# Politics and Canon of Audience: Tourists and Local Cultural Performances

### Shiva Rijal

Tourists have become important audiences of traditional performing arts. Audiences and even performers themselves finally arrive at a venue for a performance after crossing several boundaries created by agents of tourism -- from tour leader to local guide and hotel crew to hawker. In this process of becoming an audience, a tourist becomes a 'meta-tourist'. Urry calls him or her a 'post-tourist' (Urry 2002: 91), someone who is conscious of being a tourist at a certain point of time and place in his or her life and one who is always in the process of becoming a tourist. Since local performers know that they are performing for tourists, they too become 'meta-performers' for the tourists; they are conscious of performing for some kinds of audience. Thus performance in such contexts itself assumes a 'meta-local' and 'meta-touristic' quality since it tries its best to remain local.

Moreover, canons are created to affirm a hierarchy of audience for local cultural performances. Locals are the most authentic audience. Anthropologists or researchers are taken as valid audiences too. Expatriates may be similarly positioned as 'authentic' audiences while tourists of the past are given important recognition for watching some older forms in more 'natural' contexts. Tourists of recent times, however, are given a marginal significance. They are always bound to be 'meta-tourists'. Many assume that tourists of our times are naïve audiences of local cultural performances of the traditional order. I would like to deconstruct this hierarchy, and argue that the culture of performing for tourists in Ubud deconstructs such a hierarchy. Furthermore, in a postmodern context, a 'meta' consciousness is not a tag of decadence. It is a process of intellectual and creative transformation that every individual and art form manages to achieve. Artefacts, either made or staged for tourists or locals, by their nature "need to be made, in some manner of deliberate, even self-conscious creation, then, in order to be artefacts at all, rather than accidents or natural objects" (Wartofsky 1980: 2). I argue that performances made for the tourists are not merely 'touristic' but are indeed artefacts that need to be interpreted accordingly.

# **Canon and Context**

Politics and a canon of defining audiences for local cultural dance and drama in Bali has functioned by creating a demarcation line between and among the locals, anthropologists, expatriates, tourists of the past, and of the present. This canon also invites a perspective that performances made for tourists are less 'authentic'. Despite becoming and being of the audience of local cultural performances, the personal experience that every tourist goes through is defined as an inauthentic experience. Given the condition of being a tourist, an audience as ephemeral as the staged performance itself, "there is neither a felt necessity nor an opportunity to create mutual trust" (Cohen 1984: 379) between tourists and performers.

This lack of 'mutual trust' between performers and audiences is taken as the qualifier of the artefacts created and practiced for the tourists. Local authorities strengthen this canonicity. The history of Balinese performance culture tells us that the academia and national cultural policy makers found it a matter of exigency to create a canon of audience when it was found that tourists were being shown ritualistic or religious dances. Several rounds of seminars on the topic of sacred and secular dance and drama forms took place in the 1970s in Bali. Finally, it was decided that only certain dances and dramas were to be performed for tourists and were then considered secular art forms. Since some dances and dramas performed for tourists are also performed on cultural occasions as part of temple ceremonies, they are to be called *bewail*, or ceremonial dances. This academic and bureaucratic intervention, no matter how important it was from an insider's perspective, was a deliberate attempt to classify Balinese performing arts into three categories: sacred, ceremonial and secular. Tourists in Bali, then, have become eternally secular audiences though the dance and drama forms they watch can remain sacred, ceremonial and/or secular. Academic and bureaucratic offices check the standard of performances made for the tourists these days in Bali. Performing groups for the tourists also stage dance dramas created in academia including those which are thematically socialist and nationalistic and thus loved by bureaucrats too. This 'artworld' of performing for the tourists in Ubud, or for that matter in Bali, has become the subject of hegemony, domination, control, and manipulation "which are real features of the politics of art, no less than are aesthetic determinations of value and propriety, progress and innovation, banality and pseudo-art" (Wartofsky 1980:7).

