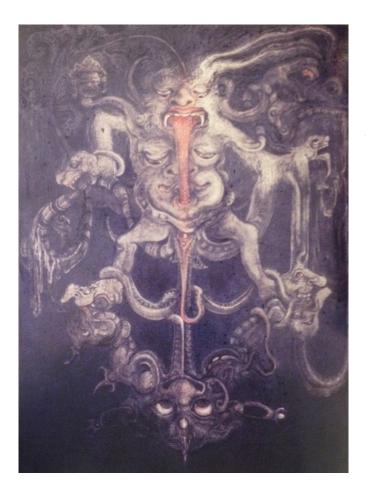

FIGURE 1
I Ketut Budiana, *Merah Putih* **(Red and White), 1998, acrylic on canvas, 109 x 85 cm.**

Source: Stephen, Michele. *Desire: Divine and Demonic.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.

Indonesian flag are surely present in the artist's mind and for a viewer who is aware of Indonesia's history and political iconography. Budiana provides his work with a title that conveys nationalistic meanings, by referencing the red and white flag, or "Merah Putih", but pairs this with strong Balinese cosmological references to a divine and destructive female being. By doing so Budiana offers a counter-narrative that promotes a Balinese worldview centered on seen and unseen dimensions and a balancing of opposing forces.

Examining Budiana's painting suggests that continuous communication between *sekala* and *niskala* dimensions is a significant part of many belief systems in Bali. This work also highlights *niskala* beings as an integral part of Balinese society. In the next section I address how offerings assist in connecting people in the visible, material world with beings from unseen realms.

Offerings as Art Forms and Systems of Communication

Much of the research on Southeast Asian art and religion tends to favor more monumental and permanent art forms.[44] An art historical approach is not typically utilized to discuss 'ephemeral arts' such as offerings, which are created with the implication that they are transitory and will disintegrate. Offerings have typically been classified as artifact, 'craft' or ethnographic object —a type of object that has not generally been valued in art historical frameworks and not studied in Indonesia until Claire Holt's research opened new avenues of inquiry.[45] Holt was the first Indonesian art scholar to discuss offerings, cremation sarcophagi, and other ritual arts of Bali in her book; she classified them as "temporary art."[46] My goal is to further highlight the creative and artistic components of offerings and the importance of including them within a Balinese art history. Balinese offerings fit other ideas associated with art forms since they engage the imagination and different senses, such as kinesthetic, visual and olfactory experiences. The sensory dimension of offerings, and the question of

how an unseen realm can be accessed through the physical senses is an important question for future research, but is not the focus of this paper.

Offerings are a significant art form because of their highly developed, aesthetic forms and symbolism as well as their meaning for the individuals who create and use them to connect with immaterial (unseen) beings within a Balinese community. As objects created from natural materials designed to be given and then decay over time, Balinese offerings challenge the art historical fixation on 'preservation' and the notion that art objects should be permanent. Not only do offerings push these boundaries, but they also provide a personal, physical and visual understanding of belief systems.

Offerings have unique meanings and are created for specific types of *niskala* beings. Although Balinese people make different kinds of offerings depending on their purpose, the most frequently used components include natural materials like flowers, coconut leaves, money, Chinese coins and palm leaves. Some offerings also include areca nut, betel leaf and limestone paste which are the ingredients for chewing betel and represent a common gift for human and unseen guests.[47] *Canang* (fig. 2) are one type of offering that is used on a daily basis, as well as in rituals. They consist of trays fashioned out of palm leaves, and filled with flowers, betel chewing ingredients and perfumed water; palm leaves on the *canang* are often arranged in fringed, triangular, circular, and fan shapes. Offerings that incorporate food also reveal the more human-like aspects of unseen beings and the ways that they materialize in the *sekala* world. Offerings called *jotan* and *saiban* (fig. 2) are composed of a small portion of rice that has been freshly cooked for the day, and before anyone has eaten it, the grains of rice are mixed with salt and placed on square banana leaves for household spirits.[48] Offerings for deities must include natural elements like flowers, leaves, water and fruit; the inclusion of fruit also symbolizes the deities eating food.[49]

FIGURE 2
Photo of *canang* and *jotan* offerings, Ubud, Bali, 2014.

