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# AMBIGUOUS BLEEDING: PURITY AND SACRIFICE IN BALI<sup>1</sup>

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**Menstrual beliefs and practices in Bali defy simple classification. Menstruation may be relegated to the dump, as when a woman had to undergo a rite on a street midden when her monthly period coincided with the ritual time for a purification ceremony. But menstruation is also viewed as conferring raja status, and women do exhibit agency in this supposedly passive process. Experiences of menstruation, furthermore, may vary according to caste status. (Bali, classifications of pollution, restriction, agency, ambiguity)**

As many tourists to Bali can confirm from personal experience, menstrual taboos remain in effect there. At the entrance to temples, female tourists find that the taboos pertain to them, too, a fact they almost invariably experience as an affront to their sex. Visitors stop short with some incredulity at the signs in English that forthrightly prohibit entry to menstruating women. Although they have had surprisingly little to say on the issue of menstruation, the reaction of scholarly observers of Balinese culture has been similar. If mentioned at all, the complex of taboos and regulations surrounding it has tended to be viewed as somewhat of a jolting exception to otherwise relatively egalitarian gender relations (Covarrubias 1986). More recently, scholars have treated the issue of gender relations in Bali in more depth (Wikan 1990), but remain almost silent on the circumstances of the menstruating woman. Balinese women, meanwhile, generally adhere to certain menstrual taboos as a regular and accepted part of their lives.

In 1998, in a noble house in eastern Bali, I observed a ceremony performed for a woman whose period coincided with a family temple purification marking the onset of preparatory sacred work for a major ancestral ritual. Reminding her that she must heed her elders, the woman's paternal aunt summoned her to the garbage heap outside the palace walls. Placed at the top of the heap, she was sprinkled with holy water in a brief rite performed by her aunt. At first glance, such a practice of sending the menstruating woman to the garbage heap—expressly, as the women envisioned it, because her condition belongs with the filth there—seems to resonate with conclusions such as Covarrubias's, that although in Bali "the woman is by no means the proverbial slave of Oriental countries . . . once a month, during menstrual time, a wife's life is not a happy one" (Covarrubias 1986:156). There is no more graphic expression of menstruation as pollution than the image of the woman on the garbage. Other evidence, however, complicates any easy assumption that such practice necessarily reflects female oppression. This same woman stepped down from the garbage to talk at length about how the menstruating woman in Bali is said to become "like a raja." These positive and negative images of menstruation appear to coexist without contradiction to the Balinese actors involved.

After introducing the complex of menstrual taboos found in Bali, this article clarifies the classification of menstrual pollution that emerges from contemporary commentary of variously positioned men and women in the eastern part of the island. It revolves around cycles paralleling those of life and death and a view of women as both vulnerable and powerful. For example, taboos surrounding a woman's menstruation also open for her certain avenues of agency. But such power is hedged by the differences in experience between high- and low-caste women in Bali. While high-caste women are more likely to appeal to the raja image, being a woman in a princely household entails not only higher status but also a higher degree of constraint. Similarly, being treated like a raja might restrict as well as empower the menstruating woman.

Even studies that otherwise take into account many complexities surrounding menstrual taboos and related practices, such as those compiled by Buckley and Gottlieb (1988), still tend to characterize societies as having either positive, negative, or neutral views of menstruation, or as having taboos that either limit or enhance the powers of women. In Bali the answer cannot be framed in these ways but must embrace classificatory ambiguities of the bleeding woman. Taboo typically is analyzed as part of a single system, but Bali does not reveal a homogeneous system of pollution and taboo; instead, menstruation is situated along multiple axes and in a field of sometimes competing ideas.