### Anthropologists and Tourists

Performances in ritual contexts and extremely rare, almost extinct dances and dramas have remained as research topics for anthropologists and researchers. Anthropologists are credited for some important daring adventures to the world yet unknown. They are sometimes even praised for speaking for the sake of the 'natives'. This has allowed them to assert their authority "to represent the lives of their subjects", and they have taken "great pains to distinguish themselves, on the one hand, from tourists, and, on the other, from stationary missionaries and colonial officials" (Rosaldo 1986: 96). Anthropologists in/of Bali have played similar important roles as their discourse on Balinese art and culture are counter arguments to those made and circulated by the agents of the Dutch Empire and missionaries of the past. Several researchers

have worked on the performance culture of Bali. They have described how individual visitors to Bali "scan a variety of sights/ sites and are able to locate them interpretatively within an historical array of meanings and symbols" and thus have created "an *anthropological* gaze" (Urry 2002: 150-151). Some of them have even worked with local artists and helped to create new local art forms. In Turner's terms, they have tried to "know one another better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies" (Turner qtd. in Schechner and Appel, 1997: 1), and their number have increased in Bali in recent years, as many as one hundred a year (Vickers 1996:189).

Since tourists are not anthropologists, they are often told that they miss 'real' or 'authentic' performances and the ones they arrive to watch are always 'touristic'. Tourists are given 'grammars' and 'vocabularies' of local performance in the form of brochures in English, the tourists' language. Anthropologists in the past could and would watch the dramas and dances that tourists watch these days only after waiting for several months until they finally encountered the 'ethnic' culture. But tourists come just in time and leave the venue after the show. Anthropologists would take photos and probably conduct extensive interviews with local performers. Tourists take as many photos as they like and love to talk to the performers too. Most of the performances for tourists are staged in the temple yard in Ubud. A local priest comes on stage and performs a round of rituals to purify the stage and performers and appears at the end to pacify the possessed trance of the fire dancers. To the surprise of everyone, probably including the anthropologists of the past, tourists of the present time live through a culture where and when it is affirmed that 'ethnicity' too can be invented and staged. Turner argues that a community and its individual members as "owners" of ritual and liturgy have "authority to introduce, under certain culturally determined conditions, elements of novelty from time to time into socially inherited deposit of ritual customs" (Turner 1982: 31). Thus 'ethnicity' is taken as a subject of change and continuity, not something that is "simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully, repressed or avoided" (Fischer, Michael M. J. 1986:195).

The history of Balinese performance culture shows that the *kebyar*, the aesthetic revolution of the early twentieth century, was a major driving force for stimulating the local artists to create dramatic, ritually free, secular, and shorter dance drama forms. Over the course of time, such 'free' dance dramas and musical forms became culturally and spiritually important as they were performed at temple ceremonies too. Several performances invented and performed for the tourists "use similar ritual procedures as the ceremonies that inspired them, be they the presentation of offerings or the use of consecrated accessories" (Picard 1966: 160).

The researchers and anthropologists who lived in Ubud in the period between the Wars are taken as the pioneers of tourism of the present time. They helped local artists invent new forms, explore professionalism, and were gurus who taught locals to create 'ethnic' forms of art. Now, tourists have become the patrons of the performing art forms that these anthropologists studied and even helped develop. This fact makes one realise that tourism everywhere in the world has become an important opportunity and "audience pressure" for the local performing arts. Schechner argues further that theatre historians need to regard tourism as important to the theatre of our times as "the exchange between England and Continent" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Schechner 1983: 145-6). Thus tourists and anthropologists evoke each other. They are not members of opposite teams.

