During a break in the 1988 festival at Lingsar, the Sasak priest Sanusi and I sat on a pavilion in the temple, where he carefully responded to my questions on the schedule of rites and their meanings. Suddenly, the Balinese leader and grandson of the last Lombok Balinese king, Anak Agung Gedé Biarsah (Agung Biarsah), stormed in with an entourage of advisors and demanded to know if rumors were true that Balinese were precluded from carrying the main food offerings in festival processions. Tellingly, he spoke in Indonesian, rather than the regional Sasak language, which made his words formal and distant. He stated that many local Balinese were complaining about this rumor; they had always had access to the offerings, and the prospect of not touching or carrying the offerings (a locus of power) during processions was upsetting. Sanusi, overwhelmed and outnumbered, replied in polite Indonesian that “of course” Balinese could carry the offerings in turn with Sasak participants, “just like always,” and that the rumors were untrue. Agung Biarsah, with his advisors in tow and mission accomplished, quickly departed.

There was more at stake in this interaction than simply access to the offerings—though that was also a serious issue for Balinese participants. Sanusi and Agung Biarsah were struggling over the ritual position that articulates which party is at the “center” of the festival and which is the “outsider.” Agung Biarsah, as the heart of past political power, wanted to reclaim Lombok Balinese access to these offerings while at the same time continuing to dominate in other festival events, ultimately restating Balinese hegemony as center; Sanusi was trying to
reconfigure the Sasak as center hosts and the Balinese as peripheral others, symbolized by exclusive Sasak access to power via the offerings. Though Agung Biarsah reclaimed the visible center on this occasion, the efforts of Sanusi, who died in 1993, and those of other Sasak have resulted in an enhanced acknowledgment of the Sasak contribution. Most Sasak, in fact, hold that they are the originators and hosts of the festival and that the Balinese are simply honored guests. I have never met a Balinese who agrees with this assessment.

This book is a broad ethnographic study of the Lingsar festival that addresses its players, performing arts, rites, histories, changes, and relationships with sociocultural and political trends on the island of Lombok and nationally in Indonesia. The festival is a site of cultural struggle and a nexus of religious, political, artistic, and agrarian interests. It is a significant image- and identity-molding event, and many forces try to control the forms it takes, their meanings, and interpretations to further their own interests. Many decades ago the festival was considered the most important religious event in Lombok; now, while it preserves this function for many participants, the event has also become a contested institution for constructing ethnicity and asserting sociopolitical identity in postcolonial, modernist, and newly democratic Indonesia.

Any major festival provides an opportunity for a culture to define itself, as social worlds, sacred beliefs and objects, meaningful rites, and performing arts are revealed to refresh that culture. The participants are bonded as a unit, further grounded in their history and ideology, and in general come to know themselves better as a result of their encounter and experience. Festivals are ideal contexts for the negotiation of history, ethnicity, and identity; they also may reflect a people’s response to contemporary circumstances, may erect boundaries of “us vs. them” to stimulate intraethnic experience, and may result not from some abstract impulse to celebrate culture but through the agency and decision-making of their participants. The festival at Lingsar has one major feature that distinguishes it from most others worldwide: it is created by two ethnic groups and must accommodate the histories, experiences, and memories of both the local Hindu Balinese and the Muslim Sasak.
Lombok is a relatively neglected island neighboring Bali. Dominated by Java in medieval times, it was then colonized by Bali for over 150 years and the Dutch for the next fifty, so the indigenous population, the Sasak, have had little opportunity to develop an independent cultural identity. Their history with the migrant Balinese, the largest minority on the island, has often been tense. Memories of ethnic colonization run deep, and religion has been a major dividing factor. Among Sasak and other ethnic Muslim minorities in Lombok, the phrase “yang penting Islam” (what’s important is Islam) has unifying, linking power; despite their centuries on the island, the Lombok Balinese, being Hindu, are excluded from this pact. The festival has historically been the forum to mediate religious and social tension and nurture Hindu-Muslim solidarity. Today, however, this union is less potent as religion, reform movements, modernization, and politics have instead promoted greater separation.