### MENSTRUAL TABOOS IN BALI

Taboos surrounding menstruation in Bali state that a menstruating woman may not enter the kitchen to perform her usual domestic tasks and that she must sleep apart, sometimes in a separate pavilion, sometimes merely on the ground. To keep the clothes in which she menstruates separate from clothes she might wear to the temple, she is supposed to don special menstrual dress. She also is to eat from a special set of dishes. Some of these measures were most pronounced among people of high caste, and are now in effect only in brahmanic households. There continues to be a taboo against sexual relations during menstruation, though many women relate that this does not necessarily deter their men, and that it is the women who feel ashamed at the violation. What continues to hold most strongly and universally among all castes is that a menstruating woman is absolutely forbidden to go to the temple or participate in any ritual work, such as making offerings. The clause of not being allowed to go to the temple, when applied to a woman, appears to define the very condition of menstruating. Women in the years between menarche and menopause, furthermore, may not handle the serpent-bladed heirloom daggers (*keris*) that usually are closely associated with a man, his characteristics, and his heritage; nor may they handle the dagger-like spurs of the fighting cocks, with which men also closely identify, even if not necessarily in quite the phallic way that Geertz (1973a) suggests.<sup>2</sup>

The menstruating woman and her blood are explicitly considered to be polluted (*sebel*). Pollution is not limited to women but can befall whole families, men, and even house yards, villages, or rice paddies. Pollution is defilement, a state of being impure. A woman's period is said to last three days (though some go by five days or until the complete cessation of blood flow). After this, the woman is to wash her hair (*mesisik mambu*) and receive holy water (*tirta penglukatan*) before she can again be considered clean and normal (*bersih, biasa*).

In light of these views of menstruation, several women and girls of low and high caste were asked about their anticipation and experience of the onset of menarche. Although everyone agreed that girls like it when they get their first period, young and old alike reported having been terribly afraid and taken aback the first time they started bleeding. Menstruation is not a private issue; it is talked about freely and without embarrassment, and girls grow up surrounded by casual references to women menstruating. Both men and women, of high caste and low, frequently and unself-consciously asked me about my menstrual status. Yet it appears that girls are not prepared for the reality of the blood emitting from their own bodies. Nonetheless, there is no ambivalence about the condition's desirability. The initial shock over, girls enjoy their new womanly status, which is celebrated. Many people agreed that the ceremony for a girl at menarche is much more marked than that for a boy at his passage into adolescence, explaining that this indicates the high level of respect for the woman's condition.

The woman freshly off the garbage heap stressed that a woman experiences no inherent sense of fault at bleeding. That would come only with the breach of a taboo, especially going to the temple. The bleeding and pollution are kept distinct: it is not the matter itself, but the matter out of place that is at issue. This applies also when the woman's menstrual cycle coincides with the ritual cycle, which is interpreted as being somehow wrong, even if she has not consciously violated any taboo. The ceremony on the garbage pile impressed this on her and she admitted feeling mildly shamed. "If your period always comes on holy days," she explained, "the perception is that you are not lucky. You may even be the victim of magic. So they make this small 'neutralizing' ceremony for you; you receive holy water on the heap in the hope that your period will not again come on holy days."

### CONTEMPORARY CLASSIFICATIONS OF POLLUTION

Death is presented as the governing reason why someone or something becomes polluted or impure. House yards, villages, or rice paddies are so rendered if a wrongful death takes place in them. Families become *sebel* at a death in the family, and individuals do so if they are in contact with a corpse during mortuary rites. With menstruation, the failed-procreation argument is applied: if the woman's egg had borne fruit, the blood would have become a human. Instead, the *manik* (womb, or the "jewel" in the womb) died, and the resulting blood and the woman transporting it are *sebel*.<sup>3</sup>

A state of pollution also accompanies successful procreation, however, for the blood that accompanies childbirth is *sebel*, as are the baby, the mother, and the father. They cannot take part in any sort of ritual activity for 42 days following the birth because of this. The explanation is that the blood of birth is leftover blood, meaning it is dead and therefore *sebel*. In addition, evil spirits (*bhuta kala*), drawn to death, blood, and to the placenta and fluid byproducts of childbirth, cause the situation to be dangerous and *sebel*.

*Bhuta kala* are demons who interfere with the lives of humans; more generally, they are the disruptive, negative forces of the earth. Ubiquitous rituals, from small daily ones to large elaborate events, are directed at placating these spirits, and they often require an offering of blood, for which the *bhuta kala* have a keen desire. It is these spirits, not the menstrual blood itself nor people bleeding, that are impure and represent sundry dangers and ultimately death. The taboo ends when the *bhuta kala* disperse. Modern menstrual equipment presents no barrier between the *bhuta kala* and the blood and does not change the need for taboos.