### **Expatriates and Tourists**

Out of 47,000 expatriates living in Bali, 8,400 live in Ubud alone (Murdoch 2002: 7-8). During my nine-month long research in Ubud, I came across several expatriates who often criticise the 'touristic' performances in Bali. They argue that such culture of performing for the tourists has brought fragmentation, reducing and "truncating" local and traditional Balinese dance, drama, and musical forms, (Murdoch 2002: 7-8). Since they have lived in Bali for decades, expatriates are known and respected among the locals; they are invited as guests to watch ceremonial dances in the temple. They take this opportunity as a trope of power, of being an 'authentic' audience of 'authentic' Balinese dance and drama. Though they do not complain about the quality of performances staged for the tourists on a daily basis, they argue that such performances lack taksu. And, taksu itself is a trope of aesthetic and spiritual power. It is described as "an energy, a type of spiritual charisma that exceptional artists (and healers) are blessed with" and has "little to do with technical precision". Moreover, *taksu* is as ephemeral and epiphanic as performance itself. A performer can attain taksu at "one performance and the following night fall flat" (Dibia and Ballinger 2004: 11). Thus taksu is not something that can be fixed for certain performance and performers only. Expatriates are joined by business-makers and regular tourists to Bali, and together they take taksu, Rsi Markendeya, Walter Spies and several other older names of great stature from 'Balipedia' to affirm their knowledge and 'grammar' and 'vocabulary' of Balinese performance culture. They are equipped with several tropes of local, spiritual, and traditional aesthetics -- if not to dominate but surely not to be dominated by the tourists.

Though the expatriates do not discourage tourists from watching 'touristic' performances, they are not found watching such shows. Many of them have their own narratives of watching 'authentic' Balinese dance and drama. These narratives mostly consist of performances watched on certain nights, in a certain temple far from the usual places tourists go to watch, and where

there are not many Balinese in the audience either. Quite consistently, these performances were the 'best' they had ever watched in Bali. They do not come to watch the performances staged for the tourists regularly to meet the same performers or watch the same performances that one can watch in temple ceremonies. On many occasions, temple ceremonies and dance and drama related to them take place at the same venue where tourists go and watch on a regular basis.

#### The Importance of Being Tourists in the Past

Tourists of the past days are also often taken as luckier audiences since they had the opportunity of watching the art and culture of Bali when it was not 'spoilt' at all. This hypothesis emanates from the very process that the tourists in the past would go through before they would become the audience. Tourists who came to Bali in the past had to walk hours to reach performance venues. Tourists of our times may find the same dance and drama in the same venues, though not necessarily in the same style of the past, but they go through different processes to become the audience. They belong to a different time and culture of travelling and experiencing local culture and arts. These days roads are busy, tourists are not made to walk across the paddy field to reach performance venues. They do not encounter the shrieks of monkeys and croaking of frogs on the way to the venue. Several decades earlier, roads, fields and the very atmosphere used to be different in Bali but to look for the same today is to look for something impossible. It will be a mere oedipal hunt.

Elements like a "velvety black night", a "thirty miles long drive", "a narrow winding road" that cuts across paddy-fields "flooded with water and into the recesses of jungle gorges", and "nocturnal slumbering" of monkeys (Clune and Stephensen 1994: 246) characterized the experiences of audiences of the past before they finally arrived at performance venues. But to tell tourists or the audiences of the present time that they ought to miss those days is to miss the dynamics of change and continuity that a culture as well as an individual lives through. Thus the discourse of 'authentic' local performance functions as the politics of making the tourists of our times act out the persona of travellers, tourists and researchers of the past. However, the tourism business in Bali in such 'natural' days was not run by and for the Balinese but by colonial agents and power holders as "the sale of tourist objects, carved wooden heads of dancers and so on, was run discretely through a few small shops mainly owned by Europeans" (Vickers, 1989: 97).

Moreover, researchers and locals tell us that temples, ceremonies and dance and drama in Bali these days have become larger and more spectacular. The performing arts in Bali has become more regular and vibrant. Many old dance drama and musical forms have given way to their new versions. There is, therefore, strong ground for an argument that the Balinese performing arts has seen more prosperous days in recent years. Tourists of the present time may very well not be the 'unlucky' audiences of Balinese performance culture as they are often thought to be.

# Local Audience and Tourists

Locals and tourists as audience do not form a binary opposition as it is often thought. Critics and researchers on Balinese performing arts argue that detaching Balinese dance and drama from their ritualistic context was developing a modern aesthetic sense new even for the Balinese themselves. This detachment, initiated by the Balinese for their own purposes, required the intercession of an external gaze -- that of the tourists first and then that of the Indonesians (Picard 1996: 134). When Mario created the piece called "Bumble Bee" for the Peliatan-based group, "Gunung Sari," for its world-famous American tour in 1952. This piece was thought to have brought an intervention into the gaze of the local audience. Local audiences then were mostly used to watching classical and traditional dance and drama in Peliatan. Raka, now 67 years old, the first "Bumble Bee" dancer told the researcher that even the locals then took this new piece with a sense of wonder as it had lots of movements and expressions. In no time, it became popular among locals too. (Interview with Raka).