Source: photo taken by Astara Light.

I propose that, in addition to having a ritual function and symbolism, offerings are works of art with pronounced aesthetic and technical qualities as well as strong personal meanings. In addition, some individuals in Bali are considered experts in making offerings and understand the complexities of their meaning and use; many of them are sought out by Balinese living in other areas of the island.[50] This artistic training further demonstrates the need to address offerings as an equally valid object and art practice. Because of their impressive visual and technical qualities, offerings challenge an earlier Western notion of 'art' focused on objects like painting, sculpture, and architecture. Although some more modern and contemporary Western or Euro-American artistic projects do include the idea of impermanence, references to the ephemeral can be seen particularly in performance art and works done with materials that decompose easily.[51]

The unseen is tied to the seen world, and this balance between the two communities is expressed through the offerings and rituals that unite and balance them. It is in this way, I propose, that Balinese communities are made up of various *niskala* beings who are given different offerings depending on their function and level.[52] In Bali, ritual activities, prayers and offerings are designed to entice gods and deified ancestors to descend to altar-spaces in homes, road-side shrines, and temples. This indicates that, in spite of pressures from the Indonesian government, Balinese individuals operate independently through their own ritual governance and connection to a larger spiritual world. When Balinese artists and individuals create artworks or offerings for unseen beings, then, they are also placing themselves in relation to a larger world, or imagined community, but one that encompasses the seen and unseen worlds.

Balinese offerings are intricately made, requiring skill and creativity. Yet, they are by nature ephemeral and designed to be thrown out, or left to disintegrate after their use and time is complete.[53] Offerings are also powerful objects central to a process of communication between Balinese people existing in the seen world and the extended community in the unseen realm. Eiseman observed that "an offering is a kind of self-sacrifice. One spends time and money making an offering, putting something of oneself into it."[54]

The religious guidelines for making offerings are extremely complex and vary in different regions of Bali. However, some general characteristics I have discerned about offerings is that the larger, more aesthetically pleasing ones made with flowers and elaborate food items are usually for deities and deified ancestors. In contrast, simpler offerings are given to lower beings, like demons, who often favor meat or blood. Offerings are part of the ritual and ceremonial activities in Bali and are created with the goal of satisfying *niskala* beings. They serve not only to connect people living in the seen world with the beings in an unseen realm,

but also to connect individuals from different communities and vocations through the practice of making offerings.[55] Eiseman states that: "These (unseen) forces are around all the time… The result is that offerings are made to just about everything imaginable."[56] This demonstrates that offerings are a means of communicating and interacting with an unseen extended community in Bali, expanding our notion of imagined communities to embrace both mundane and transcendental categories.[57]

The presence of *niskala* beings in the ritual and social activities in Bali connects with the island's pre-colonial and indigenous history. Various ceremonies like cremations, weddings, tooth filings, and temple festivals all involve offerings that allow participants to communicate with *niskala* beings and often invite them to join these events. According to Kam, "the Balinese universe is populated by countless spirits of nature, demons, deified ancestors, and Indic gods and goddesses who must be appeased and indulged. Through offerings, rituals, and ceremonies the Balinese communicate with these unseen beings."[58] In this way, ritual practices and the act of giving offerings are highly functional and represent a connection with the unseen dimension of Balinese society. These practices further represent the perpetuation of, and identification with, a larger world of Bali that includes this unseen community.

Cosmopolitan Encounters and Tracing Offerings in Paint

The *niskala* world, which includes unseen beings, plays a key role in Balinese artistic, cultural and socio-political systems in the past and contemporary period. In the previous section, I proposed that offerings act as a system of language and artistic tool that allows Balinese individuals to connect with *niskala* beings and dimensions. Offerings are an ongoing art form used by many Balinese people to continually engage with unseen beings in their daily routines and in

temple ceremonies. In addition, painterly projects highlight how individuals and artists act as powerful agents in relation to national and political structures that affect them.

