Jennifer Goodlander

Women in the Shadows: Gender, Puppets, and the Power of Tradition in Bali. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016, xv + 199 pps. [Ohio RIS Southeast Asia Series, 129]. ISBN 9780896803039. Price: USD 65.00 (hardback); 29.95 (paperback).

At the centre of this volume is the narrative of the author facing many challenges in learning to become a shadow puppeteer (*dalang*) in Bali. Not least amongst those challenges is the dual fact that she is neither Balinese nor male. As the majority of puppeteers are men—often from families of puppeteers—who have an intrinsic knowledge of the stories that form the basis of performances of shadow puppet theatre (*wayang kulit*), Jennifer Goodlander had to learn to master a complex and elaborate art form as well negotiate her position within it.

In the first chapter Goodlander introduces the key elements of her narrative: herself and her teacher; his house in the Ubud area; a *wayang kulit* performance at a ceremony; the concept of tradition in Balinese society and the role of Balinese women within it. Clearly inspired by Fred Eiseman's *Bali: Sekala and Niskala*, Goodlander divides her journey in two parts: the visible realm (*sekala*) and the invisible realm (*niskala*). The former encompasses chapters two and three, while the latter Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to Goodlander's experiences of learning *wayang kulit* as a living tradition. The discussion focuses on her relationship with her teacher, her training, and her embodiment process. This narrative is interwoven with references and reflections on the function of the arts and society; on the relationship between tradition and the creation of meaning in a society; on the aesthetics of *wayang*; and the sense of learning to become a *dalang* in Bali, as a foreigner and, above all, as a woman.

Chapter 3 shifts the focus from embodiment to material culture or from the learning process to the objects and the skills needed to perform *wayang kulit*. As Goodlander's teacher underlined that the most important object for a *dalang* was the puppet box, she went through the process of having one made to use. Not only is it symbolically relevant, but it also a tool through which the *dalang* gives cues to the musicians by striking it with a beater held by his right foot. The box is the storage container for the puppets which are brought to life in performances. Goodlander discusses their characterization, their use as objects of value in museum collections as well as the way they are used for creative innovation. The last part of the chapter underlines that puppets in *wayang kulit* are not only a material presence in the *sekala* realm, but also of the *niskala* realm.

After months of learning, Goodlander recounts in Chapter 4 how she was encouraged to undergo an initiation process in order to perform at a cere-

mony. The process allowed her to experience the unseen world, albeit from her own perspective as a western white woman. The analysis of the context of her performance compared with a ceremonial *wayang* performance by a Balinese woman provides insight into the importance of spiritual power, technical skills and efficacy of *wayang kulit* for ceremonial purposes and questions the transient presence. These are the stepping stones from being a student to becoming a performer with all its spiritual implications.

The focus in Chapter 5 is very much on the position of female *dalang* in contemporary Bali. In particular, on the willingness of some Balinese women to become puppet masters encouraged either through the opportunity to train at national arts institutions or as heirs to a family tradition of puppeteering. Their challenge has not only been to prove themselves as *dalang* but also to address the strong spiritual impediments they face as women dealing with the *niskala* world.

In the final chapter Goodlander analyzes the role of the female comic characters in relation to the story, observing that in spite of the intrinsic transformative nature of tradition, the role of women in society as depicted in *wayang kulit* is set by the story. Although women may be powerful, beautiful, and of noble birth, and are allowed to destroy the most horrible enemies, ultimately their role is to marry the hero and settle down to domestic servitude. Society is currently changing but those small changes are not, as yet, reflected in *wayang kulit*.

Women in the Shadows aims to be an accessible text for both a general and a more specialized audience wanting to explore ritual performances in Bali. It has much to offer those who are already specialists in Balinese studies as well as those interested in richly textured accounts exploring issues of gender and performance studies in a cross-cultural perspective. Goodlander's foregrounding of her experiences allows the reader to see how the reality described in the field is naturally filtered by the knowledge and experience of her narrating voice, while her anecdotal style fluidly mixes with the voices of previous scholarly works and, especially at the end, with the voices of women *dalang* in Bali.

The writing in places seems somewhat simplistic in relation to elements of Balinese culture and its relationship to the demands of cultural tourism and the 'world audience', but undoubtedly this is present in order to make the narrative more accessible and attractive to non-specialists, and that is an important consideration when writing for a general audience. For those readers who have been searching for anything about Bali, it is impossible not to notice imprecision (misspelling) and inconsistency in some of the non-English terms and names used. These details can be easily fixed before reprinting the next edition of this book, which is surely worth reading.

Nonetheless, its fresh style with complex meaning can inspire scholars. This is an important book that will be of interest to teachers and students of Media Studies, Indonesian Studies, Theatre and Performance Studies as well as Gender Studies.

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Reference

Eiseman, Fred B. (1989) *Bali: Sekala & Niskala. Essays on Religion, Ritual, and Art*. Vol. 1. Singapore: Periplus Editions.