The festival, called Pujawali (worship return), is held annually at the temple in the village of Lingsar in the district of West Lombok (Lombok Barat). Participants and officials agree that it has primarily functioned to promote agricultural and human prosperity and to menyatu (unite) or mempersatukan (make one) Balinese and Sasak. The festival has also been a forum to revisit and reorder the past, and it helps to legitimize traditional Balinese and Sasak cultures in modern Lombok. The constant maneuvering and positioning in the festival indicate just how important the festival is to both groups as they struggle to express their ethnicity while negotiating the other camp, local religious leaders, and the regional government.

Music and dance are central to the festival for ritual purposes—playing at the right spot, initiating a rite, enacting a transformation—all provide an opportunity for participants to interpret the event and its history, and to construct and define ethnicity. Both camps present an array of diverse arts; a few of these exist only to serve the festival. Officials have said that the festival would not take place without its music, because music defines so many stages and completes or references worlds necessary for festival rites. Music is the public icon, the vehicle to move events forward, and the force for constructing place and ethnicity. As the soundscape for the festival, music allows its activities to happen.

**IN THE WORLD OF FESTIVAL**

Festival is a special context for the construction of ethnicity and socioreligious behavior and experience. As Cornell contends (2000:42), ethnicity can be a collective narrative that captures central understandings of a group. At Lingsar, Balinese and Sasak use an abundance of music and dance to construct and articulate their ethnicity—their collections of narratives—and orientations to the world at large, and these performing arts—themselves embodied narratives of past ideation—are refocused and finessed to respond to contemporary issues. Dance (at least at Lingsar) is the more clearly narrative medium, and its public ritual performances recast myth and redefine disputed identities (see Mendoza 2000).
Religious festivals are highly charged environments; expressive elements like music and dance that represent or unify a congregation attain a special status in such settings. Several participants of both camps at Lingsar have confirmed that music and other ritual arts and objects achieve a “heightened reality” or “symbolic life” during the festival. Music performance is also a key element in creating a magnified aesthetic state of liveliness known as *ramé*, a sociocultural goal for both groups. In the festival context, *ramé* refers to the bustling moments of music and dance, collective ritual activities, spiritual union, and to other climaxes within the event.

Participation requires physical, mental, and spiritual action, and participants learn how to interpret festival meanings through their accumulation of experience. Each festival provides a deepened foreknowledge for the next and fosters more mature ritual behavior and participant expectations. As one participant stated, “Orang tua kami tak kasihtahu arti arti saijen atau pujawalinya. Kami harus mendapatnya sendiri” (Our parents never told us about the meanings of offerings or of the festival. We had to discover these for ourselves). The festival experience becomes its own narrative of ethnic rediscovery, and the role of individual and group agency in the construction of meaning is clear.

In this sense each festival becomes a negotiation and renegotiation with a variety of entities and issues from the personal and intimate to the public and national. Each individual, party, and community experiences this negotiation process during each festival as all participants must consider what the festival represents, their personal and collective place within it, and how this relates to being a contemporary Indonesian citizen on the island of Lombok. The result is a redefinition of a myriad of identities that pertain to social, religious, and political orientation.

Major rituals and their performing arts are “shared institutions” that offer ways for participants to organize themselves, practice their culture, and assert their values (Spickard and Burroughs 2000). The festival and its music are thus forces to mould and generate culture. Stokes (1994:5) asserts that music constructs and mobilizes ethnicity and identity as it articulates the cultural self and distinguishes that self from the other. Performance at Lingsar erects and maintains boundaries of social identity, and establishes Sasak and Balinese ethnicities in positions of opposition. However, a paradox exists. While performance on a social level realizes respective cultural selves in opposition to one another, on a spiritual level it forges a unity between the groups—a unity that both groups sense and recognize as essential for festival success. Music performances are multidimensional and affect both groups.

**TEMPLE AND FESTIVAL**

The temple in the village of Lingsar (spouting water) was built above the most abundant water springs on the island. Temple organizations regulate irrigation water for much of the fertile rice-growing western plain of Lombok; this water also irrigates some fields in Central Lombok and long ago was directed as far away as
East Lombok.¹ The structure is often considered the “mother temple” for the local Balinese, and it is also a shrine to worship culture heroes for many Sasak; for both, it is the place to pray for rain and abundance, success in business and agriculture, and cures and boons.

The festival and its mythologies interweave historic events and ancestor spirits with the divine; this process allows various participant interpretations of the temple, the festival, and the performing arts. Though the organizations representing Balinese and Sasak interests would prefer uniform interpretations, the Pujawali itself, with its diverse rites and participants, does not support homogeneous themes or meanings but rather encourages divergent experiences and understandings.