In a painting by Cokorda Isteri Mas Astiti (b. 1948), titled *Women of Two Continents* (1993) (fig. 3) offerings play a central role in representing Bali in relation to the outside world. Astiti studied the academic style in Denpasar's art school;[59] and was also part of Seniwati, a cooperative gallery for female artists in Bali.[60] Her work frequently represents the different social and artistic roles that women in Bali perform, which includes making offerings.[61] Although men also make some offerings, the practice of creating and giving them on a daily basis, especially in the family temple, is typically performed by women.[62] In an interview with Adrienne Truchi, Astiti said that the Balinese women depicted in this painting "are working."[63] Astiti's explanation here further emphasizes the fact that women in Bali are usually responsible for making and giving offerings. Astiti thus highlights the gendered dimension of offerings and raises pressing questions as to why they are overlooked as art forms.

Astiti's work is also exceptional for representing women from different cultural backgrounds, and the image of Balinese women in relation to tourists.[64] Astiti's painting initially represents a seemingly static image of Balinese society. When viewed from left to right this painting represents an idyllic image of four Balinese women, wearing sarongs and carrying beautiful offerings, as well as a young girl also holding an offering, perhaps a *canang*. On the top right of the painting three Caucasian female tourists are visible, two are in bikinis and one of them is taking a picture of the Balinese women in the foreground.

The scene suggests that the Balinese women are headed to a temple ceremony or bringing offerings to the rice goddess Dewi Sri since three of them are carrying what appear to be *cili* figures on their heads. The *cili* and *canang*

FIGURE 3
Cokorda Isteri Mas Astiti, *Women of Two Continents*, **1993, oil on canvas, 70 x 100 cm, Seniwati Gallery.**

Source: Vickers, Adrian. *Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings*. Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2012.

offerings depicted here concretely demonstrate just how connected to the *sekala* world the deities, spirits, and demons of the *niskala* world are. For example, the *cili* figure offering (fig. 4) is a stylized representation of a female figure. She has elongated limbs and body and wears a fan-shaped headdress.[65] The *cili* figure as an icon appears in multiple contexts. However, as a palm-leaf figurine *cili* are most frequently placed on shrines in village houses and becomes a vessel or effigy for the rice goddess, Dewi Sri, to temporarily reside in. *Cili* figures can also be an offering made to Dewi Sri that is burned in the rice fields.[66] This anthropomorphic dimension of offerings reveals how *niskala* beings, like Dewi Sri, can manifest in specific moments in a very physical and recognizable way.

Astiti's inclusion of Western tourists in this image reveals a clash between Balinese ritual life and outsiders who visit Bali for cultural entertainment and to lounge on the island's sandy beaches. Vickers notes that the "mirroring of Balinese and Western women observing each other, is (a) gem-like imagining of

FIGURE 4
Lontar **figurine, palm leaf image of Dewi Sri,** *(cili)*, **1920-1950.**

Source: Reichle, Natasha. *Bali: Art, Ritual, Performance.* San Francisco: Asian Art Museum–Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2010.

the cross-cultural dialogue that Balinese engage with on a daily basis."[67] The title of this work highlights the geographic separation, while their dress, and especially the presence of offerings, shows striking cultural differences.

Although Astiti places the Balinese women in the center, she also highlights their cultural and religious differences compared to the female tourists. By placing the three Western tourists in the background but on a physically higher space than the Balinese women, Astiti is perhaps signifying their distance and separation from the cultural practices on the island as well as their economic power over the Balinese who are financially dependent on tourism. Astiti gives the impression of distance in her painting through the sizing of figures, but spatially the beach is actually flat and one-dimensional, this ultimately renders the female tourists even more miniscule compared to the Balinese women. Furthermore, the presence of offerings here adds another layer of agency, the *cili* figures are the same size as the women in the background and actually larger with their headdresses that reach to

the sky and touch the upper edge of the painting. These aspects of the painting's composition suggest that offerings and ritual practices can connect Balinese people to higher beings and realms.

Because Astiti has depicted the Balinese women at the beach and near the ocean there are different spatial meanings. According to the Three Worlds and directional symbolism in Bali, the ocean and sea are south *(kelod)* and thus associated with danger and chaos. There are several major temples built by the ocean that serve to appease the more chaotic sea deities and protect the island.[68] By bringing offerings, presumably to one of these sea temples, the women in this painting are participating in a system that helps maintain balance in a Balinese cosmology.

