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Shaping Barong Dance Drama in Paradise Bali: Oriental Discourse by Miguel Covarrubias and his Networks

Moldear la danza-drama barong en el Bali paradisiaco: discursos orientalistas de Miguel Covarrubias y sus redes

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Abstract In the 1930s Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias carried out fieldwork in Bali, an island of the Dutch East Indies. A few years before his arrival, the colonial government had implemented cultural and educational policies, known as “balinization,” meant to preserve Balinese “unique” culture and to ward off external influences like Islam and nationalism. Efforts to Balinize the Balinese by Dutch Orientalist scholar-administrators went hand in hand with creative endeavours of a group of bohemian expatriates to promote Bali and to promote themselves to the world as quintessentially different. Cosmopolitan Covarrubias was at the basis of the romantic image making of “paradise” Bali by dedicating himself to ethnographic recording of a world that might soon be lost. Eager to register “pure” Balinese culture, he actively participated in shaping performing arts. Covarrubias and his networks turned barong dance into a cultural icon.

Keywords Performing arts; paradise Bali; orientalism; Miguel Covarrubias; balinization; Barong.

Resumen En los años treinta del siglo pasado, el artista mexicano Miguel Covarrubias realizó trabajo de campo en Bali, una isla de las Indias Orientales Neerlandesas. Algunos años antes de su llegada, el gobierno colonial había implementado una política cultural y educativa, conocida como “balinización”, dirigida a la preservación de la cultura balinesa “única” para protegerla de influencias externas como el islam y el nacionalismo. Los esfuerzos de los investigadores-administradores orientalistas holandeses por balinizar a los balineses coincidieron con las actividades creadoras de un grupo de bohemios expatriados de promocionar a Bali y de promocionarse a sí mismos al mundo como esencialmente diferentes. El cosmopolita Covarrubias colaboró de manera importante en la construcción de la imagen romántica del “paraíso” de Bali mediante la elaboración de un registro etnográfico de un mundo que pronto podría desaparecer. Ansioso de registrar la cultura balinesa “pura” participó activamente en el desarrollo de las artes escénicas. Covarrubias y sus redes transformaron el baile de barong en un icono cultural.

Palabras clave Artes escénicas; paraíso de Bali; orientalismo; Miguel Covarrubias; balinización; Barong.

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Shaping Barong Dance Drama in Paradise Bali:

Oriental Discourse by Miguel Covarrubias and his Networks

Meeting the Barong

In Chapter IX of *Rites and Festivals of Island of Bali* (1937), we witness what might have been one of the first encounters of Miguel Covarrubias and “the Barong (fig. 1).”¹ He tells us about “the great holiday of *galunggan* [galungan], when the ancestral spirits come down to earth to dwell again in the homes of their descendants.”²

Everybody wore new clothes and the whole of Bali went out for a great national picnic. Everywhere there were women with offerings on their heads and many old men dressed for the occasion in old-fashioned style, gold kris³ and all, although with an incongruous imported undershirt. The younger generation preferred to tear all over the island in open motor-cars, packed like sardines, dressed in fancy costumes, many young men in absurd versions of European clothes, the girls wearing their brightest silks and their best gold flowers in their hair. After visiting the village temple the gay groups went to the many feasts held on this and the following days all over the

1. *Barong* is a generic word for ritual dances as well as sacred masks that represent supernatural creatures. The Barong figure as referred to in this context is a mythological animal impersonated by two men, most often a leonine creature with a dragon tail called Barong Kèt or Barong Kètèt.

2. Miguel Covarrubias, *Island of Bali, with an Album of Photographs by Rose Covarrubias* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press/Indira, 1974 [1937]), 284.

3. A ceremonial dagger with a wavy-edged blade, most often a precious heirloom.

island. At this time the peculiar monsters called *barong*—a great fleece of long hair with a mask and gilt ornaments, animated by two men—were “loose” and free to go wherever they pleased. Everywhere on the road one met the cavorting holy *barongs*, who had become foolish for the day, dancing down the roads and paths, followed breathlessly by their orchestras and attendants.⁴

These “peculiar monsters” are, as we learn from “additional notes” in Covarrubias’ following chapter on *Witchcraft*, “permitted to wander over the streets and roads making *upa* [upah] that is, performing for pennies” during the *galungan* festival.⁵ Village collectives consisting of the holy Barong and his orchestra roam the island to collect money from door to door. But this is just one of the many manifestations of the Barong figure. Better known is the Barong in his role as defender of good spirits when he confronts, helped by his followers the kris dancers, the evil witch Rangda in the barong dance-drama. As Covarrubias puts it in a list of “the most important Balinese dances and plays”: “BARONG [...] A dance-pantomime of the adventures of a fantastic, holy animal, ending usually in a wild kris dance (*rebong*, *ngurek*) by men in trance. Also an exorcism.”⁶

The aim of this article is to investigate the cultural politics of Covarrubias’ ethnographic encounters with Barong and barong ritual practice. Barong dance drama, more than any other dance or cultural manifestation, served as a testing model for changing theories within early twentieth century ethnographic research on Balinese culture.⁷ As a result it became an emblematic symbol representing the entire Balinese culture.⁸ Covarrubias was one of the

4. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 284, 286.

5. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 356.

6. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 217-218.

7. Volker Gottowik, *Die Erfindung des Barong. Mythos, Ritual und Alterität auf Bali* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag GmbH, 2005), 26-27. Throughout the first three chapters of his study *Die Erfindung des Barong* (“The Invention of the Barong”) German ethnologist Volker Gottowik convincingly shows how totemism, evolutionist ideas as well as culture and personality research were applied to the barong phenomenon in the period 1920-1940 as a way to explain Balinese culture. At first the zoomorphic Barong figure itself was at the centre of ethnographic attention and later on focus shifted towards the Barong in combination with the witch Rangda (the so-called Barong-Rangda complex).

8. This is not to say that there were no other cultural manifestations that developed into icons of Balinese culture. For example, the widow-witch Rangda and the virgin *legong* dancer also became important symbols representing Bali, but Barong Kêt was and remains the most persistent



1. I Wayan Wija, *Contemporary Barong Figure of Balinese Shadow Theatre*, 2017, cowhide, 60 × 30 cm, Ubud, Bali. ©Photo: Hedi Hinzler.

ethnographers fascinated by the Barong figure and that is why it has been chosen as main focus of this article in order to explain cultural political developments in Bali at the end of the colonial times.