The festival’s success was a mandate for legitimation of past Balinese colonization (1740–1894), and today it remains one of the largest-scale events in Lombok. Perhaps 20,000 are directly involved in the festival, and well over 100,000 farmers and other individuals depend upon the temple and its festival to coordinate irrigation and increase the producing capacity of the earth. These people, to at least some extent, believe in the powers centralized at the temple and in the efficacy of the festival rites. The stature of the temple has attracted the attention of the regional government, which has been helping direct the festival and claiming some credit for its success as a symbolic mandate for their governance of the island.

Participants come to the festival not only for its efficacy but also for its spiritual, social, and musical experience. The festival dramatically unifies a large and unique congregation, and music and dance escort the participant through a special history. Ethnic tension, however, lies beneath the surface of cooperative behavior, and the festival is an event in which a struggle is played out over which group—Balinese or Sasak—owns the past, dominates the present, and best accesses the divine. There is constant contestation over the temple’s history and meaning, and this contesting reveals the parties’ agendas and respective positions.

The festival serves many purposes:

1. To provide a forum for communicating with the divine, however construed,
2. To help secure agricultural and human fertility, rainfall, boons, and cures,
3. To help regulate irrigation for the rice fields and agricultural organizations,
4. To furnish a forum in which to appropriately erect history, remember ancestors, and construct socioreligious ethnicity, and,
5. To allow the manipulation of that history and ethnicity to meet current needs, needs that continually adjust to various pressures by outside forces and new generations of participants.

Perhaps most importantly, the festival harmonizes relations between the Sasak and the local Balinese. In the past it was considered crucial that Balinese overlords and landowners commune and celebrate with farmers, who were mostly Sasak.
Today, participants claim that the unity created between the groups is essential in coordinating them, organizing irrigation needs, and maintaining peace. A Balinese leader, Wayan Kereped, stated that without the festival union Balinese and Sasak in Lombok might become “like the Palestinians and Israelis.” Music and dance are primary catalysts in effecting transformations and reunifying these peoples.

THE PLAYERS

Lombok is due east of Bali and joins its neighbor island Sumbawa to form the Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Barat, one of the most strongly Islamic of Indonesia’s provinces. Lombok and the Sasak people have been subject to extensive Hindu Javanese and later Islamic Javanese influence; Sumatra/Malay, Makassarese, and Sumbawanese Islamic influence; Balinese colonization and influence; Dutch colonization; Japanese occupation; and now the modern Indonesian government. The Sasak voice has rarely been dominant. Sasak culture today shares some elements with Sumbawa on one side and with Bali on the other, but it has a special relationship with Java because of past influences and the existence of differing Islamic practices: one older, syncretic, and associated with traditional social custom, and one newer, modern and divorced from traditional cultural patterns. The tensions between traditional and reformist Islam, ancestral spirits and Allah, myths and liturgies, and arts and religion are clear on both islands. The Balinese also enjoy a special relationship with Java. Many claim descent from Java (via Bali) and assert that they preserve a spiritual mandate to dominate political and religious life through ancestral links to the legendary Hindu Javanese empire, Majapahit.

The value of the temple can be viewed through the pasts and presents of festival participants. The Sasak, culturally related to the Javanese, Balinese, and Sumbawanese (in West Sumbawa), constitute over 90 percent of Lombok’s population of 2.6 million. They are a society of Muslims, most of whom are “orthodox” (that is, they are party to the revitalization and reformation of Islam in Indonesia which has a Sunni basis) and Mecca-oriented. Some Sasak, however, practice a local, syncretic Islamic faith that combines indigenous beliefs with Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist influences. It is this latter group of “traditional” Muslims who constitute nearly all of the Sasak participants at the festival. Today, they may number as few as 40,000 throughout Lombok, and most are gradually accepting a more orthodox Islamic worldview. The other Sasak who attend the festival are either moderates who retain some belief in the power of the land and ancestors, reformist Muslims who are primarily curious about the event, or government officials who seek to establish a presence there.