Tourists started coming regularly to Bali in the 1930s and it was found that several sacred or *wali* as well as some secular forms were "performed in some villages on an almost daily basis, without regard for the calendar of religious festivals" (Bandem and deBoer 1995: 127-8). New forms were invented to be performed for the tourists in hotels. Some such creations of the past have now "assumed a life and place of their own in the spectrum of Balinese performance, and have been, to some extent, authenticated through constant repetition" (Bandem and deBoer 1995: 128).

Moreover, on the day of the temple ceremony, one can find tourists, locals, expatriates and researchers all dressed up in Balinese traditional dress (*sarong* and *kebyar*) to watch ceremonial dance and drama. Like the locals they keep on moving, chatting with each other, and some 'lads' even manage to fall in love. In this manner, the ceremonial occasion itself becomes a part of the ongoing life of the locals, tourists and other non-Balinese who also meet, talk, and manage to share not necessarily only the experience of watching the Balinese dance but many more things. One encounters a picture of 'glocultural' and 'leaky' Ubud in such temple ceremonies when and where hierarchy and canons of the audience for the local cultural performances created and disseminated by the Academia and bureaucrats break. Tourists, among other audiences made up of the locals, expatriates, business makers, and researchers, becomes or gets the title of "patron" on such occasions no matter how little he or she manages to understand of Balinese performance. He or she becomes not just a 'meta-tourist' but a patron of great many art forms that the locals, anthropologists and the tourists of the bygone days have loved and watched and worked on.

#### **Taming the Amorphous Audience**

Tourists make an amorphous and ever shifting audience of local cultural performances in Ubud. This amorphous audience is thought to have replaced the old feudal kings and lords, who catered to their own tastes by making their 'subjects' perform for them, and has collided with academia and its aims to rule with its canon over Balinese performing arts. When tourists come to Ubud from farther off to watch performances, they are taken to a particular venue by their guides or travel agents. Many travel and hotel agents get paid commissions by performing groups for bringing tourists to their venues. But if tourists come and stay in Ubud for a couple of days, they become a more informed audience and actually select a venue for themselves. In many cases, most of the homes open for home-stay (which is the common lodging practice in Ubud) have at least one family member performing for one or more groups; tourists go or are taken to the venue by the individual member of the group they happen to be lodging with. Once tourists select or come to the venue, they become the member of a multicultural group, already a heterogeneous entity. This heterogeneous audience in Ubud is linguistically divided into two: English and Japanese. Some groups have their brochures printed in both languages and audiences are welcomed and bid farewell accordingly.

This 'linguistically divided audience flies back to their home countries within a couple of days leaving impacts on Ubud's performance culture. Performing groups hold a view that their audiences prefer some art forms more than others. They know that audiences who keep coming back after a gap of a certain number of years want to watch the same dances and dramas they watched on their last visit. Moreover, groups which have performed abroad also assume that their audiences have specific nationalities. Most of them have performed in Japan and believe that their main audience remains Japanese and behave accordingly.

Tourists as audience mostly prefer to watch traditional and classical Balinese dance and musical forms. This preference has made most of the performing groups present three traditional, three modern and three contemporary dance and musical creations to their audiences in a standard program. Recently formed groups also use the same methodology of selecting and combining the 'units' of performance for the tourists. Groups that have been performing for the tourists for over two decades do not want to replace the traditional dance and drama forms which are loved by the tourists and the locals alike.

On the one hand, the number of audiences has decreased from 75% to 50% since the Bali Bombings of 2002, but the number of performing groups has increased in the recent times. The Japanese have become the largest audience in Ubud and tourists to Bali since the Bombings. This change in audience flow has brought more diversity into the performance culture of Ubud. The 'Bamboo Gamelan' which has remained a popular form of dance and music in Negara in the north of Bali has recently been brought into Ubud to address the tastes of Japanese audiences and was accomplished under the leadership of a Japanese entrepreneur called Suzuki- *San* (Geed Surry Suzuki) in Ubud.