Astiti has made the offerings in this work visually central, colorful and more detailed so they will stand out against the simpler background and have a greater 'presence'. It is notable that Astiti has included *cili* figures which are anthropomorphic in shape and specifically resemble female figures. This visual quality of the *cili* offerings suggests that they have an active presence, and that the rice goddess is 'accompanying' and strengthening the Balinese women in relation to the tourists. The presence of these offerings in Astiti's work demonstrates how powerful and central *niskala* beings are within a Balinese imagined community. Offerings reveal a connection between Balinese people and unseen beings which can strengthen their identity in relation to tourists and visitors. Similarly, offerings and their link to the unseen world also reveal how Balinese religious practices and cosmologies make the island an autonomous imagined community in relation to the Indonesian nation.

Encounters between the Nation and Balinese Imagined Communities

Paintings and other artistic media can deconstruct a national identity by conveying political tensions between Bali and the Indonesian government. The Balinese artist I Wayan Bendi (b. 1950) visually articulates the idea of Balinese imagined communities in relation to the larger Indonesian nation in his painting titled *Modernity* (1995) (fig. 5). In this image, Bendi represents people going about their daily lives and features dynamic scenes that juxtapose ritual and political pursuits. This painting conveys a Balinese imagined community amidst a socio-cultural and physical intrusion of the outside world. In this painting, as in other artworks by Bendi, he employs a satirical style to highlight Bali in relation to national and global issues such as political conflicts and tourism.

This painting is physically very large and measures 61 x 132 cm total. These dimensions create an overwhelming experience when viewed in person. There are multiple small scenes visualized on this large canvas which suggest that the people and activities depicted are expanding and overflowing out of its borders. This artistic technique also creates a feeling of energy as though the life and events represented are actually taking place before the viewer. Bendi's technique is derived from the Batuan style of painting[69] where he fills the canvas with multiple groups of people engaged in an array of socio-cultural, religious and political activities conveys the collective power that sustains imagined communities.

Bendi studied in the Batuan school and distinguished himself through the visual techniques and content of his paintings. Later in his career, Bendi switched to focusing primarily on political topics, including the Reformation period and fall of Indonesia's second President Suharto.[70] Bendi frequently depicts ceremonial activities and temple spaces in his works, which signals the presence of *niskala* members of a Balinese imagined community. He also frequently incorporates

Indonesian flags, as seen in this painting, and by doing so he challenges the nation and places it in dialogue with Balinese society.

FIGURE 5
I Wayan Bendi, *Modernity*, 1995, ink and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 302 cm, (Right side of canvas)
Source: Couteau, Jean. 2011. *Bali Inspires: Masterpieces of Indonesian Art*. Ubud, Bali: Yayasan Seni Rudana.

In *Modernity*, Bendi represents a collision between Balinese people (and by extension their unseen community) with the Indonesian government and nation, which is signaled by the presence of red and white flags. In the upper middle portion of the canvas, an Indonesian flag appears to be planted next to a temple with a *Bhoma* face. The flag here suggests a metaphor of the Indonesian government 'claiming' the island of Bali within its nation. The Indonesian flag is also visible on the side of an airplane flying above a cremation ceremony, with a person leaning out of the window and shooting images with their camera (fig. 6). In this painting the camera functions as an intrusion into the lives of Balinese people, both in the case of tourists taking pictures of religious ceremonies and the person shooting pictures from a plane. In these instances, Bendi has created a juxtaposition between Balinese people and 'outsiders' which includes tourists and the Indonesian government. This scene visually suggests an invasion of modernity, except in this image the 'invading outsider' is alluded to as the Indonesian state.