The Hindu Balinese, most of whom originate in the East Bali district of Karangasem, became the colonizers of neighboring Lombok and controlled the entire island from 1740 until 1894, when they were defeated by Dutch forces. Nearly all surviving Balinese chose to remain in Lombok, which they considered their home, rather than return to Bali. Today they number about 114,000. Both
groups of festival participants—Balinese and traditional Muslim Sasak—are religious and political minorities, and both have experienced oppression. Since the festival now helps to legitimize their cultures—through its elaborate fanfare, government recognition, participant numbers, and acknowledged function—both camps have a large interest in the festival’s success, and the event has become a prominent cornerstone of their religious and cultural self-identities. Chapter Two discusses these groups, their religious orientations, and their systems of music and ritual.

The Balinese and Sasak face different problems in Lombok. The former, the past colonizers, are now a religious minority in need of preserving their history and culture in response to the growing reconciliation of Sasak and Islamic culture. They are acting forcefully to maintain their presence at the festival, which the government considers primarily Sasak. The Sasak, who were prevented from experiencing a golden cultural age due to colonization and external influences, have gradually learned to temper religious values in order to preserve what is left of their past.

Sasak identity is not well defined. In the attempt to establish a culture based on Islamic principles initiated by late nineteenth-century religious leaders and nobility, the Sasak have swept aside traces of their earlier culture until very little remains of what can be designated “traditional culture.” The Lingsar festival is one phenomenon that remains, and it offers a direct link to legendary Sasak heroes, culture, and identity. Religious leaders and the government have been working to Islamify or secularize enough festival rites to rationalize and even encourage Sasak participation as a means to preserve khas Sasak (original Sasak culture) in the face of the religious, political, social, and technological changes that are sweeping over Lombok. To some extent, these forces want to control the past and manipulate the notion of khas Sasak to assert a more forceful Sasak image. Music and dance are active and powerful icons that can be interpreted to formulate cultural identity and reconfigure the past, and local leaders have given considerable attention in framing the image of khas Sasak. Most agree that anything appearing to be of Balinese origin cannot, by definition, be khas Sasak. Thus any traditions that seem to share elements with Balinese arts are scrutinized and often discouraged or even banned.

**MYTHS AND THE INNER POSITION**

The Balinese and Sasak relate two different myths regarding the discovery and significance of the temple; these myths frame the interpretation of the festival and much of its music, and they reflect contemporary ethnicity and interethnic relations. The past is subject to debate and is the cause of frequent tension. At one time or another, each group has tried to impose its myth upon the other in an attempt to demonstrate that it is they who truly direct and are the center of the festival, that their rites are truly efficacious, and that it is they who advance the fertility of Lombok. At the same time they paint the other group as peripheral to the festival’s success.
The struggle for the center position, highlighted in the first paragraph, has become a permanent feature. The issue of who has access to the offerings arose again during the 1990s (particularly in the 1994 and 1995 festivals), similar issues were apparent in 2001, and such tensions and postures will continue indefinitely due to the religious, political, and economic significance of the temple and its festival. Chapter Three interprets these problems within the respective myths of Lingsar and identifies the political positions of the Balinese and Sasak camps and the role of the government. Chapter Four details the events, activities, stages, and performing arts of the festival.

At Lingsar, myth (public/popular belief of its founding) and liturgy (scheduled rites of specialists) are two different spheres that rarely overlap. Hefner (1985:16) affirms that among the Tengger of East Java, what resides in public myth is often quite different from the liturgies of priests at the same event, and this could prove true at any contested religious event. During the Lingsar festival the human figures presented in the Lingsar myths—Datu Wali Milir for the Sasak and Anak Agung Ngurah Karangasem for the Balinese—are not invoked by the priests of either camp. The deities immediately associated with these figures are similarly ignored. Yet many participants interpret the festival through the myths and their political units. The distinctions between myth and liturgy in Lombok were probably caused by the questions posed by modernizing Indonesia and revitalized Islam, as both Balinese and traditional Sasak appear to have made an effort to “reshape” their “folk heritage so as to make it capable of meeting the challenge” of the current surrounding society (ibid.). This reshaping of heritage apparently stimulated an evolution of the Lingsar myths that I believe has accelerated over recent decades. The divergence of myth and liturgy has also affected the interpretation of the festival music. Some performances are held to support a mythic-political complex of meanings, others have a more liturgical function and connect directly to the priests and their rites, and a few combine elements that reach into both domains. Since the myths are subject to change, so too are the interpretations of the performing arts.