Covarrubias' fieldwork in the 1930s coincided with intellectual efforts of scholar-administrators of the Netherlands Indies Government to "Balinize" the inhabitants of the island's different kingdoms. The Dutch Orientalists endeavoured to "regain paradise" by promoting awareness of a homogeneous, unique and pure Balinese culture. Meanwhile the famous "Bali set" of "bohemian expatriates" living and working on the island, including the Mexican newly-wed

one. Nowadays after landing on Bali's international airport one is immediately surrounded by Barong paraphernalia like t-shirts, keychains and fridge magnets. Furthermore, near the taxi stand, huge billboards display a cute Barong, all smiles, accompanied by the slogan in English: "You are working hard everyday [sic] enjoy your vacation."

couple Miguel and Rose Covarrubias, enjoyed the “Garden of Eden” by bringing the “unique” culture of Bali to the attention of the outer world. Together with government officials and members of the Balinese elite they made the barong dance into a cultural landmark.

From Palm-leaf Manuscripts to Living Traditions

While colonial power had been consolidated in the island of Java, the Dutch were not able to establish their full authority in the neighbouring island of Bali until the turn of the twentieth century. North Bali became part of the Netherlands Indies in the 1850s and South Bali followed in the first decade of the 20th century. The violent intervention in South Bali which led to massive suicide (*puputan*) by members of various kingdoms, coincided with implementation of the so-called *Ethische Politiek*, Ethical Policy. After a colonial political strategy of *laissez-faire*, the new priorities of the colonial government were education, irrigation and migration. This reform policy led in practice to consolidation of colonial dominance in the outer islands of the Netherlands Indies. Military intervention in Bali was justified by the argument that the colonial state “should guarantee the legal security of persons and property, ensure peace and order, have monopolistic control of revenue collection, and use such revenues for the ‘public good’”—something “Bali’s opium-smoking despots” were thought to be incapable of.⁹

From the 1840s onwards scholars of the Royal Batavian Society for the Arts and Sciences (Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen), based in the capital Batavia of the Netherlands Indies on the island of Java, carried out scientific expeditions to Bali. Inspired by British Orientalist Sir Stamford Raffles (1781–1826) who regarded Bali as a “living museum” of ancient Java, they set themselves the task to re-construct—by means of studying old palm-leaf manuscripts called *lontar*—the grand Hindu culture of Java before the arrival of Islam. They searched for information with members of the kingdoms and with priests who were considered representatives of the former classical Hindu Javanese culture.¹⁰ Only a few nineteenth century ethnograph-

9. Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise, Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 25–26.

10. Adrian Vickers, *Bali a Paradise Created* (Berkeley-Singapore: Periplus Editions, 1989), 78–82.

ic records mention the existence of Barong, the mythological animal with its clacking jaws, its figure borne by two persons as investigated by Covarrubias. Scholars did not seem to be interested in “local lore”: they focused mainly on *lontar* and on what they considered Indian traditions like cremation ceremonies and widow sacrifice.¹¹

Towards the end of the nineteenth century research opened up for the interpretation of Bali as a separate entity and no longer as a part of Indian or Javanese civilization. Civil servants dedicated to traditional law—notably Frederik Albert Liefcrinck (1853-1927)—developed the idea, again inspired by Raffles, that the village represents the “real” Bali. Despotism was considered imported elements from Java, whereas the autonomous village republic with its irrigation system was seen as indigenous and pure. Traditional Balinese culture consisted of egalitarian and harmonious villages.¹² Whereas former scholars were inclined to focus on written traditions as presented to them by members of the highest casts, a new generation of researchers started to appreciate oral traditions on the village level. This paradigm change makes way for interest in phenomena like cockfights and barong.¹³ Slowly the idea is born that Bali is a homogeneous and static culture of extraordinary beauty: a “paradise.”¹⁴

Aesthetics and Linguistics in Colonial Perspective

In New York the Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias and his future wife Rose had seen “a splendid album of Bali photographs” of the German medical doctor Gregor Krause who worked for the colonial government between 1912 and 1914, a book that contained many elements of paradise: “and gradually we had developed an irresistible desire to see the island, until one spring day of 1930 we found ourselves, rather unexpectedly, on board the *Cingalese Prince*, a freighter bound for the Dutch East Indies”.¹⁵ Bali was the final destination of the newlywed couple. They would stay nine months and Covarrubias initiated his field research for *Island of Bali*. Back in New York Covarrubias

11. Gottowik, *Die Erfindung des Barong*, 31-61.

12. Vickers, *Bali a Paradise Created*, 89-91.

13. Gottowik, *Die Erfindung des Barong*, 65.

14. Vickers, *Bali a Paradise Created*.

15. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, xvii.

applied for a scholarship of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. In a letter to the Foundation he explained the importance of his ongoing research about Bali and the Balinese:

Their manner of living created what I consider the finest and most successful developed race of artists, that is, a people that until today have preserved a pure culture. All the existing works on Bali are either scientific scholarly studies dealing mainly with religion, or simple travel books. Of these only one is in English, the others being in Dutch or German, most of these are articles in periodicals published in Java during the past century, which are now unobtainable and out of date. In doing my research, I realized there is not a single work that represents a general aspect of the island with correct and complete information. On the subject of Art, nothing has been written in a systematic and up to date manner and from the viewpoint of an artist.¹⁶

As a matter of fact, an important source on Balinese art “from the viewpoint of an artist” already existed, be it not very “up-to-date” and written in Dutch, called *Bali en Lombok* (1906-1910) by Dutch graphic artist Wijnand Otto Jan Nieuwenkamp (1874-1950). Nieuwenkamp, also known by his initials W.O.J.N., can be considered one of the first European artists who explored the island and “discovered its beauty,” drawing Bali in *art nouveau* style. He wanted to “open the eyes” of those people who never were lucky enough to see the Malay Archipelago but nevertheless claim: “*Indië* is not beautiful; it cannot be beautiful with its eternal green and everlasting burning sun; nothing is to be gained from there for an artist.”¹⁷ Dutch scholar Orientalist Gerrit Pieter Rouffaer (1860-1928) encouraged Nieuwenkamp to undertake travels to Bali because, as he notes in the preface to *Bali en Lombok*, “practically nothing” had been published about the “living flower of Balinese Civilisation,” Balinese Art.¹⁸

Covarrubias used Nieuwenkamp as a reference in his book although he might not always have been aware of that. He made a drawing of a temple relief in his *Island of Bali* and explains: “The North Balinese take their temples lightly and often use the wall spaces as a sort of comic strip, covering them

16. Adriana Williams and Yu-Chee Chong, *Covarrubias in Bali* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2005), 29.