*Bhuta kala* and pollution are also associated with inner states. One woman suggested that *sebel* is related to sadness or disrupted equanimity (*sebet*). If your heart is sad about something, such as a death or other loss, this is a problem for ceremonial activity because it interferes with concentration and focus. Thus a woman who was experiencing nightmares and anxiety attacks during the preparatory phases of a major ritual also was told that she should not be participating in it. Likewise, a new child is disruptive of its parents' focus. A young woman who admitted that she might cheat a bit with regard to menstrual taboos by going to the temple even if she was still bleeding, said that in that case, she would "concentrate her thoughts on God" all the more and not think about her period. She felt she could overcome the effects of bringing her blood into the temple through enhanced concentration.

These perceptions of the *sebel*, pertaining to what does not belong in the temple, are exemplified in the split gate (*aling aling*) at the entrance to Balinese temples. The gate is said to prevent *bhuta kala* from entering, as they can travel only in straight lines, and also to avert unfocused thoughts and to help the entering person concentrate.

### *Pollution and Gender*

Many men emphasize that the rules of menstrual pollution are based on principles that do not pertain only to women. Baby, mother, and father all are *sebel* at childbirth. And the rule against blood in the temple pertains to all forms of open blood, be the bleeder male or female. Theoretically, if a man has a bleeding wound, he too must refrain from going to the temple. Similarly, the dangers regarding the serpent-bladed daggers are often phrased as mutual dangers; women do not want to do these things because they are *tidak berani*, which translates as "afraid" but should not be confused with connotations of cowardice (Lovrick 1987). Similarly, a man

may not handle the keris if he is *sebel*, such as through death or after the birth of his child, just as he may not enter a holy area in that condition.

The respective natures of men and women, however, are seen to differ. In the case of the taboos against women touching cocks, spurs, or keris, for example, it was suggested to me (by a man) that it may just be a belief of Balinese men that “because women in general are physically weaker than men, who knows what effect they may have on the weapons they touch?” So whereas women’s blood may be seen to give them a certain power by virtue of the *bhuta kala* that are drawn to them, here some men interpret it as being the very weakness of a woman that constitutes her danger. Specifically, it is believed that she may weaken the *ampuh*, the magical power and potency of these male-gendered objects of bloodletting. (Van Duuren [1998:23], however, relates an intriguing story from Java that again asserts a female power in relation to keris. In the story, a female keris smith at the fourteenth-century Javanese court of Majapahit cools the red-hot keris by inserting them into her vagina.)

This does not necessarily mean that women are singled out for the possession of negatively valued traits or ritual treatments thereof: women by nature are considered not only weaker, but also less aggressive than men. They are more *halus*, more sensitive and delicate. They are said to be respected for these traits, which are indeed highly valued in Bali, in men and women. Men by contrast are believed to be more *kasar*, crude and aggressive—in a sense, more inherently disturbed internally by *bhuta kala*.<sup>4</sup> In some areas, postadolescent men undergo a purification rite every six months for the *bhuta kala*, explicitly to minimize in themselves these negative, primarily male traits. Though cleansing is not generally applied as an explanation for menstruation, it was suggested to me by some that women do not need this male ritual because they are purified through their monthly letting of the menstrual flow.

In the end, although menstrual regulations are based on principles that apply to men and women equally, Balinese acknowledge that there is a double standard in their application. Taboos against bleeding in the temple, for example, are rarely if ever observed or enforced for the slightly injured man. It was readily offered that the double standard is due to the respective social positions of men and women. Many men do not hesitate to admit that although women are highly respected, men are privileged (*diutamakan*). The priest with whom dancer and writer Katharine Mershon (1971:179) worked explained that when a woman is buried, “her body is turned face downward, showing woman’s relationship to earth. Men are buried face upward, for we are superior as related to heaven.” Such statements are not uncommon.

Similarly, although both men and women can be witches (and many offer that theoretically they are equally likely to be so), women are in fact more commonly suspected of witchcraft than are men. They are considered more eerie and fearsome (*angker*) than men, and are perceived to have easier access to the black arts. The goddess of witches and *bhuta kala* is female and is believed to give her blessing most readily to women. It is after menopause that women are thought to become witches (unless they do not marry and procreate, when it may happen sooner), and older

women without men, widows, who are especially perceived as eerie. Becoming scarier is another side to power.