Balinese and Sasak participants realize that they are both linked to Lingsar, that beneath their argumentative exteriors they actually share many understandings, and that they must work together for the mutual success of the festival, and this has always served to unify them. The shared rites, in particular, create a sense of Turner’s “communitas” (see especially 1969), where separate social roles and ethnic identity dissolve in the establishment of a unified spiritual order (a process discussed in Chapter Six). The religious goal of the festival is to guarantee through ritual processes sufficient rainfall and irrigation water for the rice fields. Water and its spiritual force are major symbols. The festival therefore has a universal appeal to the inhabitants of Lombok, Hindu Balinese and Muslim Sasak alike. The farmers of both groups have a considerable stake in the success of the festival, and they care very little about debates over history.
THE FIELDWORK ENCOUNTER

I first came to Lombok in 1983 to research music of the Balinese minority, following the findings of a single source available on local music (Seebass et al. 1976), and I attended the Lingsar festival as part of that project. I was astonished at the diversity of ritual and musical activity at the festival, and at the participation of the Sasak—a fact never mentioned by my local Balinese hosts. The Balinese and Sasak held mostly separate rites in separate spaces within the temple, but came together for other rites. Since there had been some sectarian violence between Balinese and Sasak, the unified actions and apparent solidarity in the joint rites were striking. The intermingling of the participants and their different forms of music was a unique experience; it seemed clear that this event was specific to Lingsar and could not happen elsewhere. At that time I was concentrating on the local Balinese music at the festival, and so other dimensions of meaning lay hidden within the folklore of the temple, the unique scheme of the festival, and the experiences of the participants. I returned to visit the temple in 1985, 1989, and 1995, and to again witness and research the festival in 1987, 1988, and 2001, and thus have since immersed myself in other aspects of the festival and have come to notice changes over the years.

Over the past two decades, a series of new developments have emerged as a result of pressure from interest groups (including the provincial and district governments), a new generation of more educated (or modern) participants, a changing political climate, and the fact that many officials and leaders have died and been replaced (see Chapter Seven). Some “traditions” considered requirements in 1983 no longer exist. In 2001 festival officials and participants acknowledged small changes over the years but insisted that the festival and its diverse meanings and functions were tetap sama (still the same). I soon realized that the notion of perpetuity—that everything within the festival must be validated or rationalized by historic practice—is the lynchpin of the event. Admitting to truly new developments, without historic precedence, would make those elements inauthentic; instead, apparent new developments are identified as perbaikan (improvements, here implying improvements on already existing models).

In the 1980s I took a structuralist approach to attempt to make sense of the festival’s myriad activities, but in 2001 this proved inadequate to explain new developments. This volume thus combines an interpretive structuralism with new ethnography to contextualize and explicate meanings of performing arts and rites and to trace sociocultural changes and their resulting impact upon the arts. The festival, like other major events worldwide, is a barometer of change for the participants and their society and a malleable node of identity construction and negotiation. Such cultural texts are never fixed; they must be reinvented. Each festival is a new take on past practice, and the many histories, voices, and experiences that bring such life to the event can never be fully contained; these move and change in often unpredictable ways.
ISSUES AND CHANGES

My earlier work on Lingsar tended to focus on the importance of music in interaction with context to generate meaning and on “structural homologies” linking music and cosmological forms. While these both have a place in the current study (see the musical analyses in Chapter Five), they are restricted to specific performative and religious dimensions and are not used to explain change.

A turning point in the modern realization of the festival was the death in 1993 of the Sasak priest Sanusi. The position was assumed by his brother, Asmin, who was neither well versed in the rites nor felt obligated to some traditions; thus began a series of changes. Their nephew Suparman Taufiq, a well-respected authority, stated that Asmin had never even attended the festival before he became priest and did not have the background to understand the various rites and crucial role of music. I believe that the changes initiated after 1993—new interpretations and the additions and omissions of specific music—led to increasingly more changes in subsequent years.

