



# ON WOMEN AND THE PRAXIS OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE THROUGH THE ARTS<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

*This paper seeks to bring to the foreground the praxis of interreligious and intercultural dialogue through the arts in the field of Interreligious Studies. In particular, it looks at the unfolding of collaborative artistic offerings made by women from diverse cultures and faiths of Indonesia from 2000 to 2015 at the local level during cultural events held in Bali to the international level of the Parliament of the World's Religions and the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. By doing so, it hopes to show how the arts can embody the centuries-old principle of *bhinneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity) today to support interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for world peace.*

*Keywords: interreligious dialogue, praxis, women, the arts, Bali, Indonesia, world peace*

## **Introduction**

Thinking about what to contribute to the theme of Bali Hinduism, tradition, and interreligious studies for this international seminar has been an opportunity to further reflect on

my dissertation (Butler, 2011) about religiosity in art and my experiences as a dance-movement artist, teacher and cultural program director who has resided in the villages of Bedulu and Tejakula in Bali for seventeen years

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1. This is a slightly revised version of the paper presented for the International Seminar on Bali Hinduism, Tradition, and Interreligious Studies convened by Universitas Hindu Indonesia, Denpasar, Bali, 10 March 2018. Aspects of this paper are dealt with in my dissertation "Religiosity in Art Inspired by Samuan Tiga and Tejakula Bali: Unity in Diversity" (2011). Original quotations from Bagus, Granoka, Sudiarta, Suryodarmo, and Syahrir in Indonesian were translated to English by this author.

and engaged in creative dialogue with traditional and contemporary artists from and in the Americas, Europe and Asia for thirty years. One of the main insights has been that the language of art fosters a common field for people of varied cultures even when their art forms and spoken mother tongues differ (see Butler, 2014) and also how this is related to the *genius loci* or spirit of a place. An equally important insight is that the seminal deliberation for interreligious creative conciliation among the Bali Aga and nine Hindu and Buddhist faith groups *circa* CE 989 to 1011 at Samuan Tiga in the village of Bedulu (see Patera et al., 1999) and intercultural egalitarian innovations since the seventeenth century dialogue of indigenous and migrant mountain and maritime cultures in the village of Tejakula in North Bali (see Yayasan Tejakulus, 1998) – constitute a model for furthering the Indonesian ethos of *bhinneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity) in the world today.

This seminar also feels timely given that since the first World Day of Prayer for Peace on 27 October 1986 in Assisi attended by over 160 leaders of the world's religions; the modern Parliament of the World's Religions first held in Chicago in 1993; The Contribution by Religions to the Culture of Peace meeting convened by UNESCO in Barcelona in 1994, and the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders opening

at the United Nations in 2000 – the field of Interreligious Studies has gained currency as an academic discipline (see, for example, Banawiratma and Bagir, 2010 and Leirvik, 2014). Yet, as Dunbar (1998) noted, few scholars have written about the place of interreligious dialogue.

I had hoped to have a conversation with two colleagues who have been involved in the field of interreligious dialogue on an international scale for many years and also in several cultural events in Indonesia and abroad since 2000 inspired by the creative interreligious spirit of Samuan Tiga. Though the time was too brief to do so, Professor Emerita of Religious Studies at St. Francis College in New York; member of the Board of Trustees of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, and Vice President of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations, Kusumita Pedersen (pers. comm., 2018), suggested that I look back at the history of events held in the theme of sharing in the arts and religiosity and focus on collaboration, partnership and convergence of visions. UN Representative of the United Religions Initiative (URI) and former Chair of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN, Monica Willard (pers. comm., 2018), pointed out that this seminar at Universitas Hindu Indonesia coincides with the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (see UN Women, 2018) at the

UN Headquarters in New York from 12 to 23 March 2018 and recommended including the place and value of women within traditions especially as the theme for the CSW62 is the empowerment of rural women and girls.