There is no question that menstruation is viewed auspiciously and the onset of menarche is a celebratory event. But beyond the obvious benefits of fertility and procreation, it is also a fact that women remain set apart by their inherent nature to bleed regularly, and that the cause for their *sebel* condition in this case stems from within their bodies, rather than from death occurring outside of them. Although there are special rituals for men's impurities, men are not *sebel* as a result of their intrinsic impurities.

### THE BLEEDING WOMAN AS RAJA

The restrictions placed on the menstruating woman can be, and often are, read as alleviations, a view similar to that of some women interviewed by Martin (1987). The woman who underwent the rite on the garbage adamantly asserted that she was not embarrassed or ashamed about menstruating. "Usually people like menstruating," she explained, as she reiterated how previously in Bali you became like a raja when you had your period. "You were waited on, did not have to cook, did not have to weave. It was nice. People would ask, 'Why are we not seeing her?' 'Oh, she is still being like a raja.' You could do this for up to five days!" Certainly from a male perspective, it also can be read that a menstruating woman in no way may be called upon to serve him.

Beyond such restricting/privileging of the menstruating woman, and although taboo is "prescribed nonaction" (Valeri 2000:412), menstrual taboos also give women certain avenues of power and agency. In some cases, for example, a woman may use her menstrual discharge to elicit the help of the evil spirits to perform love magic on an errant or negligent husband. The generally agreed-upon method is for a woman to waft a piece of blood-soiled undergarment around the room as she appeals to the spirits to help make her husband fear her. Through this, it is believed, a man becomes bewildered (*binggung*) and loses his courage and authority in the home.

Covarrubias (1986:156) reported that it is perhaps because of the dangers of blood magic that men "have such mortal horror of being near a woman during the time of menstruation." Sundry sources, young and old, confided that the risks involved gave little pause to their husbands, who still would seek sex with them even if they were menstruating. It is usually the husband's family, not actually the husband, who suspects a woman of employing love magic. The husband, under its influence, is just enthralled, happy to serve her (which may help explain why he also is reckless enough to have sex with her). Menstrual magic "can make him crazy, obsessed, infatuated" (*gila*). So, as many Balinese men admonished me, "do not do it!"

In relation to women's adherence to menstrual taboos, there is also a public health concern. Wikan (1990) says that it is incumbent upon Balinese, especially Balinese women, to not affect others with any sadness they might be experiencing.

As many older men pointed out, it was not uncommon in the recent past for the menstrual blood to seep through a woman's clothing for all to see. The phrase *kotor kain* (dirty cloth) still is sometimes used to denote menstruating. The viewers would be aware that the woman could be bringing the evil spirits with her, exposing others to danger. She could be offending the gods, with unknown consequences for all. Hoskins (this volume) likewise argues that menstrual practices in Huauilu are part of a concerted public health campaign to keep the village clean.

Beyond the exercise of magic and participation in public protection, women may not only silently welcome the respite allowed them by the prohibitions against their involvement with ceremonial activities; some may draw on the options offered them through menstrual taboos. Women have various ways to manipulate the rule while still respecting it. They can influence the timing of their periods through foods, as with the ingestion of raw blood in the much-relished dish of *lawar*, which is prepared with pig's blood. This is to bring on bleeding and involves the same kinds of raw and harsh foods that might induce abortion, and of which *bhuta kala* are said to be fond (cf. Hull and Hull 2001.)