I met with Sanusi tens of times. He taught me a lot about the festival, particularly what it meant to the Sasak and to Lombok. He also spoke at length about the importance of the performing arts. He knew the names of all the rites and stages of the festival and could expound upon these for guests. His friendly, outgoing manner and total grasp of the event was an asset to all participants at Lingsar. He worked well with the Balinese and with the government, and had in fact worked in government offices before assuming the position of priest in the 1960s. In contrast, his younger brother Asmin (Min) received little formal education and had no history with the festival until 1993. Suparman (Parman) told me that Min is “blind” (buta) toward the inner workings of the festival, and that he has “difficulty interacting with others” (sulit berinteraksi) and thus cannot explain what he does know. While most Sasak (and Balinese) respect Min, they realize that his knowledge is limited and that he is serving a role rather than leading the festival. This issue arises in several chapters because many changes originate with the transition from Sanusi to Min.

Though the Balinese position has remained more consistent, a number of new developments have emerged over the past ten years, including the loss of an important gamelan, the addition of a new sacred temple dance, and a reconfiguration in the authority of the temple complex. New priorities are in place that did not exist in the 1980s. Both Balinese and Sasak are negotiating pressures from the government, Islamic leaders, and Hindu organizations and making adjustments where necessary (see Chapters Three and Seven). Interpretations of the festival have consequently become more fluid, less coherent, and more prone to change.

STUDY OBJECTIVES AND REFLEXIVITY

This study aims to demonstrate the interrelationships of music and festival at Lingsar, explore how symbolic practices (performing arts, rites) shape socially
active history, discuss issues of change and modernization in the festival, advance notions of individual agency, define Balinese and Sasak and their cultures in Lombok, and to present fairly the case for each group. The festival’s value is today multifaceted, its meanings are diffuse, and it represents ethnic groups and social classes equally. Though I have been careful not to privilege any individual, ritual position, class, or ethnic group, the more well-known Balinese cultural model is sometimes presented first in a section in order to contrast with the lesser-known Sasak examples. Points of contrast are also made between Balinese culture in Bali and in Lombok to illuminate the unique nature of the latter in relation to Lingsar.

While I’ve devoted many years of research and thought to the festival, this is rarely a reflexive study; my experience is added only when necessary to illustrate change or contrast. One of my primary goals—a responsibility in fact—is to place the Lingsar event in the world of festivals. Thus several chapters describe the festival’s properties (for example, their arts or rites) and processes. Much of the time I cite what Rice (1994:11) calls “generalized authors,” in this case “the Balinese” and “the Sasak.” These authors are often held to feel particular things, to bear certain attitudes, and to hold specific beliefs. While these authors consist of diverse voices and are not monolithic, the information ascribed to them has been established through extensive interviews with leaders and participants of each camp. I feel that it is necessary to discover and frame positions of similarity and contrast for respective Balinese and Sasak participants. However, participants within each camp often disagree, and divergent opinions are occasionally featured to demonstrate internal conflict.

I frequently use the word “tradition,” also critiqued by Rice (ibid., 12–13), to describe those forms of music and behavior that represent the past and are in general highly valued. “Tradition” legitimizes the present for most participants and is a construct that defines a temporal continuum of moral order. Its antonym, “contemporary,” refers to the current period, which, though modern, independent, and more “Islamic,” is stripped of the values associated with ancestors and the past. For most people in Lombok today, the contemporary is preferable; however, for most participants at Lingsar, “contemporary” is seen as shallow, without spiritual basis, and lacking authenticity.

Throughout the text, I use the word “teacher” rather than “informant.” I use it to refer to a large number of Balinese and Sasak, a few of whom are the late Mangku Sanusi, Mangku Asmin, the late Mangku Kadek Saka, I Wayan Kerped, Anak Agung Gedé Biarsah, Suparman Taufiq, Saparia, the late I Wayan Kartawirya, Mangku Negara, Lalu Gedé Suparman, Lalu Wiramaja, and the late Ida Padanda Ketut Rai. This book has grown out of discussions and interviews with these and many more individuals, from pertinent literature, and from my own observations over the years. I hope that I have given them all sufficient voice.

There was often confusion as to my role in the festival; I believe it was difficult for Sasak and Balinese to determine my identity. Participants, musicians, and ritual officials were used to seeing me at Lingsar, however, and I have become a very small part of the festival lore. My research sponsorship often came from the
regional Education and Culture Department. A few department officials had also researched the festival, and in the late 1980s they occasionally accompanied me to the site. These officials, to whom I am indebted, felt they were performing official business and therefore held as much authority as festival officiates, an attitude quite counter to my research approach. I was often viewed as an official or alternately as a foreign scholar and granted appropriate respect and distance. However, I usually wore pakaian adat (ceremonial clothing), which distinguished me from government officials, and many participants eventually grew comfortable discussing intimate aspects of their knowledge and experience. The Balinese and Sasak camps were consistently accommodating to me, and, perhaps wanting to court a more favorable opinion, invited me to eat in their respective compounds several times each day of the festival. Though my stomach was often quite full, the frequent experience of feasting together helped develop a closeness that I hope is reflected in this work.