So, this paper seeks to bring to the foreground the praxis of interreligious and intercultural dialogue through the arts in the field of Interreligious Studies. In particular, it looks at the unfolding of collaborative artistic offerings made by women from diverse cultures and faiths of Indonesia from 2000 to 2015 at the local level during cultural events held in Bali to the international level of the Parliament of the World's Religions and the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. By doing so, it hopes to show how the arts can embody the centuries-old principle of *bhinneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity) today to support interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for world peace.

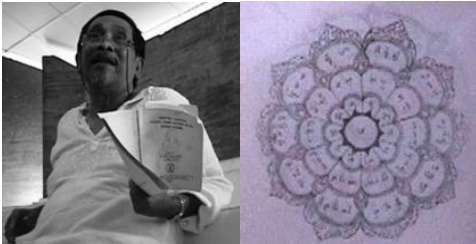
### **Sharing Art & Religiosity: the prayer of women for the beauty and peace of the world**

Numerous thematic Srawung Seni/ Sharing Art events in cultural and heritage sites in Indonesia and other countries since 1986, which originated from the efforts of the non-formal arts educational institution Padepokan Lemah Putih based in Solo, Central Java; have contributed to the growth of intercultural and interreligious dialogue

through the arts. One such event in Bedulu, Bali, inspired by the local genius of the Samuan Tiga temple – since the international festival Sacred Rhythm to pass from the second to the third millennium – was Sharing Art & Religiosity/Pasuruan Seni & Ketuhanan (2001–2004) and then in the theme of 1,000 Years Wisdom of Samuan Tiga (2011). While other publications cited in the reference section can be consulted for a fuller picture of the many artistic offerings made by hundreds of artists, educators and interreligious leaders from villages and cities of Indonesia and several regions of the world; here I would like to feature just a few made by women.

Actually, during the third Sharing Art & Religiosity event at the Mandala Wisata Samuan Tiga, it was the late theorist and initiator of the first Kajian Budaya program in Indonesia, I Gusti Ngurah Bagus, who offered a discussion on The Prayer of Women for the Beauty and Peace of the World. Bagus (2003) simply said, 'In Bali, it is already ordinary for women to create for God; creating the art *banten* offerings ... Now there is a new trend of playing gamelan. But originally they wove the *banten* offerings for creating the beauty of humanity'. He then recited from the book *Sastra Yantra* (Granoka and Bagus, 1989) which is a compilation of devotional calligraphy by the mid-twentieth century East Balinese poetess Anak Agung Istri Biang Agung (1922–

1979). Her *geguritan* poetry composed of classical Balinese script inscribed in aesthetic drawings, such as upon the petals of lotus flowers or the feathers of a peacock, were visual *yantra* for meditation and also a form of *sung sadhana* yoga ‘for her soul to be freed and to meet with true beauty, God’.



**Figure 1.** I Gusti Ngurah Bagus reading *geguritan* poetry by Anak Agung Istri Biang Agung from the book *Sastra Yantra* for 3rd Pasamuhan Seni & Ketuhanan/Sharing Art & Religiosity at the Mandala Wisata Samuan Tiga in Bedulu, Bali. 26 March 2003. Photos by the author © Yayasan Dharma Samuan Tiga and Dharma Nature Time.

Changed by the fragrant flower  
known as *padma sari*  
surrounded by bees  
spread with aromatic essence of  
pollen made by a fragrant flower  
truly awakening love.  
Given an invisible strength  
in creating sacred poetry  
midday and evening contemplated  
imagined within thought  
if fulfilled becomes a base  
adhering to the foot-dust  
at the feet of the Great Creator.

(trans. of pupuh 5 Ginanti stanza 14–15  
by A.A. Istri Biang Agung, see Granoka and  
Bagus, 1989: 108)

In turn, the Women’s Seka Gong  
Bedulu sang the *Kidung Wargasari*

prayer. Bagus (2003) also articulated that, ‘every nationality, every ethnic has their own ways or related arts and literature. ... Religiosity in art is the realization of an aesthetic art expression that is created for the great authority *Yang Maha Kuasa* – the Great Creator’.