17. Wijnand Otto Jan Nieuwenkamp, *Bali en Lombok*, vol. 1 (Edam: Zwerver Uitgave, 1906-1910), 1.

18. Nieuwenkamp, *Bali en Lombok*, vol. 1, VI.

with openly humorous subjects: [...] a man on a bicycle with two great flowers for wheels.”¹⁹ This man was Nieuwenkamp. He became famous for riding his bike through Bali and was immortalized in a temple relief at Pura Meduwe Karang in Kubutambahan close to Singaraja in the north of Bali. Between 1904 and 1937 he travelled five times to Bali. He witnessed and depicted the military invasion of South Bali whilst travelling with the Dutch troops in 1906.²⁰

Nieuwenkamp prepared himself very well for his first trip to Bali in 1903-1904. He studied the Herman Neubronner van der Tuuk Collection of 483 Balinese drawings situated in the Leiden University Library and became a gifted imitator of the Balinese style. Linguist Van der Tuuk (1824-1894) worked on Bible translations and dictionaries during his stay as a civil servant in the North of Bali between 1870 until his death in 1894. Van der Tuuk most likely set up his drawing collection in order to provide his four volume *Kawi-Balinese-Dutch-Dictionary* (*Kawi-Balinesesch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek*, 1897-1912) with illustrations, but he never finished the task.²¹

Several Barong figures are part of the collection.²² One stands out as showing a full-fledged barong ritual by Balinese artist I Ketut Gedé from Singaraja (fig. 2). It is likely that Van der Tuuk commissioned the artist to make this specific drawing and that he provided the paper.²³ It consists of two parts: a Barong performance at the bottom and the accompanying orchestra at the top of the paper. A text written in Balinese script on the upper right part of the bottom drawing explains the following: “This is a barong performance, all wear masks” (*puniki lampahan barong, sami nyaluk tapel*). In the centre we can observe the Barong, a hairy fleece with an animal mask carried by two men. The two figures with bulging eyes and protruding tongues dancing around

19. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 185-186.

20. For a comprehensive study on Nieuwenkamp's travels see: Bruce W. Carpenter, *W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp: First European Artist in Bali* (Abcoude and Singapore: Uniepers and Editions Didier Millet, 1997).

21. Hedi I. R. Hinzler, *Catalogue of Balinese Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Collections in the Netherlands*, Part II, *Descriptions of the Balinese drawings from the Van der Tuuk Collection* (Leiden: E.J. Brill/Leiden University Press-Bibliotheca Universitatis Leidensis, Codices Manuscripti XXIII, 1986), 13-14.

22. See Hedi I. R. Hinzler, *Catalogue of Balinese Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Collections in the Netherlands*, Part I, *Reproduction of the Balinese Drawings from the Van der Tuuk Collection* (Leiden: E. J. Brill/Leiden University Press-Bibliotheca Universitatis Leidensis, Codices Manuscripti XXII, 1987).

23. Hinzler, *Catalogue of Balinese Manuscripts*, Part II, 5.



2. I Ketut Gedé, *A Barong Performance*, ca. 1880, polychrome, watercolours and ink, bottom part of folded sheet 43 × 34.5 cm, Singaraja, Bali. Special Collections Leiden University ms Or. 3390:125. Courtesy of Leiden University Library.

the Barong represent the female monster *léak* and the one with the blue mask a male demon. In the foreground a spectator is depicted in the act of *ngurek*: stabbing himself with a kris during trance.²⁴ Van der Tuuk gives the following description in his *Kawi-Balinese-Dutch-Dictionary*, volume IV: “*barong*: a certain masked performance, white hair, face of wild animal. The *sekaa barong* [‘barong collective’] is also engaged in *ngurek*.”

In *Bali en Lombok* we find Nieuwenkamp’s interpretation of Barong and the Barong dance (fig. 3).²⁵ The lower part shows the mythical leonine monster Barong Kèt, which Nieuwenkamp describes as: “a lion with a beautifully carved head with perforated leather ornaments.” The Barong is chasing after a *léak* or Rangda figure, according to Nieuwenkamp “Doerga (‘Durga’), Goddess of Death.” The upper part shows a tiger Barong and a boar Barong. Street performances take place during New Year’s festivities in which “puppets and beasts” are displayed.²⁶ “Beasts” refer to zoomorphic Barong figures and “puppets” refer

24. Hinzler, *Catalogue of Balinese Manuscripts*, Part II, 189–190.

25. Nieuwenkamp, *Bali en Lombok*, vol. 3, 206.

26. Nieuwenkamp, *Bali en Lombok*, vol. 3, 232.



3. Wijnand Otto Jan Nieuwenkamp, *Three Barong Figures and a Rangda Figure*, ca. 1906, pen and ink, 8.5 × 15 cm, from Nieuwenkamp, *Bali en Lombok*, vol.3 (Edam: Zwerver Uitgave, 1906-1910), 206. Courtesy of Nieuwenkamp Museum Foundation.

to an anthropomorphic barong type in which large scale puppets are animated.²⁷ The geographical names “Oeboet” (Ubud) and “Tabanan” refer to the places where Nieuwenkamp encountered these figures.²⁸

Nieuwenkamp’s depiction of the Barong figure might have inspired Orientalists of the Leiden tradition to do more research on this topic. The article entitled “Barong op Bali” (“Barong on Bali”) (1924) of the Dutch educator Jacob Kats (1875-1945), published in the academic journal *Djâwa* issued by the Java Institute (*Java-Instituut*), is probably the first ethnographic article

27. For an extensive study on anthropomorphic Barong figures (*Barong Landung*) see Gottowik, *Die Erfindung des Barong*.

28. Although the illustration seems to indicate that Nieuwenkamp came across the figures depicted on the upper part in the region of Ubud and those below in Tabanan, it seems more likely that it was the other way round. At the time, 1906, in Tabanan, there were no Barong rituals in which Rangda figured. It would be until a few decades later when, influenced by tourism, Barong collectives started to integrate Rangda in their (ritual) performance (personal communication with Hedi Hinzler, 8 August 2017).

entirely dedicated to the Barong phenomenon. Kats was part of the editorial board of *Djāwā*, a cooperation between Javanese aristocrats and Dutch Orientalists. The Java Institute, established in 1918, organized all kinds of events like seminars, stage plays and exhibitions to promote the indigenous cultures of Java, Bali, Madura and Sunda.²⁹

Kats' article about the Barong is short and concise and without references.³⁰ According to Kats the Barong consists of a wooden animal head with a movable lower jaw and a decorated protective cover which represents the skin of the animal. When the Barong presents itself two men position themselves under the cover. They dance forwards while imitating animal movements and the one in front has "the most difficult task"; he needs to manipulate the head and to make the jaws click in a rhythmical way.³¹ Every village (*desa*) or association (*saka*) [*sakaa*] has its own Barong which is considered sacred and protects against evil spirits. It can represent different animals: tiger, boar, lion, elephant and the King of the Forest Banaspati (*kètèt*). The Barong receives offerings before performing. It is carried around the village during epidemics or during parts of the year when evil forces are dwelling around. On another occasion the Barong fights, helped by kris dancers, its "evil" counterpart the Rangda. Kats points at the possible totemistic character of the Barong: comparable to a sacred totem-animal the Barong performs as a protective spirit against all kinds of disasters.³² In this way Kats places barong within the theory of totemism.³³

Kats' publication in 1924 coincided with the launching of the first weekly ferry connection by KPM, Royal [Dutch] Packet Navigation Company (Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij), between the coastal town Beluleng in the North of Bali and the capital of the Netherland Indies Batavia as well as Surabaya and Macassar. Slowly the amount of tourists started to increase.