One problem I constantly confronted was that the festival is a temporary event. The ten thousand or more participants at any festival scatter after five or fewer days, leaving very little time for meeting even a handful of them or the scores of musicians, let alone taking it all in and reflecting on it. While I was accessible to everyone and open to all viewpoints, I was also extremely busy documenting the event (by audiotape, minidisk, videotape, still photos, observation, occasional participation, fieldnotes) and interviewing teachers (and eating whenever invited). Most activities, often held simultaneously in different spaces, happen only once, making thorough coverage a very challenging proposition. 3

In most years I held extensive conversations with participants and officials before and following the festival, but these discussions were, in a way, decontextualized; teachers’ words were so much richer while the event was happening, when we were all witnessing and experiencing the festival together. In fact, I discovered that descriptions teachers gave about a festival beforehand often contradicted with what they said afterward, and what they said on both occasions frequently disagreed with my experiences at the same event. We all seemed to have selective memories, though perhaps this is not surprising. So much happens at each festival that our experiences reflect both our own subjective worlds and our positions in the ritual frame.

DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

Since 1983 I have changed, the field of ethnomusicology has changed, and many aspects of the festival have changed; sadly, many people—festival teachers such as Sanusi, Mangku Saka, I Wayan Kartawirya, and Ida Padanda Ketut Rai—have died. Though some of these people still influence the festival (and my thoughts about it), the event has taken new directions.

In 1983 I was a Master of Arts in Ethnomusicology student from the University of Hawai‘i conducting research on the music culture of the Balinese minority. In the late 1980s I was a doctoral student from UCLA looking specifically at the
festival. As a professor I returned to the temple in the 1990s and again researched the festival in 2001. Some ideas that seemed intriguing in the 1980s did not interest me later, which shows either an evolution in my thinking or a change in my priorities. Ethnomusicology, of course, has shifted dramatically over those decades as well, moving from a positivist and objectivist perspective—where the researcher unquestioningly takes copious notes, extensively documents music for later analysis in the lab, maps data for geocultural regions, and in general aspires to act like a scientist in the field—to the researcher’s becoming a more reflexive and interacting player—where s/he admittedly affects the environment, becomes part of the proceedings, scrutinizes biases, and prioritizes local voices. Changes in the discipline and in the researcher are natural developments that affect field method and interpretation.

In the 1980s I was strongly attracted to the notion of structural homologies between music and other ritual or belief systems operating at Lingsar or in cultures generally. Sugarman (1997:24) explains that the premise of this type of analysis is that “a community makes the music it does because something in that music’s structure or style is logically consistent with central patterns of thinking and of behaving within the culture.” The concept that gamelan music was homologous with cosmological structure reached its fruition during the 1980s after provocative works by Becker (1979, 1981), Becker and Becker (1981), DeVale (1977), and others. Becker and Becker developed the idea to suggest that “iconic” constructs in music reflected the “natural order” of existence. My attraction to these ideas stemmed from my interest in religion; the theories supported my bias toward music in ritual contexts as necessarily expressing religious or spiritual sentiments. It “made sense” that underlying structures of music and religious cosmology would be shared and that gamelan music could represent cosmological order. I actively looked for such connections in my work at Lingsar and privileged that information in early reports and in my dissertation (1991a).

I now feel that this argument limits a music’s impact. While homologies are often confirmed by participants, priests, and musicians at Lingsar, simply stating that music structure is homologous with religious cosmology says little about a music’s relationship to its immediate environment. Stokes (1994:4–5), in a similar critique, suggests that music does not simply reflect underlying cultural patterns and social structures as a static symbolic order but rather creates a unique sociocultural context for things to “happen.” I have become more interested in how music shapes social behavior and experience and allows for a variety of behaviors to flourish.