Bendi's representation of offerings and temples in his painting also signals the presence and power of unseen members of Balinese society. In this work, he references cremation ceremonies by depicting two different groups each carrying a large tower in the upper middle sections of the canvas (fig. 6). In Bali, large and elaborately decorated towers are sometimes used in cremation ceremonies to hold the remains of a deceased individual before being burned.[71] In this way, the towers function as a type of offering and a ritual activity that helps ancestors to transition to the unseen realm and upper world. In the middle section of this scene, one group of approximately eleven figures, most likely male, are depicted wearing cloths around their waist and head. These figures carry bamboo frames with large multi-tiered cremation towers placed on top. Behind the large group of figures supporting the tower, two female figures are shown carrying large offerings on their head and walking toward the temple entrance. The intrusion of the plane flying overhead and directly above the temple and cremation ceremony activities creates a startling contrast and suggests conflict between Balinese people and the Indonesian nation. This scene also suggests conflict between the nation and unseen members of a Balinese community who are referenced in the cremation towers, the temple spaces, and the mountain in the distance.[72]
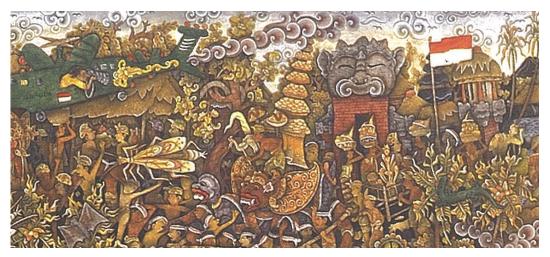

FIGURE 6
I Wayan Bendi, *Modernity*, 1995, ink and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 302 cm, (close up from the right side of canvas).

In this painting, Bendi emphasizes Balinese ceremonies and performances which perhaps reflects the artists own sense of connection to the unique practices of the island.[73] Bendi's work often interrogates national and international issues, and he paints images that directly **c**onnect political questions with social and religious ones.[74] In *Modernity*, he represents Bali in sharp contrast to those who are 'outside' of the nation or island. For example, he includes scenes of tourists poking their gigantic cameras into dance performances, rituals, or any activity that is deemed photo-worthy. Bendi's painting demonstrates tensions between Bali and the international tourist industry, which is central to the island's economy, but also tensions with the nation that encourages this cultural and spiritual consumption. Therefore, his work is situated at a nexus of the local, national and global. By depicting ritual activities, ceremonies, and temple spaces that invite unseen beings into the seen world, Bendi asserts a uniquely Balinese imagined community in his paintings.

Each of the painters examined in this paper articulate a web of connections and interactions occurring between the nation and province of Bali as well as the dynamics between the seen and unseen world by visualizing individual daily activities, philosophical ideas and larger religious ceremonies. Budiana connects the destructive mother goddess figure of Rangda (or Kali) to national symbols through the reference to the Indonesian flag, to forefront a worldview that is part of religious ideas in Bali. In Astiti's painting, she represents a more individual aspect of offerings and employs humor to challenge the presence and tension of tourism on the island. By focusing on women in this work, Astiti also underscores that the labor and culture surrounding offerings in Bali is highly gendered. Lastly, Bendi conveys a socio-political collision between Balinese people and the Indonesian government in his large and dynamic work.

In conclusion, the offerings and artworks examined in this paper visually support and further inscribe a Balinese imagined community that encompasses seen and unseen beings. Paintings by the artists I Ketut Budiana, Cokorda Isteri Mas Astiti, and I Wayan Bendi convey Balinese world-views amidst a shifting political and religious climate. The paintings by Budiana and Bendi both reference the Indonesian flag and juxtapose it with religious or cosmological imagery, such as offerings, that are culturally unique to Bali. Astiti also employs offerings in her work to make a statement about Balinese identity, but contrasts it more directly with international and touristic issues. Their works represent offerings, ceremonies, and philosophies that enable a connection to unseen worlds and a sense of belonging. Offerings are themselves an art form that reflects a balance between seen and unseen dimensions and supports a Balinese imagined community.

I have employed the term imagined communities as a lens with which to consider how unseen beings are included directly or indirectly in social, religious and political contexts in Bali. I argue that considering unseen beings as part of an imagined community of Bali also uncovers the importance of the artistic and ritual practices designed to connect with them. As I have demonstrated, smaller socio-political systems, such as those relevant in Bali, through their distinctive cultural and religious practices, can identify autonomously from the larger nations, in this case Indonesia. This hypothesis provides an avenue for considering how multiple imagined communities of varying sizes and socio-cultural specificity, and which may include unseen beings, can co-exist within a larger, politically and internationally defined nation. The diversity of cultural, ethnic and religious groups in many areas like Indonesia demonstrates that the need to address smaller imagined communities also extends beyond Bali.