29. Matthew Isaac Cohen, *Inventing the Performing Arts: Modernity and Tradition in Colonial Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016), 108.

30. This article appeared in a special *Djāwā* issue offered to the Javanese Prince Mangkunegara VII, cofounder of the Java Institute who studied in Leiden and worked together with Kats on publications of shadow puppet plays.

31. Jacob Kats, "Barong op Bali," *Djāwā* 4, extranummer aangeboden aan P.A.A. Mangkoenegoro VII (1924): 140.

32. Kats, "Barong op Bali," 140-141.

33. Kats, most likely following the French sociologist Durkheim, elevates the Barong figure to the status of sacred animal that represents the origin of religion.

Compared to Europe after the First World War, facing an economic crisis, Bali seemed a politically stable place where traditional lifestyle and tropical beauty embraced the visitor. With Nieuwenkamp and Krause as an early example, writers, ethnologists and artists came to establish themselves for longer time periods from the end of the 1920s onwards. Orientalist and Head of the Archaeological Service Willem F. Stutterheim noted:

The discovery of Bali's beauty, revealed to Holland in word and picture by the Dutch painter Nieuwenkamp, and to the rest of the Western world through the numerous photographs published by the German physician Dr. Krause, was followed by a world-wide pilgrimage to the island. Before long a trip to Bali became an indispensable attraction in the programmes of travel-bureaux, and to-day no round-the-world trip is complete without at least twenty-four hours spent in a motor-car in Bali.³⁴

From the mid-1920s onwards the Government of the Netherlands Indies started to make changes to the “modern” and “rational” administrative reforms that were initially implemented at the turn of the century.³⁵ Members of the aristocracy and royal houses were granted more power in daily practices of rule. In this way the government tried to regain the loyalty of the upper class, to increase peace and order and to diminish administrative tasks.³⁶

Balinizing the Balinese

In order to maintain the “special” character of Bali, the island had to be protected from modern influences from outside. The greatest preoccupation of the colonial system was penetration of movements inspired by Islam, nationalism and communism. Restoring self-rule amongst the elite could help to “insulate Balinese society from the decadent influences emanating from Java and beyond.”³⁷ But limiting the spread of external forces was not enough to preserve Balinese “uniqueness”: cultural and educational government pol-

34. Willem F. Stutterheim, *Indian Influences in Old-Balinese Art*, trans. Claire Holt (London: The India Society, 1935 [1934]), xi.

35. Henk Schulte Nordholt, “Localizing Modernity in Colonial Bali During the 1930s,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (2000): 103.

36. Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, 36-38.

37. Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, 38.

icies known as *Baliseering* (“Balinization”) were developed that actively promoted the renaissance of Balinese culture. Initiator of this new policy was the Dutch educator H. te Flierhaar, director of HIS Sila Darma, a school founded in 1924 in Klungkung with a curriculum almost entirely dedicated to indigenous culture. To ensure that young Balinese would not get detached from their original background, students had to be trained and immersed in their own cultural heritage. They had to become skilled in their proper language and literature as well as in traditional performing arts.³⁸ Active support to promote balinization came from Orientalist-administrators Victor E. Korn, Roelof Goris, Willem F. Stutterheim and artist Walter Spies.³⁹ The cultural policy of balinization meant reintroduction of so-called “traditional” clothes, traditional architecture and strict use of Balinese language levels.⁴⁰

Within this context of safeguarding Balinese culture the colonial government established—in close cooperation with a board of Balinese advisers—a foundation (*kirtya*) called Kirtya Lieftrinck-Van der Tuuk in Singaraja in 1928. Named after two of Bali’s most famous scholars mentioned earlier, the foundation was concerned with the collection and study of Balinese palm-leaf manuscripts.⁴¹ Stutterheim noted: this “centre of study for literary Balinese [...] was received by them with great enthusiasm and has been kept up with the same enthusiasm to the present day.”⁴²

Between 1929 and 1941 the Kirtya published (in the Dutch language) *Mededeelingen* (‘communications’) about its acquisitions and monographs on archaeology, customary law (*adat*) and language. From 1930 till 1935 the Kirtya published the monthly magazine entitled *Bhawanagara* (“condition of the country”) with contributions in Balinese and Malay.⁴³ Covarrubias included Bawanagara [sic] as very first entry of his bibliography to *Island of Bali*.⁴⁴ He must have consulted some of its issues. The aim of the jour-

38. Michel Picard, “Le Christianisme à Bali: visées missionnaires, objections orientalistes et appropriation balinaise,” *Archipel*, no. 81 (2011): 18.

39. Michel Picard, “En Quête de l’identité balinaise à la fin de l’époque coloniale,” *Archipel* no. 75 (2008): 30.

40. Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise*, 49.

41. Picard, “En Quête de l’identité balinaise,” 27–28.

42. Stutterheim, *Indian Influences in Old-Balinese Art*, XII–XIII.

43. Jan Lodewijk Swellengrebel, “In memoriam Dr. Roelof Goris,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 122, no. 2 (1966): 212.

44. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 413.

nal was to function as a platform for the Balinese to discuss their “culture” and—as specifically stressed in the first issue—was not meant as a mouth-piece of the government.⁴⁵

Dutch Orientalist Roelof Goris (1898-1965) had an important role in the development of the journal as editor, advisor and regular contributor. He had been working as a linguistic officer for the Archaeological Service in Batavia since obtaining his doctorate at Leiden University in 1926 and was transferred to Bali in 1928 to study Old-Javanese literature as well as Balinese festive traditions.⁴⁶ According to Orientalist scholar Swellengrebel (1909-1984) Goris “quite soon became a source of information for younger colleagues, civil servants, visitors (including highly-placed ones), and tourist guides, while the Balinese world also came to appreciate him as a judge of things Balinese.”⁴⁷

Apart from collecting manuscripts the Kirtya also collected paintings, sculptures and archaeological artefacts, many of which later were transferred to the Bali Museum that was opened with financial help of the Kirtya in 1931.⁴⁸ Goris participated together with his fellow Dutch scholar Stutterheim in the establishment of this museum in Denpasar, where “different objects of historical, cultural and aesthetic value no longer used in daily life by the people, and threatened by destruction (their export being prohibited in addition)” were exhibited.⁴⁹ German artist Walter Spies, close friend of Goris and Stutterheim, accepted the “pro-deo” position of curator. This brought the museum in a very “fortunate position,” according to a speech delivered by acting custodian Ir. Th. A. Resink during “het Bali Congres” of the Java Institute held in Bali in 1937 dedicated to the study of Balinese culture, because it received the help of “a person who hopes to spend the rest of his life in Bali” and “who would be difficult to replace” because of “his knowledge for Bali and his sense of art.”⁵⁰