The year before, during the second Sharing Art & Religiosity event at the Mandala Wisata Samuan Tiga, Solonese movement artist Suprpto Suryodarmo offered a collaborative piece titled *Kidung Kalayoni* (The Song of Woman Time). In the synopsis, Suryodarmo (2002) wrote that ‘at the dawn of the third millennium in these times of mounting discord and destructive wars in many nations, the superiority-based conflict laden tendency of male time needs to be balanced with female time. [So,] I worked with the sense of nature like the Hindu-Buddhist idea of the turning of the wheel of the cosmos, *mandaragiri*. Then joined it with the Islamic idea *kun fayakun* meaning ‘it is to be’ (also not to be) and *Inna Lillahi wa-Inna Ilahii Roji’un* like God created human beings from clay and at death our body returns to dust. These I combined with the idea that the door to heaven is in the sole of the feet of the Mother. ... I am buried in clay; then I am born connecting with three characters of woman: Holy Ghost, Mother Home, and Public Woman. Then I am buried again. This is just an embryo of the life and death process’.

Women from other faiths and

provinces of Indonesia also made artistic offerings; especially during the fourth Sharing Art & Religiosity event in the theme of Offering World Peace Barong, which was one of six programs worldwide partially supported by the 2004 UNESCO International Fund for the Promotion of Culture. For instance, the Osing people from the village of Olehsari, Banyuwangi region of East Java brought the *Seblang* dance ritual for peace, safety, fertility of the land, and to ward off calamity or epidemics. Guided by an elder woman and man, gamelan music and *pesinden* women's chorus, the *seblang*, adorned with an *omprok* crown hand-woven from leaves and flowers, circled the space. As she offered flowers, the public gave alms to benefit others. The Kaili people from the Donggala district of Central Sulawesi held a *Balia* customary ceremony with music, dance, and ritual food offerings attuned to the ancestral



**Figure 2.** *Kidung Kalayoni* by Suprpto Suryodarmo of Solo, Central Java with Wahyu Widayati 'Inonk'; Sri Lestari 'Cempluk'; Rini Endah Sulistyowati and musicians Yayat Suhiryatna and Ade Kholiq for 2nd Pasamuan Seni & Ketuhanan/ Sharing Art & Religiosity at the Mandala Wisata Samuan Tiga in Bedulu, Bali, 20 March 2002. Video stills by the author, reprinted courtesy of the artist.

realm for prosperity, healing illness, and well-being.



**Figure 3.** *Seblang* dance ritual by the Osing people of the village of Olehsari, Banyuwangi region, East Java for 4th Pasamuan Seni & Ketuhanan/ Sharing Art & Religiosity at the Mandala Wisata Samuan Tiga in Bedulu, Bali, 26 March 2004. Video stills by the author © Yayasan Dharma Samuan Tiga and Dharma Nature Time.



**Figure 4.** *Balia* customary ceremony by the Kaili people from the Donggala district of Central Sulawesi for 4th Pasamuan Seni & Ketuhanan/ Sharing Art & Religiosity at the Mandala Wisata Samuan Tiga in Bedulu, Bali, 26 March 2004. Video stills by the author © Yayasan Dharma Samuan Tiga and Dharma Nature Time.

What emerged from sharing art and religiosity inspired by Samuan Tiga was a participatory space generated from traditional and modern art offerings by people of diverse cultures and faiths and a common field for intercultural and interreligious creativity. In 2004, this

spirit of unity in diversity was furthered by these and other offerings to create the *Barong Pa-Hayu Buwana/World Peace Barong*, a mythical animal figure that makes a dancing pilgrimage for peace.