ENDNOTES

1 Benedict Anderson (1936-2015), Professor Emeritus of International Studies, Government and Asian Studies at Cornell University, is regarded as a pioneer for his extensive writings about international issues and histories, including many Southeast Asian countries, and for developing the 'imagined communities' theory. This is considered one of the first theoretical approaches employed in political science and history.

2 I believe that in order to contextualize my own research and this paper it is necessary to include some information about my own background and positionality. As a descendent of European settlers on the American continent I am culturally (and physically) located outside of Bali, although I have done previous language training in Java and field-work in Bali. In addition, during my first visit to Bali in 2006, my friend Inten, who is an accomplished dancer, explained aspects of Balinese culture, religion and dance. During my most recent trip to Indonesia in 2014 I was in Java, Bali, and Lombok during the 2014 presidential election. These personal and research-related experiences have informed my approach and questions in this paper.

3 Hildred Geertz, *The Life of a Balinese Temple: Artistry, Imagination, and History in a Peasant Village* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2004), 13.

4 In the context of this paper I employ the term 'indigenous' to broadly refer to practices and belief systems that developed early in Bali, meaning that they are linked to pre-Hindu or pre-colonial periods, or are specifically tied to, and developed on the island of Bali. I am not using this term to argue that there is a single 'original' or 'pure' form of Balinese culture that can be defined as 'indigenous', rather, I employ 'indigenous' to refer to socio-cultural, religious, and political systems or ideas that developed in Bali or are uniquely associated with the island of Bali. This is a complex issue since many pre-Indic practices, which are often what is referred to by 'indigenous', have been integrated over time with Hindu and Buddhist ideas, so separating the so-called 'indigenous' aspects from the 'non-indigenous' is not part of this project. In addition, there is much discussion about how the concept of Indigeneity, as a socio-political and legal concept defined by the UN (see: https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/about-us.html) relates to Indonesia. However, this is not what I am referring to in the use of 'indigenous' in this paper. The history and current politics surrounding associations with Indigenous identity in Indonesia is complicated since there are many different ethnic and cultural groups within the archipelago. While many groups choose to identify as Indigenous and are aligned with AMAN (*Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara*) which translates as "Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago," other ethnic and minority groups in Indonesia choose not to identify themselves in this way. In Bali, for example, there are some differences surrounding this issue. See, Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, "How Indigenous are the Balinese? From National Marginalisation to Provincial Domination" and Frederick Rawski and John Macdougall, "Regional Autonomy and Indigenous Exclusivism in Bali." Therefore, discussing the complexity of Indigenous identities for groups in Indonesia and, specifically in Bali is a task for a different and much larger research project and beyond the scope of this paper.

5 Jean Gelman Taylor, *Indonesia: Peoples and Histories* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 7.

6 The Guardian. "Bali - Folklore and regional stories." https://www.theguardian.com/observer/journeysofthemind/story/0,,1099997,00.html. Accessed August, 2017.

7 Stephen Lansing, *Three Worlds of Bali* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 41-48. He proposes that in the 10th century there were artifacts and other physical traces of Indic ideas on the island.

8 James A. Boon, *The anthropological romance of Bali 1597-1972: dynamic perspectives in marriage and caste, politics and religion* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press), 10.

9 Robert Cribb and Audrey Kahin, *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia*, Second Edition (Toronto; Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), xlvii.

10 Lansing, 41-48. The *puputan* was a series of mass ritual suicides that occurred in Bali. The last of these events occurred in 1908 in Klungkung and essentially marked the end of the political power of Balinese royalty.

11 Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 5.

12 Adrian Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 226-227: Bali's government status is that of a province and not a Special Region like Yogyakarta or Aceh. However, in 1950 a group of conservative forces sought to have the island given the Special Region status which would allow for "traditional royal leadership" to be continued.

13 Leo Howe, *Hinduism and Hierarchy in Bali* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 155-156: Part of the "re-Hinduizing" process involved turning to other areas of the world where a large majority practice Hinduism. For example, many Balinese officials looked to Hindu practices in India and there was increased pilgrimage and literary exchange with that area. This increased exchange with India helped the Balinese justify their ceremonial and daily ritual practices.

