

**NON-BALINESE INDONESIAN PAINTERS
AND THE PROBLEMATIC OF IDENTITY
IN BALI**

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Abstract

This article is an attempt, in an Indonesian context, to understand how the “center” of a states, through the voice –here the brush- of its representative, “imagine” its periphery – areas that are historically and culturally different, and how this periphery reacts. Focusing on the case of Bali, it will show how the painting discourse of the non-Balinese painters is closely related to sociopolitical environment. The artists of the post-independence period, bathing in a mood of nationalist enthusiasm, tended in their representation of Bali to de-emphasize the exotic signs and on the contrary underline the common Indonesian features. After mass tourism took the island by storm in the 1970s, non-Indonesian painters became in their majority the ideological mouthpiece of tourism, providing the images exotic paradise that justified and encouraged the take-over of the island by outside capital. To this alienating discourse the modern Balinese artists reacted not in a political way, which was then impossible, but by producing work that discarded the outward exotic signs of Bali in their representation (offering, women etc) to focus on the Hindu symbolic core. Their works were therefore an assertion of identity and therefore of “difference” toward the Indonesian states. However, a new wave if modern artists, Balinese and non-Balinese, is now exposing the deceit of exoticization and by doing so, finding a new ground of exchange and communication beyond ethnic differences. Painting is thus one of the fields where the Tunggal (One) and the Bhinna (Different) of the Indonesian national motto (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika) are dialectically locked into one another.

Key Word : *non-Balinese, painters, identity*