Numerous studies—including *Island of Bali*—portray a most romantic image of Walter Spies: a legendary figure who has become as controversial as the paradise he helped creating. Artist and musician Walter Spies (1895-1942) arrived as a sailor in Java in 1923 and “suddenly” decided to stay there. He earned money during the night by playing the piano in a cinema in Bandung

45. Picard, “En Quête de l’identité balinaise,” 33.

46. Swellengrebel, “In memoriam Dr. Roelof Goris,” 207.

47. Swellengrebel, “In memoriam Dr. Roelof Goris,” 208.

48. Picard, “En Quête de l’identité balinaise,” 28.

49. Stutterheim, *Indian Influences in Old-Balinese Art*, XIII.

50. Thomas Anne Resink, “Het Bali-Museum,” *Djâwâ* 18, no. 1-2 (1938): 76.



4. Nickolas Muray, *Miguel and Rose Covarrubias*, ca. 1930, silver gelatine print, 24 × 19.5 cm, New York. Archivo Miguel Covarrubias. Sala de Archivos y Colecciones Especiales, Dirección de Bibliotecas, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla. no. 31095.

and bicycled around during the day to get to know his surroundings and to transform his encounters into paintings. One day his musical talent was discovered by the Sultan of Yogyakarta and he obtained a position as conductor of the royal orchestra. In 1927 Spies accepted an invitation of Prince Tjokorda Gede Raka Soekawati, district head of Ubud and member of the Volksraad (People's Council), to work and live in Bali. The artist set up his studio in Ubud and would never leave the enchanted island again.⁵¹

In the 1930's Spies gained reputation as "Bali's most famous resident,"⁵² a smart cultural broker with love for the Balinese and their culture. A circle formed around Spies—including Rose and Miguel Covarrubias—of European and North American artists and scholars who stayed in Bali for longer periods of time (fig. 4). This group was extremely productive: creating novels, travel-

51. Hans Rhodius, *Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens Walter Spies* (Den Haag: L.J.C. Boucher, 1964), 34-35.

52. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, xxi.

ogues, academic studies, artworks and movies related to Balinese arts and culture. Barong became a very popular subject of ethnographic research carried out by the Spies circle.⁵³

Spies would give generous advice on what to see and where to go. As Covarrubias put it: “In his charming devil-may-care way, Spies is familiar with every phase of Balinese life and has been the constant source of disinterested information to every archaeologist, anthropologist, musician, or artist who has come to Bali. His assistance is given generously and without expecting even the reward of credit.”⁵⁴ Rose and Miguel Covarrubias became close friends with Spies: “The months went by as we roamed all over the island with Spies, watching strange ceremonies, enjoying their music, listening to fantastic tales, camping in the wilds of West Bali or on the coral reefs of Sanur.”⁵⁵ After nine months of exploring the island, the couple returned to New York. They came back again to Bali in September 1933 and would stay one more year, this time financed by the Guggenheim Foundation.

The Barong of the Bali set or the Bohemian Expatriates

In the 1930s the so-called “barong and kris dance” became famous amongst tourists as a dance spectacle involving trance and exorcism. The performance was loosely based on the *Calon Arang* ritual dance drama that represents demonic masks and is meant to ward off evil spirits.⁵⁶ The Barong and kris dance

53. Gottowik, *Die Erfindung des Barong*, 76–78.

54. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, xxii.

55. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, xxii.

56. This exorcistic ritual most likely emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in Bali. It bears resemblance to one of the episodes of the Old-Javanese *Calon Arang* legend that has its roots in the history of the reign of the Javanese King Erlangga (1019–1042). One of the oldest versions of the Calon Arang story can be found in the Leiden University Library Special Collections: a palm leaf manuscript from 1570; H. Hinzler, “Palm-leaf manuscripts,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 149, no. 3 (1993): 459. It tells the story of the widow-witch called Calon Arang from Girah who put a spell on the East Javanese Kingdom Daha causing terrible misery and destruction because the ruler, King Erlangga, refused to marry her daughter. King Erlangga called upon the powerful Priest Mpu Bharada who succeeded in breaking the spell. He killed the witch, but at the same time gave her useful instructions to overcome her misdeeds and reach illumination; R. Ng. Poerbatjaraka, “De Calon-arang,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, no. 82 (1926): 110–180. A bewildering array of versions exists of the Balinese Calon

displayed an excerpt of the most “spectacular” part of Calon Arang: the moment in which the Barong and Rangda confront each other while kris dancers stab themselves.⁵⁷ The Spies circle had ample interest in all trance- and exorcism-related rituals and focused on the encounter of Barong Kèt and Rangda, of “the two great forces.” The “Barong-Rangda complex” became their favourite topic (fig. 5).

A special issue of the journal *Djāwā*, released in September 1937 by the Java Institute as an introduction to the upcoming “Bali Congres” in October, contained several articles related to the Barong. Spies and Goris who both participated in the organization of the conference wrote an overview of Balinese dance and theatre. Three pages are dedicated to the description of different types of barong performance. Barong Kètèt is described as the most common and most sacred type of Barong, a mythological monster that bears resemblance to the Chinese lion. During the “climax” of the barong play the “white” magical force Barong fights the “black” evil force Rangda. Followers of the Barong are induced in trance by the Rangda and stab themselves (*ngurek*).⁵⁸ In the same issue the German ethnographer Hans Neuhaus provides field note descriptions of a Barong performance. He notes the totemistic background of the Barong and interprets the barong play as a psychoanalytical way to ward off evil forces present in the village community.⁵⁹ In another contribution of this particular *Djāwā* volume North American anthropologist Jane Belo presents the results of her research on drawings of Balinese children. She maintains that shadow puppets (*wayang*) as well as Barong and Rangda figures are recurring elements of children’s drawings: “Generally when the children take as their subject a scene from real life, they choose, as from the wajang material, a dramatic moment, a cockfight in action, the communal slaughtering of a pig, a dancing performance at which a crowd has gathered—a gandroeng, a djanger, or most popularly, a Barong. When it is a performance, the orchestra, which adds so much to the gayety of the actual scene, has always been represented.”⁶⁰

Arang, often with Priest Mpu Bharada represented by the Barong. According to Covarrubias “The [Calon Arang] play approaches our dramatic literature more nearly than anything else in Bali,” *Island of Bali*, 330.

57. Michel Picard, “‘Cultural Tourism’ in Bali: Cultural Performances as Tourist Attraction,” *Indonesia*, no. 49 (April 1990): 57–58.