Initiated on 26 March 2003 and blessed on 26 March 2004 at the Mandala Wisata Samuan Tiga in Bedulu, Bali; *Barong Pa-Hayu Buwana/World Peace Barong* was adorned with initial materials gifted by fifty-six individuals and societies from villages and cities of Bali; East, Central, and West Java; South and Central Sulawesi; Kalimantan, and Sumatra, Indonesia; Italy, France, Germany, United Kingdom, United States, Mexico, Columbia, Argentina, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Netherlands, Switzerland, Israel, Greece, Poland, Ireland, Canada, Australia, Philippines, Japan, Taiwan Province of China, and India.

As Balinese painter Wayan Sudiarta (2003) expressed, ‘Whoever wishes can offer materials every year. This barong



**Figure 5.** *Barong Pa-Hayu Buwana/World Peace Barong* after 4th Pasamuan Seni & Ketuhanan/ Sharing Art & Religiosity at the Mandala Wisata Samuan Tiga in Bedulu, Bali. Pictured here with Balinese dancer Ni Wayan Sekariani, 15 April 2004. Photo by Wayan Sudiarta © Yayasan Dharma Samuan Tiga and Dharma Nature Time.

will never be finished. It will accompany humankind’s journey with a heartfelt spirit for togetherness with all of our differences by our offerings to beautify the *World Peace Barong*’.

### **A new intercultural ritual dance: *Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati***

Another artistic collaboration that features the role of women in fostering world peace is *Tari Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati* – a new intercultural ritual dance offering to Saraswati the Goddess of knowledge, the arts and wisdom. For the Bugis people of Makassar, South Sulawesi, she is known as Colliq Pujie Arung Pancana Toa, author of the world heritage literature *I La Galigo*. The dance stems from the local genius of three ethnic traditions – Solonese, Balinese, and Bugis – receiving the radiation of Dewi Sarasawati’s compassion, combined with the concept of *bhinneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity), and breathing with a manner of bowing to the ancestors, nature, and the Great Oneness of God. A collaboration of Yayasan Dharma Samuan Tiga, Padepokan Lemah Putih, Yayasan Pawiyatan Kabudayan Karaton Surakarta, and El’s Tari Makassar, the dance and music was developed in Solo, Central Java and candi sites on Mount Lawu and offered for the 2004 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Barcelona, Spain at the Universal Forum of Cultures.



**Figure 6.** *Tari Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati* with Ni Wayan Sekariani (Bali), Gusti Koes Murtyah (Karaton Surakarta), Nurlina Syahrir (Makassar, South Sulawesi) and *Barong Pa-Hayu Buwana* for filming at Pendopo Ageng, Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta in Central Java, 4 July 2004. Presented 13 July 2004 for 3rd Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, Spain at the Universal Forum of Cultures. Video stills by the author © Yayasan Dharma Samuan Tiga, Padepokan Lemah Putih, and Yayasan Pawiyatan Kabudayan Karaton Surakarta.

Three divine strengths of women in *Tri Yoni Saraswati* are manifested through:

- Rejang, Legong Keraton, Gambuh Putri dances, and Barong Pa-Hayu Buwana with an attitude of bowing in praying toward nature and God danced by Ni Wayan Sekariani from Batuan Village, Gianyar Regency, Bali
- Pakarena with an attitude of offering ones soul to humanity, nature and God danced by Nurlina Syahrir from Makassar, South Sulawesi
- Bedhaya Duradasih stemming from fully experiencing and appreciating by a feeling of bowing toward Father and Mother, the ancestors and God the Great Majesty danced by G.R.Ay Koes Murtyah daughter of the late King Sri Susuhunan Pakubuwono XII of Karaton Surakarta Hadiningrat, Central Java

The dance is accompanied by Solonese *macapat* composed by Pakubuwono IV, Bugis-Makassar *royong* prayer, and Balinese *kidung* with Javanese gamelan and kemanak, Makassarese gendang and puik-puik, and Balinese Gambuh suling, ceng-ceng, and gender played by I Wayan Sadra, Waluyo Sastro Sukarno, Misbach Daeng Bilok, Galih Naga Seno, Subjha Ilham and Suprpto Suryodarmo. Eddy Supriono Wirabhumi supervised the costume design.