14 Ibid., 157. The Balinese have been viewed by other minority groups in Indonesia as a kind of 'success story' for maintaining aspects of their (earlier) spiritual practices through today. There are other groups, such as in Lombok whose beliefs and practices are also challenged as are those in Bali.

15 Ibid., 155-156.

16 Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, 113-114.

17 Ibid., 19.

18 For an example of how art forms in Bali that have been labeled as 'traditional' or 'authentic culture' are actually very fluid and changing, see: Laura Noszlopy, "Ogoh-Ogoh: A 'new Tradition' in Transformation," in *Performing Objects: Museums, Material Culture and Performance in Southeast Asia*, ed. Fiona Kerlogue (London: The Horniman Museum, 2004), 153–65.

19 Anderson, 6.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ruth McVey, "Ben Anderson and the Imagining of Indonesia," *Indonesia*, No. 101 (2016): 19.

23 Rita Padawangi, "Benedict Anderson: A Reflection by an Indonesian Urbanist," *Theory, Culture & Society* 33 (7–8) (2016): 331.

24 Ibid.

25 As a contrasting example, the island of Sumatra has a Muslim majority population with a small percentage of Christians and Aceh is a province that is governed as a special territory with a very high Muslim majority population.

26 Brian A. Hoey, "Nationalism in Indonesia: Building Imagined and Intentional Communities through Transmigration," *Ethnology*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2003): 112.

27 Suharto (1921-2008) became a major general during Indonesia's post-independence period. His political rise and authoritarian term (1968-1998) marks one of the most brutal moments in Indonesia's history. Suharto was involved in the anti-communist killings that occurred from 1965-66 which resulted in the brutal death of many ethnic Chinese Indonesians as well as Indonesians accused of being communist.

28 Megawati Sukarnoputri is the fifth President of Indonesia, the first female president of Indonesia, and the daughter of Indonesia's first President Sukarno.

29 Frederick Rawski and John Macdougall, "Regional Autonomy and Indigenous Exclusivism in Bali," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*. Vol. 11, No. 1/2 (2004): 150.

30 Kapila Vatsyayan, Advaitavadini Kaul, and Sukumar Chattopadhyay eds. *Kalātattvakośa: A Lexicon of Fundamental Concepts of the Indian Arts* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, vol. 1 and 5, 1988).

31 Fred Eiseman, *Sekala and Niskala: Volume II: Essays on Society, Tradition, and Craft* (Singapore: Periplus Editions, 1990), 127.

32 Geertz, 36.

33 Carol Warren, *Adat* and *Dinas: Balinese Communities in the Indonesian State* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), 40.

34 Geertz, 40.

35 Ibid., 36.

36 Lansing, 52.

37 Ibid.

38 Eiseman, 134.

39 Claire Fossey, *Rangda, Bali's Queen of the Witches*, (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2008), 10.

40 Lansing, 93.

41 Michele Stephen, *Desire: Divine and Demonic: Balinese mysticism in the paintings of I Ketut Budiana and I Gusti Nyoman Mirdiana* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 41-42.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 146.

44 Philippe Montebello, "Foreword" to *Islands and Ancestors: Indigenous Styles of Southeast Asia* ed. Jean Paul Barbier and Douglas Newton, 7, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988), 7.

45 I also noticed this devaluing process during a research trip to the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam in 2016. I observed that the Balinese offerings and religious objects, including wood sculptures, that each possessed different meanings, narratives, and uses were displayed together, but with no individual labels or explanation. This presented them as simply an amalgamation of "exotic" Balinese ritual objects.

46 Holt, 175.

47 Garret Kam, "Offerings: Ritual Requests, Redemption, and Reward," in *Bali: Art, Ritual, Performance*, ed. Natasha Reichle (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum–Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2010), 89.

48 Ibid.

49 Francine Brinkgreve, "Palm Leaf and Silkscreen: Balinese *Lamak* in Transition," in *Bali: Art, Ritual, Performance*, ed. Natasha Reichle (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum–Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2010), 63.

50 Both Garret Kam in "Offerings: Ritual Requests, Redemption, and Rewards," and Francine Brinkgreve in "Palm Leaf and Silkscreen: Balinese *Lamak* in Transition" discuss offerings experts and the important role they play in Balinese ritual preparations.