Some women are said to use birth-control pills to ensure postponement of their period until a major ritual was completed. Many women find room for interpretation of the three- or five-day rules pertaining to the duration of their impure state. Some might even rationalize that they are cleared when "there's almost no more blood"; and younger women, whose social lives revolve around temple festivals, admit to sometimes cheating, in the sense that they might go to the temple even if they are bleeding. There are also strains that unsettle any simple narrative of menstruation as liberation, such as the complication added by the relationship of caste to gender and menstruation.<sup>5</sup>

### *Pollution, Restrictions, and Status*

Women of higher caste and of presumably higher standing were held to stricter standards regarding menstrual taboos. In fact, they were more restrained altogether, and from the onset of menarche they became *gadis pingitan* (secluded girls). They were not allowed to talk to anyone outside the family and could not leave their own courtyard unless appropriately escorted. There continues to be a strong preference within high-caste households for their women not to marry, rather than marry down. As Boon (1977:124) summarized, "a woman received is a woman somewhat debased, since she is given rather than kept by her own group." Any advantage of giving a daughter in marriage to a superior yard is counterweighed by the option of displaying ancestor-group strength by endogamy. One male member of a high-caste family talked about *lek* (shame) in relation to caste issues, stating that it might well cause a father to commit suicide if his daughter were to marry down. There was a saying in the family, he said, that the faces of their women are ugly so no one will make off with them. The men, on the other hand, may be ugly too, he joked, but have almost mysterious powers of attraction over women.



Another high-caste man explained that "it may look as though women's freedom is oppressed, but actually women hold high status. A woman is like a drop of water atop a leaf, he said; "you shake it a bit and it falls. Women were guarded so they would not be damaged." He continued, "So it appears as though women's rights were limited, when in fact this is not so. Because the woman is very sublime, because her position is very high, she is also very carefully watched over. Girls were most carefully guarded. It looks as though they are limited, but that is not it, it is because they are respected." The paternalism in such statements is obvious, but the picture is complicated by the fact that much of the same is said for male brahmanic priests, who also are held to higher standards. Of both women and priests, it was said that "if they have just the slightest flaw or take just the slightest misstep, they fall" (*kalau cacat sedikit, jatuh*).

The themes, on the one hand, of how privileging someone can be a way of controlling them and, on the other, of how someone of high status and magical power must be controlled, emerge also in regard to chiefs and kings in other societies. Claessen (2000:718, 729), for example, writes of restrictions placed on Polynesian chiefs. Because the chief was sacred ruler, anything he touched became sacred and taboo to everyone around him. In practical terms, this meant that he had to be kept separate and apart. The king and his family could enter only dwellings specially dedicated for their use, and wherever the king went, he had to be carried so that his feet would not touch the ground. Quigley (2000) presents examples of African kings as scapegoats. There is cultural control, he says, "in various restrictions on the movements, dress and speech of kings." In an example from Ghana, the king is "confined to his palace and forbidden from touching the earth" (Quigley 2000:242). Quigley (2000:242) continues,

Other restrictions one sees in other monarchies include being confined to the palace at night, being obliged to be carried everywhere, having the space around the royal personage as free as possible from contamination, being dressed in special clothes, being housed in special kinds of residences, and being prevented from talking or being addressed in the same manner as ordinary people.

Moreover, the king also may be viewed as a "repository of inauspiciousness." One of Frazer's explanations of the scapegoat king in *The Golden Bough* is "that the king is held to embody the sins/evil/death/inauspiciousness of his people: he is a kind of dangerous polluted vessel who must find some means of ridding himself of the contagion he absorbs in case he imperils both himself and the kingdom" (Quigley 2000:239). De Heusch (1997:225), upon whom Quigley draws heavily, presents an example of "the master of the earth":

The status of his body is now profoundly changed. He may only move about very slowly; he cannot touch the earth, or walk barefoot or dance, etc. . . . He has effectively become the scapegoat of the group; he is "the pile of filth," the one who picks up and takes everything upon himself. He is held responsible for all the evil happenings in the village. . . .

Izard (1987, in Quigley 2000:241) holds “that among the Mandé and the Gur the theme of filth (ordure) is fundamental in the symbolism of all the chiefdoms. The chief is the man on whom one pours everything one wants to get rid of, whether symbolically or in reality.” In an example from one of Jean Rouch’s films, a newly installed king is addressed with, “You are a pile of filth” (Quigley 2000:241).