### **Weaving a fellowship feeling of religiosity: unity in diversity at the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions**

In one sense, the new ritual dance *Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati* can be seen as a deepening of art and religiosity that had been shared since 1986 during Srawung Seni events in Indonesia and a spirit of togetherness with Sharing Art events in other countries carried in materials offered to beautify the *World Peace Barong*. It is also notable that the creation of *Tri Yoni Saraswati* naturally came into contact with other movements in the fields of cultural heritage and interreligious dialogue. For the fifth Parliament of the World's Religions, held at the Melbourne Exhibition & Convention Centre in Australia from 3 to 9 December 2009, from Indonesia a delegation of Suprpto Suryodarmo from Solo, Java; Gusti Koes Murtyah, Eddy Supriono Wirabhumi, and Eko Kadarsih from the Karaton Surakarta,

Ni Ketut Arini, Bali Hindu high priest Ida Pedanda GK Sebalu Tianyar Arimbawa and Istri Pedanda Ketut Tianyar Arimbawa from Bali, Nurlia Ruddin from Makassar, South Sulawesi and Diane Butler of USA/Bali with the World Peace Barong offered a series of intercultural arts programs.

The 'Parliament', convened by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions based in Chicago and inspired by a world religion's conference held in 1893, was revived in 1993. This event, based upon respectful dialogue among diverse religious and spiritual traditions to achieve a peaceful and sustainable world, is offered every five years in a different locale: 1999 in Cape Town, Africa, 2004 in Barcelona, Spain and the fifth Parliament in Melbourne, Australia was themed Make a World of Difference: Hearing each other, Healing the earth. About 6,000 participants from 80 countries attended, 700 programs were offered, and 4,000 people attended the International Plenary. The delegation offered:

4 December 2009

8:00–9:00

The Prayer of Women for Giving Peace on Earth I – Kidung Gayatri sung by Ni Ketut Arini (Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia)

16:30–18:00

Joged Amerta: the Gardening of Mandala Salam – workshop with Suprpto Suryodarmo (Solo, Central Java, Indonesia)

5 December 2009

16:30–18:00

Movement Mudra of Traditional Solonese Dance – workshop with Eko Kadarsih (Karaton Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia)

19:30

Tari Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati (excerpt) with the World Peace Barong performance for the International Plenary

6 December 2009

8:00–9:00

The Prayer of Women for Giving Peace on Earth II – Macapat sung by Gusti Koes Murtiyah (Karaton Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia) Royong Bugis sung by Nurlia Ruddin (Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia)

9:30–10:15

Tari Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati with the World Peace Barong performance

16:30–18:00

Offerings for Barong Pa-Hayu Buwana /World Peace Barong interactive exhibit

7 December 2009

16:30–18:00

21 Moments of Stillness – workshop with Diane Butler (USA/Bali)

8 December 2009

8:00

Rejang sacred dance – offered by Ni Ketut Arini (Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia) Opening Ceremony of the Convocation of Hindu Spiritual Leaders



12:45

Prayer for the Nature – offered by Ida Pedanda Arimbawa (Indonesian Hindu Council) - Closing Ceremony of the Convocation of Hindu Spiritual Leaders

14:30–16:00

Unity in Diversity through the Arts & Religiosity of Indonesia – panel discussion



**Figure 7.** *Tari Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati* [L. to R.] Nurlia Ruddin (Makassar, South Sulawesi), Gusti Koes Murtiyah (Karaton Surakarta), World Peace Barong, Ni Ketut Arini (Bali), Suprpto Suryodarmo (Solo, Java), Ida Pedanda Arimbawa and Istri Pedanda (Bali), Diane Butler (USA/Bali) for the International Plenary of the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia, 5 December. Photo by Steve Rohrbach © 2009



**Figure 8.** *Tari Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati* [l. to r.] Gusti Koes Murtiyah and Eko Kadarsih (Karaton Surakarta), Nurlia Ruddin (Makassar, South Sulawesi), World Peace Barong danced by Ni Ketut Arini (Bali) for the International Plenary of the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia, 5 December. Photo by Steve Rohrbach © 2009.