Parallel to the changing face of the discipline, the researcher, and the festival over the last two decades were changes in the regional and national governments (from autocratic to chaotic and democratic). During these same years (1980s–1990s) the tourist industries in both Lombok and Bali experienced tremendous growth. Though it did not directly impact the festival, the 1997 recession and currency devaluation halted tourism expansion and government projects, and destabilized the government of dictatoral President Soeharto, who had been in
power since 1966, inspiring massive protests that resulted in his resignation in 1998. This ushered in the hopeful era of reformasi (reformation), of democracy, of a freer press, and of freedom for splinter groups that had previously been restrained, including Islamic parties and organizations. These splinter groups began to burgeon and soon affected sociopolitical and cultural situations throughout the country.

As a result of newfound freedom for religious and political organizations, perceived police corruption, a declining economy and resources, and political infighting (and perhaps stimulated by disgruntled former powerbrokers), sectarian violence emerged in several areas and spilled over onto other islands. In January 2000 violence erupted in Lombok against Christian churches and businesses (mostly owned by Chinese-Indonesians, a frequent target of violence in Indonesia), apparently in reaction to ongoing Christian-Muslim violence in the Maluku islands. The young protagonists were affiliated with Islamic brotherhoods organized to control crime and deal with lawbreakers; these had formed because locals felt the police had become untrustworthy. Nearly every church and targeted business was destroyed; interestingly, the only churches saved were those located in Balinese communities that local Hindu Balinese decided to defend. Apart from one incident, the Balinese were not assaulted or threatened; nevertheless they armed themselves with knives, daggers, and clubs and kept watch over their communities throughout 2000. Many Sasak citizens were shocked at the violence and wanted to help or protect the victims, but they feared the gangs. A Sasak teacher and friend, Lalu Wiramaja, said as he looked absently toward the ground, “I didn’t know that these things could happen here, but as I drove around the city (Mataram, the regional capital) I saw that it was.”

This violence shattered the tourist industry, and many hotels, shops, and restaurants soon went out of business. Combined with the recession, this was a crippling blow to most everyone on the island. Many Sasak, including those responsible for the violence, became ashamed of such violent actions and pledged that it would never happen again. Though many Christians have returned and a freer political environment prevails, there remains an air of tension and fear.

According to Balinese and Sasak teachers, most of this tension has been absent at the festival; this is likely because participants were never involved with, nor sympathized with, reformist Islamic groups. One recent change, however, is the development of local security forces, lang lang (or pecalang) to watch over the proceedings. Several other minor changes are clear, including the manner in which the festival is locally publicized and reported, the policies and relationships with various government offices, the more visible authority of Muslim and Hindu reformist organizations, and the increasing attempts by outside forces to control and define the event. More changes are likely. Since 2001, regional autonomy has been granted, and Sasak have now largely replaced Javanese in district and provincial government posts. Most of these new officials are haji (local spelling for men who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca) or Islamic leaders, and they have some authority over cultural events like the festival.
The bombings in Bali on October 12, 2002, that killed 202 people directly impacted tourism and spotlighted the growth of radical Islam and political disorder in Indonesia. Hotel occupancy rates in Bali and Lombok dropped from 70–90 percent to 10 percent; the numbers rose slightly in early 2003 but then the U.S.-Iraq war in March 2003, followed by fear of the SARS virus, caused another steep decline. Though tourist numbers have since risen, the local economy has not recovered, and continuing travel advisories from some major Western countries restrict a rebound. The devastating tsunami that struck Sumatra on December 26, 2004, may also stall the recovery of tourism.

When discussing Islam, one point to make clear is that Islamic organizations in Lombok, while “fundamentalist,” have no relationships with national, Southeast Asian, or international militant groups. The major organizations have developed locally to promote the further Islamification of the province and to help unify and govern religious practice. Nevertheless, many formal and informal groups thrive and impact local culture. In the aftermath of the bombings and the local, national, and international tension caused by the U.S.-led war with Iraq, sources indicate that many Sasak are undergoing a self-reflection that will likely influence local politics.

The festival, however, does not depend on tourism, is not impacted directly by world events, and has an oblique, though growing, relationship with reformist Islam and modernism; it has existed in some form for over three hundred years and has adapted to great turmoil before. It seems likely that it will again accommodate any developments and continue prospering. The festival may, in fact, operate as a stabilizing mechanism in mediating local and external conflicts and rebalancing the worlds of Lombok.