51 The German artist Eva Hesse (1936-1970) is one example of a Western artist who introduced impermanence in her projects since many of her pieces were made from materials that could not be preserved. Many performance artists have also introduced impermanence into museum and gallery spaces. While Balinese offerings are not performances in this typical sense, they contain a very performative dimension, and, in fact, *niskala* beings even act as a kind of audience to the act of giving and leaving offerings. In addition, performances are a significant part of temple ceremonies and could even be considered a kind of offering as well.

52 Kam, 97.

53 Natasha Reichle, "Bali: Art, Ritual, Performance" in *Bali: Art, Ritual, Performance* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum–Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture, 2010), 34.

54 Eiseman, 217.

55 Kam, 87.

56 Eiseman, 133.

57 The writers and scholars cited in this sub-section have lived in Bali for several years or conducted fieldwork that included interviews and conversations with Balinese. Fred Eiseman is the earliest source here, he lived in Bali for a number of years, Garret Kam is the main curator at the Neka Art Museum in Ubud, Bali, and has also lived in Bali for several years, and Francine Brinkgreve is a curator at the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden, and a scholar who has conducted fieldwork in Bali over several years. All three of these writers include discussions or examples of perspectives from Balinese individuals.

58 Kam, 89.

59 Adrian Vickers, *Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings* (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2012), 233

60 Astri Wright, "A woman's place: The Seniwati Gallery in Bali," in *Asian Women Artists*, ed. Dinah Dysart and Hannah Fink (Roseville East, NSW: Craftsman House, 1996), 102.

61 Vickers, *Balinese Art,* 233.

62 Reichle, 33.

63 Adrienne Truchi, "The Politics of Transgression: Women Painters in Bali during the 1990s" (MA Thesis, University of Victoria, 2002), 90.

64 Seniwati Gallery of Art by Women, *The First Ten Years 1991-2001* (Jakarta: Seniwati Gallery of Art by Women, in conjunction with their exhibition at Taman Ismail Marzuki, 2001), 20.

65 Reichle, 143: *Cili* figures are often depicted on *lamak*, or constructed as a small figure out of palm leaves.

66 Ibid.

67 Vickers, *Balinese Art*, 233.

68 Pura Luhur Uluwatu and Pura Tanah Lot are two of the most famous sea temples in Bali. Pura Tanah Lot is actually built on a rocky island in the ocean.

69 For more on the Batuan school and style of painting, see: Bruce Granquist, *Inventing Art: The Paintings of Batuan Bali* (Denpasar: Satumata Press, 2012) and Klaus D. Höhn, *Reflections of Faith. The Art of Bali: The History of Painting in Batuan 1834-1994* (Wijk en Aalburg: Pictures Publishers, 1997).

70 Jean Couteau, *Bali Inspires: The Rudana Collection*, ed. Sherry Kasman Entus (Ubud, Bali: Yayasan Seni Rudana, 2011), 109.

Vickers, *Balinese Art*, 201: Bendi also represents the Dutch colonization of Bali, and the Indonesian revolution.

71 I attended two separate cremation ceremonies in Bali in 2006, this information is drawn from my observations and conversations during this trip.

72 Joseph Fischer, "Problems and Realities in Modern Balinese Art" in *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change, 1945-1990*, ed. Joseph Fischer (Jakarta and New York: Panitia Pameran KIAS, 1990), 96.

73 The titles of Bendi's works also indicate his emphasis on Bali specifically, as follows: Vickers, *Balinese Art*, 199: "Bali Island." And in http://www.artnet.com/artists/i-wayan-bendi/past-auction-results: "Bali Life," "Batuan Bali," "Bali in time of revolution," and "Betara Giri Bali."

74 Henry F Skerritt, "I Wayan Bendi: On Looking at Looking," *Henry F Skerritt*, 2013, https://henryfskerritt.com/2013/08/29/i-wayan-bendi-on-looking-at-looking/. In his blog, the travel-writer describes viewing paintings by I Wayan Bendi which include scenes in Singapore, Hawai'i, London, and New York. Bendi's art focuses on many issues specific to Bali, as well as speaking to and representing global issues and political events in other countries. The work I focus on in this paper references issues in Bali and Indonesia.

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