So when a menstruating woman in Bali finds herself literally on a pile of filth, yet claims that she is being treated like a raja, this is not without parallel. It is an ambiguity that is well known in many other examples concerning highly valued males, including Balinese priests, Polynesian chiefs, and African kings. Association with impurity and restricted movement do not necessarily indicate low value.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Experience of Menstrual Restrictions and Caste*

Considering the taboos and restrictions pertaining to menstruating women, and Balinese women in general, whether they are oppressed is not a simple question. A further complicating factor is that Balinese women do not all experience menstruation and the taboos surrounding it in the same way. Experience differs depending on the woman’s caste. High-caste women may indeed feel that they become like rajas, but low-caste women married into high-caste households talked about having cried when they first were made to adhere to these more stringent menstrual taboos, for they were experiencing them in a matrix of other oppressive measures reminding them of their more lowly place in their new settings. For those who were “set aside” in special menstruating quarters, the experience was not a warm, social one; in fact, they felt quite isolated. Schulte Nordholt (1996:83), in a rather extreme example, reports that within the palace, low-ranking women during menstruation were sent to the corner of the palace where the pigs were kept.

The stricter menstrual requirements do not necessarily translate into proportional liberation through menstruation, but high-caste women, although more constrained, also have greater potential for power in male-dominated realms if they do not marry: Brahman spinsters can become priests (whereas a male brahman must marry to be consecrated) and from the ranks of *ksatrias*, members of palaces and noble houses usually relate that each generation includes women who hold important positions. In the current generation, such women continue to be held in high regard and are always consulted and listened to. As a high-caste man put it, “Wherever you have strong families, you have strong women. Without women nothing would work.”

### *Menstrual Restrictions and Modernity*

Menstrual practices have also changed over time. Some of the practices experienced as more oppressive have waned, whereas other practices remain and show no sign of disappearing. No woman I spoke with ever felt it to be a hardship (or injustice) to be omitted from ceremonial activities during her period (recall Geertz’s [1973b:395] estimations of how “frenetic” a ritual life most Balinese have).

Furthermore, men and gods are considered superior to women in Bali, be they high caste or low, modern or not. So, unless one is a tourist at the temple gate, for whom the experience of a ritual would be a rare event, menstruation may provide a time of exemption from dealing with either men, community, or gods.

Balinese women do not complain about the remaining menstrual taboos, perhaps because they do allow for some agency in an otherwise very demanding ritual schedule. I have never observed a woman miss an important ceremony that she definitely wanted to attend. I heard no voices calling for the declassification of menstruation as pollution, nor did anyone feel that the taboos would disappear, given the modern menstrual equipment that renders menstruation invisible.<sup>7</sup> What may also be at issue here is an assertion of Balineseness. As Sahlins (1976:27) has pointed out for Polynesian chiefs, the freedom from taboo may be "more generally understood as a negation of chieftainship." The remaining menstrual taboos serve also as a confirmation of Balinese identity.

It is possible that younger, modern women are more prone to take advantage of the leverage provided by the exempting options. Aspects of menstruation can perhaps be seen, then, as a metaphor for changing gender roles. A male leader of a noble house posed the notion that with the decline in observation of the menstrual rules restricting their movements, women are becoming more aggressive: "Menstrual blood is very strong and demons like it. So if a woman is always out and about during her menstruation, evil and aggression will enter. This is why women are getting more aggressive nowadays! They are becoming more like men, playing soccer, [they] are less feminine, more kasar."

Conceivably, the ceremony for the woman on the garbage heap represents the limits of room for maneuvering: If a woman's period repeatedly intersects with important ceremonial activities, people suspect that something is awry. Beyond neutralization of bad luck and witchcraft, the ceremony may represent ritual treatment of the underlying possibility that the woman is exercising her own agency to excess. This particular woman had already been exempted, on the basis of menstruation, from participation during a previous weekend of ritual work. But again, though mildly shamed, this high-caste woman summoned to the garbage heap by her paternal aunt still experienced it differently than would the low-caste spouse directed there by an in-law. Note that this is a ceremony for women, by women; little if any attention is paid to it by men. But there is a hierarchy among the women in a princely household that may be experienced more intensely than any of the other hierarchies of which they are a part and that might be accentuated in their menstrual practices.

The Balinese example complicates a simple view of menstruation as pollution through expressed male/female equity in the principles of pollution, through the fact that it is a joint project that women not endanger themselves, their men, or their gods, and through the ways in which menstrual restrictions may render the woman like a raja as well as provide room for agency. This also is not a homogeneous system. Beliefs and practices pertaining to menstruation and pollution intersect with beliefs surrounding gender, caste, and life in the modern world. Such a perspective

corresponds with recent considerations of the culture concept: if culture is no longer viewed as a single, coherent text, it is not surprising that there be several, coexisting, and not always clearly coherent systems.