During the International Plenary, after the excerpt of the collaborative artistic offering *Sesaji Tri Yoni Saraswati* featuring women from diverse cultures and faiths of Indonesia and a presentation by the Chairperson of the Coalition in support of the initiative for a UN Decade of Interreligious and intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace – Istri Pedanda Ketut Tianyar Arimbawa was invited to join seven other women faith leaders from across the earth in a Sacred Chant for the World.



**Figure 9.** Sacred Chant for the World by eight women faith leaders: Joy Wandii Murphy (Wurundjeri people of the Kulin alliance, traditional land-holders of area now called Melbourne, Australia); Istri Pedanda Ketut Tianyar Arimbawa (Bali Hindu and wife of the chief priest of the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia); Ines M. Talamantez (member of the Mescalero Apache tribe and professor at University of California Santa Barbara); Rosita Worl (Tlingit of the Shangukeidi Clan of Alaska); Jessie Kaur Singh (Sikh of Melbourne, Australia and Global Trustee URI-United Religions Initiative); Lally Lucretia Warren (Baha'i of Botswana); Vajra Chan-Ying (Chinese Han Transmission Tantrayana Buddhism nun and lecturer at Tasmanian Chinese Buddhist Academy of Australia); and Dé Bryant (Afro-Caribbean: Haitian Vodun and professor at Indiana University) for the International Plenary of the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia, 5 December. Screen capture from video edited by Campfire Film Festival and Image Control © Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

### **Sharing Creating Offering Art at Goa Gajah and UN World Interfaith Harmony Week**

As a continuation of this creative spirit, Srawung Cipta Seni Sembah/ Sharing Creating Offering Art at Goa Gajah in the village of Bedulu, Bali is a community-based public participatory intercultural event held every six months on Tumpek Krulut/Compassion Day since 2014. To quote from my article (Butler, 2017):

Sharing Creating Offering Art is a gathering based on *srawung* (sharing) between artists, culture specialists, religious leaders, market vendors and the public actualized by traditional and contemporary art forms stemming from the value of *persembahan* (offering) presented in the Goa Gajah handicraft market, cultural heritage site, and temple gardens as the stage. What is shared is the ways and the fruits of creating offering art. Convening this event at Goa Gajah – a Bali Hindu temple and cultural heritage site that attracts over 250,000 visitors a year – intends to be an actual effort to give meaning to its rich cultural values. While Goa Gajah is a sacred site precisely because it functioned as two hermitages where Hindu and Buddhist monks resided side by side from *circa* the ninth to eleventh centuries; in this era, it can also function as a creative source for offering art in the context of humans, nature, and their Creator.

During the second event at Goa Gajah, for instance, traditional and contemporary offering art was contributed by 465 artists and religious leaders from Bali; East, Central, and West Java; West Sumatera, and Jakarta, Indonesia; Singapore, USA, UK, Japan and disciples of Sri Chinmoy from 30 nations. Another result of collaboration, partnership and convergence of visions is that the event was associated with the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony week (see World Interfaith Harmony Week, 2015) and twice been a Pre-Parliament of the World's Religions event (see CPWR, 2015). Moreover, the program opened in the handicraft market with *Rejang Rentang* danced by the Bedulu Women's Association followed by a *tumpang* rice offering prayer by interreligious leaders and public figures from varied provinces and nations. Also, three photos were featured in a video titled *World Interfaith Harmony Week Celebrations around the World* (see United Nations, 2015a) aired during the Multi-religious Partnership for Sustainable Development Conference convened by the President of the UN General Assembly in cooperation with the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN held at the UN Headquarters in New York on 6 February 2015.