58. Walter Spies and Roelof Goris, “Overzicht van dans en tooneel in Bali,” *Djāwā* 17, no. 5 and 6 (1937): 214–216.

59. Hans Neuhaus, “Barong,” *Djāwā* 17, no. 5 and 6 (1937): 238–239.

60. Jane Belo, “Balinese Children’s Drawing,” *Djāwā* 17, no. 5 and 6 (1937): 257.



5. Rose Covarrubias, *The Figure Rangda in a Calon Arang Performance*, ca. 1930-1933, silver gelatine print, 12.7 × 8.1 cm, Bali. Archivo Miguel Covarrubias. Sala de Archivos y Colecciones Especiales, Dirección de Bibliotecas, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla. no. 3879.

The Bali set produced at least ten ethnographic works related to barong dance drama and Calon Arang rituals of which four delve more profoundly into the subject: *Island of Bali* (1937) by Miguel Covarrubias; *Dance and Drama in Bali* (1938) by Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies; *Balinese Character* (1942) by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, and *Bali: Rangda and Barong* (1949) by Jane Belo, entirely dedicated to the Barong-Rangda complex.⁶¹ Work initiated by Spies, Goris, Neuhaus and Covarrubias was followed by Jane Belo, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. Whereas the Barong figure was first explained in terms of totemistic theories, or—in the case of Covarrubias, rather described without a clear theoretical framework—it was later applied to Culture and Personality research. In the second part of the 1930s Belo, Mead and Bateson studied the character of the Balinese by analysing trance dance. Bateson and Mead's findings in their *Balinese Character*, implying that Balinese people are “schizoid,” became highly controversial.⁶²

61. Gottowik, *Die Erfindung des Barong*, 77-78.

62. Gottowik, *Die Erfindung des Barong*, 89-129.

The Spies circle promoted Barong overseas. Fifty Balinese dancers and musicians represented their paradise homeland at the Dutch section of the Exposition Coloniale Internationale in Paris in 1931 by impersonating the Barong and the Rangda figure. They also paid tribute to Queen Wilhelmina with a special performance, including barong, at Palace Het Loo in the Netherlands.⁶³ Rose and Miguel Covarrubias who stopped in Paris on their way back home met their friends from Bali: “the Tjokordes of Ubud, feudal lords of Spies’s village [Ubud], the leaders of the troupe of dancers and musicians that were the sensation of the exhibition.”⁶⁴ Their friend Spies was present too as artistic director of Tjokorda Gede Raka Soekawati’s dance group. He had revised the Calon Arang drama for the occasion.⁶⁵ A selection of “traditional” dances was presented daily of which the Barong-Rangda complex apparently deeply impressed the French surrealist playwright Antonin Artaud.⁶⁶

Overseas triumph of Barong and Rangda went on with the release of the German movie *Die Insel der Dämonen* (Island of Demons) in 1933, starring an all-Balinese cast. It came out under the title *Wajan* in the United States in 1938. *Die Insel der Dämonen* tells the story of the village Bedulu where peasants live in peace and harmony, growing their rice crops and celebrating their festivals. The forbidden love between Wajan, the son of a witch and Sari, daughter of a rich family, leads to all kinds of terrible disasters. Finally, the good spirit Barong triumphs over the evil witch Rangda and a temple feast is organized to pay tribute to the gods. After “months of close collaboration” on a film script in 1931, director Friedrich Dalsheim, producer Victor Baron von Plessen, Walter Spies, a “Hindu Priest” and an “indigenous prince” set themselves the task to recruit local lay actors and to start their shooting on location. A “withered old medicine woman” from a neighbouring village got the role of the witch.⁶⁷ The final scene shows an exorcism rite taking place in a temple courtyard figuring Barong and Rangda as well as

63. “De Balineesche dansers,” *Het Vaderland, Avondblad C*, vol. 63, section Kunst en Letteren, June 5, 1931, 1.

64. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, xxiii.

65. Cohen, *Inventing the Performing Arts*, 138.

66. Leonard C. Pronko, *Theater East and West. Perspectives Toward a Total Theater* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974 [1967]), 24-25.

67. “Die Insel der Dämonen,” *Illustrierter Film-Kurier*, 1933. Retrieved from http://de.metapedia.org/wiki/Die_Insel_der_Dämonen, consulted 10 October 2017.

parts of the ritual dance drama *sanghyang dedari* choreographed by Spies.⁶⁸ It was Spies' idea to place the enduring battle between good and evil spirits—as represented by Barong and Rangda—at the centre of the movie.⁶⁹ The story, apart from elements of “Utopia” and “paradise regained” has the ingredients of the legendary Calon Arang tale about the widow-witch Calon Arang or Rangda who causes terrible epidemics and destruction, because King Erlangga refuses to marry her daughter: a story depicted—be it in revised format—in the popular dance-drama barong where the kris dancers impersonate the followers of Barong. Barong was becoming an indispensable element of featuring Balinese culture.

Spies had also been involved in Andre Roosevelt's production of *Goono Goona* (1932), a film inspired by *Tabu* (1931) of his lover Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau about French Polynesia, starring locals. *Die Insel der Dämonen* and *Goono-Goono* were part of a string of “all-Balinese films” released in the 1930s that focused on traditional village society: “there are no cars to be seen, no Westerners nor electrical appliances, and only minimal amounts of clothing—all in line with baliseering policy.”⁷⁰

In his final chapter VII *Modern Bali and the Future* Covarrubias lamented how these “documentary films” suddenly brought “the remote little island” into the centre of the attention of the Western world: “now everybody knows that Balinese girls have beautiful bodies and that the islanders lead a musical-comedy sort of life full of weird, picturesque rites. The title of one of these films, *Goono-Goono*, the Balinese term for ‘magic,’ [Malay word *guna-guna* ‘love spell’] became at the time Newyorkese for sex allure.”⁷¹ Interestingly enough Covarrubias does not mention, let alone criticize, Spies' role in the production of this particular movie. But to mention this, would mean to contradict his apparent admiration for Spies: “An authentic friend of the Balinese and loved by them, I feel he has contributed more to the prestige of the white man than the colonial despots who fail

68. Kendra Stepputat, “Performing *Kecak*: A Balinese Dance Tradition Between Daily Routine and Creative Art,” *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, vol. 44 (2012): 54.

69. Gary L. Atkins, *Imagining Gay Paradise. Bali, Bangkok, and Cyber-Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 82.

70. Matthew Isaac Cohen, “Representing Java and Bali in Popular Film,” in Susan Legêne, Bambang Purwanto and Henk Schulte Nordholt, *Sites, Bodies and Stories, Imagining Indonesian History* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2015), 144.

71. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 391.

to impress the discriminating Balinese by the policy used to bluff natives into submission.”⁷² Spies is elevated to the level of “noble white”: he is better than the other whites. This in turn leads to another significant contradiction on the part of Covarrubias. Whereas he criticizes the “colonial despots” he praises them as follows:

The Dutch have been often called the best colonizers in the world, and whatever the verdict may be on the principle of colonization, it is lucky for Bali that of the imperialists it is Holland that rules there. [...] the native has derived definite benefits from Dutch rule: land may not be sold for exploitation by strangers, the autocratic powers of the princes have been considerably curtailed, the Balinese have retained their laws and their courts, and the troublesome missionaries were supposedly barred from the island. Up to now the Dutch have shown a more humanitarian treatment of the people than most imperialistic colonizers.⁷³

Covarrubias, contented with the Dutch efforts to preserve “pure Balinese culture”—including banning “troublesome” Christian missionaries—, actively wants to do the same. He cannot escape the Orientalist discourse of the scholar administrators: Bali is unique and needs to be approached accordingly. As Cohen put it:

The Bali set ultimately was interested less in communication with Balinese than with maintaining their cosmopolitan standing in a modernizing “paradise” and propagating their authority and influence in the world. This meant preserving Bali as a special niche—because, as Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1996, III) points out, “there can be no cosmopolitans without locals.”⁷⁴

Covarrubias Shaping Barong Ethnographies

Covarrubias, worried about recent developments that threatened Balinese culture, wanted to register as much as he could before paradise would disappear. Was he even aware he would soon cause a Bali craze with *Island of Bali*? The

72. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, xxii.

73. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 403-404.

74. Cohen, *Inventing the Performing Arts*, 137.

colourful feature article of *Life* entitled “Mexican Covarrubias in Dutch Bali” put it in clear black and white:

Inhabited by 1,400,000 Balinese, this tiny, exotic island is an East Indian possession of the Dutch Queen Wilhemina. [...] Though Covarrubias fears that the natural simplicity of Bali will be ruined by tourist invasion, his book about the island to be published this fall will undoubtedly contribute to a greater rush than ever to the charming island.⁷⁵

A clever marketing move that was approved of by his editor Alfred Knopf.⁷⁶ In his closing chapter Covarrubias noted:

lately travel agencies have used the alluring name of Bali to attract hordes of tourists for their round-the-world cruises that make a one-day stop on the island. On this day the tourists are herded to the hotel in Den Pasar to eat their lunch, buy curios, and watch hurried performances by bored “temple dancers”—ordinary village actors who hate to play in the midday heat. The show over, the tourists are rushed back to their ships in numbered cars, satisfied to have seen Bali.⁷⁷

Notwithstanding the midday heat, Covarrubias himself commissioned performances during the day to be able to film by daylight. Walter Spies assisted as always, but Rose and Covarrubias also benefitted from collaboration with their friends of the “New York Van Vechten circle,”⁷⁸ anthropologist Jane Belo and her Canadian husband composer ethnomusicologist Colin McPhee. Covarrubias and Jane Belo exchanged ideas about barong dance rituals. In 1949 her famous monograph came out entitled *Bali: Rangda and Barong*.

Excerpts of footage assembled by the recent international project “Bali 1928 — Repatriating Bali’s Earliest Music Recordings, 1930s Films and Photographs” led by American ethnomusicologist Edward Herbst show ample proof of Covarrubias’ interest in Barong during his fieldwork between 1930-1934.⁷⁹

75. “Mexican Covarrubias in Dutch Bali,” *Life*, 27 September 1937, 46.

76. Williams, *Covarrubias in Bali*, 36.

77. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 392.

78. Carl van Vechten (1880-1964) was a well-known music critic, writer and photographer of celebrities who helped Covarrubias to establish his network in New York during the 1920s (personal communication with Nancy Lutkehaus, 5 November 2017).

79. Edward Herbst, “Bali 1928, vol. III, Lotring dan Sumber-Sumber Tradisi Gamelan,”

Volume three of “Bali 1928” includes impressive fragments of the Barong as seen through Miguel and Rose Covarrubias’ eyes, which can be related to pictures by Rose and to specific descriptions in *Island of Bali*: “barongs prancing down the hills”; “crazed men in trance pretended to stab themselves and tore live chickens with their teeth to show their wickedness”⁸⁰ and explanations of Barong kètèt and “Barong play”:

Despite his demoniac character, the Barong materializes in a trance play in which he is made to act foolishly and to dance for the amusement of the crowd. His costume consists of a great frame covered with long hair, with a sagging back of golden scales set with little mirrors. A beautifully arched gold tail sticks out of his rump and from it hang a square mirror, a bunch of peacock feathers, and a cluster of little bells that jingle at every move. Under a high gilt crown is his red mask, too small for his body, with bulging eyes and snapping jaws. The power of the Barong is concentrated in his beard, a tuft of human hair decorated with flowers.⁸¹

Covarrubias’ eyewitness account of the barong play in *Island of Bali* was based on a location distinct from the place mentioned in the “Bali 1928” project, but it gives nevertheless an eloquent summary of what can be observed in the film fragments.⁸²

Like a circus prop-horse, the Barong danced, wiggling his hind quarters, lying down, contracting and expanding like an accordion, snapping his jaws, and in general behaving in a comic, rather undignified manner for his awesome character. After his gay outburst of animal spirits, he began a long dance, staring around as if astounded by magic visions that filled the air. He was constantly on the alert for invisible enemies, growing more and more alarmed, clicking his teeth like castanets as the tempo of the music increased. Firecrackers began to explode at the far end of the arena, startling the Barong, and when the smoke cleared, the figure of Rangda

<http://bali1928.net/wp-content/uploads/Bali-1928-Vol-III-Lotring-dan-Sumber-Sumber-Tradisi-Gamelan.pdf>, 122, consulted 19 October 2017.

80. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 286.

81. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 332-333.

82. For direct access to Covarrubias’ Barong footage consult the following two websites: “Bali 1928, vol. III - Barong, Sandaran, Rangda & Ngurek in Kesiman”, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lo_QcNMOziE; “Bali 1928, vol. III - Sandaran, Omang, Jauk, and Barong in Kebon Kuri, Denpasar”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iK7CVmob-k>, consulted 19 October 2017.

appeared, yelling curses at the Barong, who appeared humiliated by her insults. But eventually he reacted and they rushed at each other, fighting and rolling on the ground until the Barong was made to bite the dust.⁸³

While the entranced kris dancers came out to assist the Barong, the furious Rangda put a spell on them:

By the spell the krisses in the hands of the men turned against them, but the magic of the Barong hardened their flesh so that, although they pushed the sharp points of the daggers with all their might against their naked chests, they were not even hurt. This was the explanation the Balinese gave of the strange exhibition and it seemed inconceivable that they were faking, such was the earnest force with which they seemed to try to stab themselves.⁸⁴

Covarrubias rounds up his story of the barong play as follows: “The *pemangku* [priest] wiped the face of each man with the beard of the Barong dipped in holy water, and gradually the hysterical men came out of trance, dazed, simply walking away as if they did not know what had happened to them.”⁸⁵

Ironically enough Covarrubias’ recording and preservation efforts becomes a testimony to early 1930 tourism in Bali. A review about the “Bali 1928” project notes: [In a film associated to volume five] “we see Rose Covarrubias done up in traditional Balinese dress. The shot is surreal for appearing as the prototype of an image to be repeated ad infinitum within the context of the mass tourism that would shortly take Bali by storm.”⁸⁶ In the Miguel Covarrubias Archive of The University of the Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, Mexico, a series of pictures can be found of Rose “done up in traditional dress” made by Walter Spies.⁸⁷

Covarrubias sent his book to Spies quickly after its publication. Spies received it with great enthusiasm in April 1938 as can be read from a letter he wrote:

83. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 333.

84. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 334.

85. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 334.

86. Andy McGraw and Gusti Putu Sudarta, “Bali 1928, Volumes 1-5 (Review),” *Asian Music* 48, no. 2 (2017): 174.

87. See <http://catarina.udlap.mx/xmLibris/projects/covarrubias/index.html>, consulted 15 October 2017.

Dear Miguel and Rose! The book arrived. Thank, thanks, thanks, it is lovely! It reads so easily and all the questions which everyone asks, are all answered. [...] I am very ashamed to read all that glorifying nonsense about me in the introduction and I must say that it has already added to my publicity! Every new coming tourist knows everything about me, and I had already two orders for pictures again through your book! [...] Our dance book comes out in spring. It looks as if it could be a big success. The editor—Faber and Faber—is very enthusiastic and everyone else who read the manuscript and saw the pictures as well. [...] I hope you make millions with your book, darlings! I see every tourist with it. It is just the thing everyone wants to have! And to everyone who asks me something I say: look in Covarrubias. It is such a comfort. Darlings, tabé tabé and come lekas lekas [quickly]. Kisses and kisses from Walter.⁸⁸

Spies refers to his upcoming book *Dance and Drama in Bali* (1938) made in collaboration with British dancer Beryl de Zoete, which became a classic on Balinese performing arts. Chapter III *The Drama of Magic* is entirely dedicated to Barong and Calon Arang (Tjalonarang). The Barong is described as a “protective animal.” According to the writers the conflict between Barong and Rangda is always observed “with intense emotion by the villagers”:

[...] an emotion strong enough to induce a state of trance not only in the recognized village mediums (the so-called kris-dancers), but in the Barong itself, in Rangda, in the *pemangkoe* [priest], and in casual members of the audience. At each *Barong* play the life of the community is somehow jeopardized. The dramatic victory of the Barong is more than a mere symbol of its preservation, it is a material pledge. Black magic, the force of death is not destroyed, but is driven away to the graveyard where it belongs.⁸⁹

Barong Kèt in confrontation with Rangda and surrounded by Kris dancers became emblematic for Balinese culture. It was black against white in struggle for equilibrium.

88. Rhodius, *Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens Walter Spies*, 371.

89. Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete, *Dance and Drama in Bali* (Hong Kong and Singapore: Periplus Editions, 2002 [1938]), 97-98.

To Conclude: Barong, a Cultural Landmark

Orientalist philologists and ethnologists only seriously “discovered” the Barong figure by the end of the nineteenth century when Balinese society became interpreted as a separate field of study and no longer as an extension of research on India and ancient Java. By interpreting the village as a quintessential part of Balinese society the Barong gained a special status as “protector of the village.” The “peculiar monster” as encountered by Covarrubias, transformed over approximately a decade (±1924-1934) into a key figure of Bali’s imagined paradise.

Both linguist Van der Tuuk and artist Nieuwenkamp, heirs of Orientalist tradition, showed for the first time real interest in Barong figures. Van der Tuuk commissioned artists to draw Barong figures, whereas Nieuwenkamp learnt to portray the Barong figure by studying the drawings made under auspices of Van der Tuuk. Nieuwenkamp, stimulated by Orientalist scholar Rouffaer, promoted Balinese culture through his richly illustrated album published in 1906-1910. The Netherlands, in serious need of displaying a positive picture of Bali after their violent military intervention in the island, found a good ally in Nieuwenkamp: he portrayed Balinese “paradise.”

While the tourist industry developed in the 1920s, Orientalist Kats presented the Barong figure as a theme worthy of academic study, in need of further investigation. The journal *Djāwā* for dissemination of indigenous cultures published several Barong-related articles especially from the mid 1930s onwards. Meanwhile books were released on similar topics, mainly written by Westerners. This focus on Barong can be explained by two intertwined phenomena that emerged towards the end of the 1920’s: *baliseering* policies instigated by the colonial government and creative invention of expatriates living and working on Bali. The aim of balinization was to preserve the “extraordinary” indigenous culture of the island by implementing a set of educational and cultural rules that could enhance knowledge, awareness and respect among the Balinese of their own cultural heritage. As a hidden but nonetheless clear agenda, the colonial government had the strategical isolation of Bali in mind: by Balinizing the Balinese, “dangerous” ideologies like Islam and nationalism were thought to be kept outside.

The expatriate circle around artist Walter Spies had its share, in direct and indirect ways, in the balinization process. Spies himself collaborated in the government-sponsored Kirtya Lieftrinck-Van der Tuuk and the Bali Museum, both established to safeguard Balinese cultural heritage. Together with scholar



6. Anonymous, *Barong Dance Drama Depicting Barong, Rangda and Kris Dancers*, date unknown, mixed technique on rice paper, 30 × 20.5 cm, Bali. Quadrante Plástico Collection, Mexico City. ©Photo: Quadrante Plástico.

administrators Goris and Stutterheim he participated in the organization of a special Bali Conference in 1937 organized by the Java Institute.

Miguel and Rosa Covarrubias joined the Bali set in the 1930s. They soon developed an interest in all aspects of Balinese culture, but focused specifically on artistic expression within the Balinese world, because “Everybody in Bali seems to be an artist. Coolies and princes, priests and peasants, men and women alike, can dance, play musical instruments, paint, or carve in wood and stone.”⁹⁰ Influence of their informant Spies on their work is evident. Spies had a special passion for ritual trance dance, as shown by his choreographies made

90. Covarrubias, *Island of Bali*, 160.

for overseas performances and for movies with all-Balinese casts. At some point he must have steered the Covarrubias' attention towards the Barong-Rangda complex. Together with Spies, ethnomusicologist Mc Phee and anthropologist Belo, the Covarrubias' commissioned dance and theatre companies to stage special barong performances during the day that would normally take place during the night. In this way they actively took part in revising and transforming existing performance genres. Anthropologists Bateson and Mead followed the trend of staging performances for their research, revising, changing and inventing "traditions": the barong play was made into a cultural landmark (fig. 6). ❀

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