Thus, tourists do not bring limitations to the performance culture that is practiced for them; nor do they de-root the older forms since most of them want to watch traditional dance and drama anyway. The performing groups address this audience through the creation of various versions of individual traditional art forms. The traditional performing arts of Bali thus renews itself through this practice of introducing multiple versions and the performances of a single form everyday. Dance and drama staged for the tourists in Ubud are not as short as most researchers often think. There are several recently created dance drama forms that take at least an hour to perform.

# Nature of Art

Performances made for the tourists are not merely 'touristic' oeuvres but are artefacts of important orders. Makers of these 'artefacts' are the 'artworlders,' senior performers--some of whom are in their seventies--university graduates, world-famous Balinese performing artists, amateurs, learners, business makers, farmers, and intellectuals. Researchers, historians and locals believe that these 'artworlders' are the best minds who can not only practice and perform culturally and academically accepted forms in the 'standard' manner but can also create new forms. The usual complaint that the musical and performance standards have naturally declined due to touristic performances is "open to question and difficult to generalize about" (Tenzer 1991: 25).

Performances made for the tourists in Ubud are also regarded as Balinese art created by the best minds, and art by nature is not only "notoriously hard to talk about" but it is also "unnecessary to do so" (Geertz 1983: 94). There will always be "inconsistencies, spontaneity,

and unpredictability in behaviour in the arts", and such nature of art makes us realise the "mystery, imagination, and the unfathomable creative impulse" (Throsby 1994: 4) that the 'artworld' thrives in. Thus to generalise that tourists watch the inauthentic, 'touristic' performances only is to tread upon a slippery ground. We live in an era where inter-textuality, pastiche, allusions and parody mark a common mode of aesthetic and literary expression. Demanding so-called 'authenticity' and 'uniqueness' from the Balinese dancers and musicians in Ubud may be tantamount to not understanding the nuances of the performing arts that run and function at the local levels and in the metropolis of our times.

### **Performing and Power of Representation**

Performing for the tourists is not necessarily westernising but may fall into a logic put by Huntington as a form of modernization that "does not necessarily mean Westernization" but rather strengthens the culture that it practices and reducing 'the relative power of the West' (Huntington 1996: 78). By performing ritualistic as well as the entertaining dance and drama forms for the tourists, performers or the 'artworlders' in Ubud perform a knowledge and skill, lifting the ritual "from its original setting" and perform it as theatre. And it is the "context, not fundamental structure" that really distinguishes "ritual, entertainment and ordinary life from each other" (Schechner 1983: 150-1). Similarly, by performing several versions of the traditional and religious dance forms for the tourists, they act out the logic that the meaning of the original form lies in the multiple manifestations that such overages are open to. And it is the power and experience of reproducing that which "makes something original or authentic" (Culler qtd in Crang 2004: 78).

By performing for the tourists, artists in Ubud represent their culture and themselves. Not to do what they have been doing is to accept the hegemony that the locals especially of the 'third world' countries can not or do not know how to represent their art and culture in an age of globalisation. Thus by performing for the tourists, artists from Ubud also perform the power and importance of the locals in times dominated by the global culture. The Balinese artists are not "apolitical creatures" who can only tell "the history of temple ceremonies, royal cremations, wedding ceremonies, people flying kites" (Dwikora 2001: 150). Performance arts from Bali exhibit the power of the local artists in glocultural times and evoke an intellectual power of important order.

The performance culture that has come to function in Ubud can also be taken as a counter argument against Western inter- and cross-cultural theatrical experimentations. Balinese dance and drama was performed in the Colonial Exposition in 1931 in Paris. This was the first such

showcase in the West. This event was watched by Antonine Artaud, one of the pioneers and gurus of cross-cultural experimentation in Western theatre. Ironically, the 'children' of the same performers watched in Paris by Artaud created a history of a different order. Now the local performing arts need not necessarily be taken as a source for the cross-cultural experimentation of the modern and postmodern Western theatre only but they can also be performed and practiced as they 'are' in their plurality as seen in their traditional, modern and cotemporary manifestations. There are sixty performances for tourists every week in Ubud. Several dance and drama forms of new and traditional types are acted out on a daily basis. Ubud as a zone of the culture of performance for the tourists has also become a zone of learning, experimenting and disseminating classical, modern and contemporary forms. It has also become a geo-cultural space which proves that cultural art forms can survive and flourish even in the age of globalisation.