**Figure 10.** *Rejang Rentang* danced by Bedulu Women's Association guided by Ida Ayu Made Diastini of Singapadu for 2nd Srawung Cipta Seni Sembah/Sharing Creating Offering Art at the Goa Gajah handicraft market in Bedulu, Bali, 31 January 2015. Photo by Handoko Kartika.



**Figure 11.** *Tumpeng* rice offering prayer by Ida Pedanda Gde Wayahan Bun (Griya Sanur, Pejeng); Suprpto Suryodarmo (Padepokan Lemah Putih); Naen Suryono (Assembly for Sublime Faith in the Great Oneness of God); Kusumita Pedersen (trustee Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions); Hari Untoro Drajat (Senior Advisor on the Protection of Creative Diversity, Ministry of Tourism); Al Busyra Basnur (Director for Public Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs); Bhikkhu Dhammasubho Mahathera (Sangha Theravāda Indonesia) for 2nd Srawung Cipta Seni Sembah at Goa Gajah in Bedulu, Bali, 31 January 2015. Photo by Handoko Kartika.

## Conclusion

Each of these events, as well as others, in the theme of sharing in the arts and religiosity involved artists – both tradition-bearers and contemporary practitioners – from several Indonesian provinces and countries and religions such as Bali Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Confucianism, and ethnic faith groups. Women played a key role throughout. So, here let us take notice of insights by two women – one who is an artist and one who is a professor of religious studies.

From the perspective of dancer-choreographer and lecturer at Universitas Negeri Makassar,

Nurlina Syahrir (see Butler, 2011: 444), after offering prayer and dance with Balinese dancer Ni Wayan Sekariani for the 2004 Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona:

What was interesting were the participant's comments, like what a Spanish woman expressed, who asked how we could collaborate together from different backgrounds? Like, how is it that a Hindu and a Muslim person can carry out prayer together or collaborate in performance. Ni Sekariani answered because of the belief that there is one God, even though people use many names. Sekar said it is like when we wish to go to a place and there are many ways to reach that place. The Spanish woman's question arose because her community had never had a gathering from different faiths to pray together.

Trustee of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions and religious studies scholar Kusumita Pedersen in her "Reflection on Interfaith & the Arts" (see Butler, 2011: 305–306) asks:

Why are the arts so necessary to interfaith understanding? Because religious meaning and spiritual truth are never only verbal and conceptual. Words and ideas are essential, yet, are only one aspect of this meaning and truth. A human being is not only a speaking and intellectual being, and truth exists in all parts of life, outer and inner. Meaning and truth are not to be merely 'explained', but displayed and expressed by symbolic images and actions. ... embodied and enacted in physical form, color, sound, movement, fragrance and taste. ... apprehended by seeing, touching, hearing, gesture, dance, smelling, eating and drinking. Only in this way can the meaning and truth of a religious and spiritual tradition be embraced in an integral way by the whole person. When all these dimensions of experience converge in a total sacred environment ... we can have

an awakening to the deep meaning of a religious tradition that we cannot receive from study or verbal dialogue, much needed as those also are.

Finally, the arts have the power to reach the heart and soul, bypassing the mind with all of its ideas and biases that create division and barriers to expanded understanding of one another and communion, which can eventually manifest as deeply grounded and lasting harmony among religions. Those involved in interfaith work at all levels have known for a long time how important the role of the arts is. This role will continue to increase in importance in the years to come.

Thus, let us foreground the praxis of interreligious and intercultural dialogue through the arts in the field of Interreligious Studies. In particular, let us give more presence to collaborative artistic offerings made by women from diverse cultures and faiths. Let us convene more Sharing Art & Religiosity programs so that humanity can embody the centuries-old principle of *bhinneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity) today to support interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for world peace.[]

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