### CONCLUSION

There is a Balinese principle, *rwa bhineda*, which means "two in one." The dichotomies in Bali—pollution and purity, death and life, evil and good, demons and gods, the bhuta kala in the world and the bhuta kala within us, and so forth—are never viewed as diametrically opposed, as either existing or not. Both are always there, in the one. Not even the bhuta kala are intrinsically evil, nor is anything ever absolutely good. You cannot eliminate negative forces, but only strive to lessen them. The emphasis on anomaly in pollution studies may be a Western bias that loses much of its significance in a Balinese framework.

Menstrual blood, like the blood of childbirth, is polluting because it is a kind of death, a death that also signifies the possibility of procreation. In this way, and in keeping with the Balinese principle of dual complementarity, menstrual cycling parallels the cycles of life and death, purity and impurity; there is not one without the other. Women, correspondingly, are linked to both the goddess Pretiwi, the Mother Earth of germinating life, and to Durga, the goddess of death. Like the goddess of the earth, women are fertile and vulnerable. They are rendered so by their blood. This becomes one reason why a woman has to be restrained in her movements during menstruation. If she were not, evil spirits would be at her heels in desire of her blood. She could get sick; it could be dangerous for her. This is similar to precautions taken after birth to guard the baby from dangers, at a time when the mother and child are said to smell of blood and raw meat, providing dangerous bait for evil spirits. Like Durga, women are also fearsome through their blood. A woman's movement is restrained during her period not just for her own protection, but also to protect other community members: "There are always evil spirits around, and they especially like women's blood. So they come . . . and this is what makes men afraid," explained one man.

Balinese ceremonies do include blood sacrifices. These and other offerings ensure that the bhuta kala are kept contented and will not disturb the advent and feasting of the deities. Since the onset of menarche involves blood, the ceremony to mark it involves symbolic effort to appease the bhuta kala to leave the woman alone (Mershon 1971:119). For major temple ceremonies, the sacrifice of cock's blood, specifically the blood resulting from cock fighting, is a prerequisite. Thus, it may appear that Balinese welcome the cock's blood, but not the woman's. However, not only are cock fights and any other blood sacrifice kept outside the temple's gates, but the insult to women is not the omission of their blood from the temple. The insult to women would be, on the contrary, if explicit offerings of their blood were made to the bhuta kala. It is precisely to avoid having bhuta kala interfere with humans, including women, that people strive to satiate them with other bloods.

## NOTES

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2. Such prohibitions directed against women in their menstrual years, no matter where they might be in their menstrual cycle, are not usually viewed as menstrual taboos, yet they exist in direct correlation to the bleeding woman and warrant being viewed in the same light.
3. Such a view is in keeping with the conversely extensive symbolic effort and high value placed on human fertility in Bali and the extent to which abortion is considered a sin (McGowan 1995).
4. In keeping with this, as Parker (1997:8) describes, "In Bali, learning to be male or female involves learning a certain bodily style, or *gaya*. Female *gaya* is passive, soft, fragile, calm and contained; male *gaya* is more active, bold, self-projecting and individualistic."
5. At the birth of twins, whole villages became *sebel* unless the couple was of high caste. The explanation usually given is that this represents an incestuous relationship in the womb, a union that approaches the ideal marital pairing for high-caste members. It is interesting that this is allowed in the blood of the womb, when other blood taboos are stricter, not lighter, for those of high caste. When parents are of low caste, the birth of twins is taken as such an offense to the order of things that it is assumed evil spirits must be at play.
6. In Bali, infants may not touch the ground. This is due to their proximity to the realm of the divine, to their sacredness (as it is in the case of the Polynesian chief).
7. It could be that most Balinese women simply would not wish to interfere with temple integrity, with what it implies to the gods and to the order of things. The 1960s challenge to caste and class ended in a bloodbath in Bali, frequently justified today with stories of the unholiness of the communists and their agenda to desecrate temples.

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