### **Performers and Tourists**

*Kecak* groups have over one hundred fifty members; '*Legong*' and '*Barong*' dance groups over seventy. The average number of audiences that most of the groups manage to get on a regular basis remains far below the number of group members. And, most of the groups perform for the tourists once a week only. Performers who manage to perform for more than one group manage to draw some fifty dollars a month. This nature and size of performing groups for the tourists tell us that, as far as my findings go, virtually not a single performing artist can make a livelihood by performing for tourists alone. Most of the professional artists combine the profession of performing for the tourists in Ubud with others modes of earning. They told the researcher that only performing abroad and carrying out collaborative works with artists abroad can bring changes to their lifestyles.

Most of the groups are run as part of a *banjar* or community-oriented or guided activity. Some ten to twenty percent of the income is donated to the funds that are spent on managing temples and venues for performance and musical instruments. Members of such groups do not take any money but donate all to the temple in order to maintain the continuity of ceremonies and festivals. Groups formed out of non-*banjar* members divide money every six months on the Galungan day, an important religious occasion for the Balinese. Members of all sexes and ages get the same amount of money. Thus, performances for tourists are part of the social and cultural activities which include: training local children, youth, and women; sharing professional arts and skills with amateurs; and managing temples and community buildings. Interviews carried out with leaders of performing groups and artists show that those who perform for the tourists also believe that they are using their leisure-time when they do so. Most of the performers have jobs or run shops during the day throughout week. The day of performance allows them to close their shops earlier in the evening, dress themselves in traditional attire, come to the temple, meet each other in the practice of social relationships along with performing for the tourists. Thus the Turnerian discourse of "freedom from" mundane or routine activities and "freedom to" (Turner 1982: 36-7) create art applies both for tourists and performers. Both parties free themselves from their routines for a while fully convinced and feeling deeply that playing with art is a recreational activity. Indeed, every performance made for the tourists in Ubud transforms the locale into a 'liminal space'. By nature, 'liminal spaces' remain intangible, elusive, and obscure. They lie in a limbo-like space that transcends normal social and cultural constraints. One can find in these spaces brief moments of freedom and an escape from the daily grind of social responsibilities. As a place of desire they offer a "dreamtime" that resonates with spiritual rebirth, transformation, and recuperation" (Preston-Whyte 2004: 350). Performing for the tourists also becomes an act of earning some money not only for individual performers but also for the temples and ceremonies, and ultimately for the gods.

#### **Exigencies of Performance**

Thus performing for tourists deconstructs not only the canon of audience but also the exigency of ethnicity and traditional art forms. Performing arts can live and flourish only through being performed. Though the Ubudian performance culture cannot be elevated to the status of 'utopia,' it has become a zone of inspiration for many 'artworlders' belonging to different communities. The researcher thinks that the achievements of Ubud in the domain of traditional performance culture need to be taken into serious consideration. The reasons are: (a) existence and condition of traditional dance and drama forms in many geo-cultural spaces throughout the world, (b) emergence of the eco-culture of tourism of both the domestic and international order, and (c) the exigency of practicing traditional art, knowledge and crafts not only to generate income from tourism but also to strengthen, enrich, and enlarge the domain itself.

Traditional performance culture thus flourishes and lives on with its multiple forms not only because of the faith and religion of people attached to it but also because of the involvement of the individual talents and minds that seek to make inventions through creative interventions into the order of their own times and culture. The researcher believes that Asian countries should not only live with the feeling of sharing similar traditional arts and practices of the older days still practised today but should also look at the reification of the culture of the present times when transformations are taking place in the domain of arts forms and the practices emanating from the cross-cultural movements of people, especially those of the tourists.

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