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Men Coblong
Voicing the everyday agency of Oka Rusmini

PAMELA ALLEN

ABSTRACT
Starting out as a column in the Bali Post, Oka Rusmini’s alter ego Men Coblong offers, among other things, a feminist perspective on mothers and women and the social relations and cultural practices that confine them. Men Coblong fearlessly voices her view on religious sensitivities, culture, politics and, especially, everyday life. In Men Coblong, the self-titled collection of her columns, the (re)claiming of power operates on two levels. First, we have the journalist Oka Rusmini using words as power to challenge the injustices and absurdities she witnesses in contemporary Indonesia. Second, Oka’s alter ego Men Coblong engages in acts of everyday agency, using a range of strategies, to assert her power as a woman. This analysis of Men Coblong is informed by notions of power, resistance, and agency as conceived by James Scott, Anthony Giddens, and Laura Ahearn. The power that Oka Rusmini is (re)claiming through Men Coblong is the right to confront, protest, and resist through words. Men Coblong reclaims power not through political activism but through enacting everyday agency.

KEYWORDS
Power, resistance, everyday agency, women, words.

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INTRODUCTION

Through her novels, short stories, and poetry, Oka Rusmini, Balinese journalist and recipient of the 2012 Southeast Asian Writers Award, documents the oppression of women, particularly in the Balinese context. A common theme of Oka’s writing is violence against women and the oppression they face due to Balinese adat and the caste system. Her best-known work, for example, is the 2001 novel Tarian Bumi, the story of a woman who is ostracised from her family after marrying someone from a lower caste.

In a wide-ranging interview with The Jakarta Post (Sebastian Partogi 2017), Oka gives a rare insight into her interest in the intersections between feminism and culture, and attributes her passion for writing to having to give up dancing as a child due to polio and living a solitary life with her grandparents after the breakdown of her parents’ marriage. The emptiness, she says, was “filled with books and a typewriter”. This was when she started to find her voice through writing. This led to her eventual appointment as a humanities reporter for The Bali Post, a job that entailed “interview(ing) a lot of extraordinary women implicated in cases involving the adat, farmers, Balinese dancers whose names were not acknowledged, did not get serious attention from the government despite saving local culture and dance”.

It is Oka’s view that nowadays-Balinese women’s bargaining power when it comes to adat is relatively stronger thanks to better education. She believes that women are gradually becoming more courageous in standing up to injustice. However, the battle is far from over. For example, she laments the fact that women’s magazines still confine women to domestic roles and entice them with consumerism. “It is sad that literary writers never win awards to commemorate Kartini Day,” she comments, adding, “Those who win such awards are typically fashion designers and chefs. Kartini dealt with ideas.”

POWER AND AGENCY

Among feminist scholars, there is a commonly held view that women’s empowerment involves, among other things, the development of consciousness or “the power within” as well as direct exercise of power (Naila Kabeer 1994; Jo Rowlands 1995), and that it is multidimensional, occurring at multiple levels, including the individual (Srilatha Batliwala 2007).

The (re)claiming of power operates on two levels in Oka’s most recent work, Men Coblong. First, we have the journalist Oka Rusmini using words as power to challenge the injustices and absurdities she witnesses in contemporary Indonesia. Second, Oka’s alter ego, Men Coblong, engages in acts of everyday agency, using a range of strategies, to assert her power as a woman. We are reminded of Kristy Hess and Robert Gutsche’s analysis of “journalism’s power to shape social order both in moments of political and apolitical crisis and in negotiating the banality of the everyday” (2017: 3).

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1 Oka is unambiguous in her statement that “In Men Coblong, Men Coblong is Oka Rusmini”. Di dalam Men Coblong – Men Coblong adalah Oka Rusmini. (Personal communication).
Furthermore, Men Coblong illuminates Hess and Gutsche’s (2017: 6) claim that “cultural arbitration is a resource of power and, in this analysis, serves in direct opposition to the ‘objective’ bystander role widely adopted in journalism practice.” Men Coblong is decidedly not the objective bystander.

This analysis of Men Coblong is informed by notions of power, resistance, and agency as conceived by James Scott, Anthony Giddens, and Laura Ahearn. While Scott has been criticised for his tendency to romanticise resistance (Lila Abu-Lughod 1990: 42), for the “randomness” of what he deems to be resistance, and for neglecting motivation and intention, his seminal 1985 work, Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance, remains an important guide to understanding tactics and behaviour that are not as dramatic and as visible as rebellion, riots, demonstrations, revolutions, civil war, or other such organized, collective or confrontational articulations of resistance. Scott’s notion of the everyday is pertinent to the resistance enacted by Oka Rusmini’s alter ego, Men Coblong, whose everyday routine and existence is the springboard for her challenges to the absurdities and injustices she witnesses in Indonesia. Scott (1990: 4) also coined the term “hidden transcripts” to describe the “discourse that takes place ‘offstage’ beyond direct observation by powerholders”.

Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory recognizes the inter-relationship between social structure and strategies of human actors. In what might be seen as a correction to Scott’s alleged neglect of intention, in Giddens’s (1984: 7) view, human actors are “knowledgeable agents” whose actions and strategies derive from their “practical consciousness” and “discursive consciousness of the world”. Giddens posits the interdependence of action and structure. Giddens’s theory is applicable to my analysis because Men Coblong’s agency occurs within, and cannot be separated from, social relations and cultural practice.

For a useful working definition of agency, I turn to Laura Ahearn (2001: 112), who defines it as “the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act”. Lyn Parker (2005b: 218) usefully refines this with her idea of “everyday agency”, a notion that avoids “the triumphalist bias which is not uncommon in feminist and other subaltern work”.

Taken together, these three theories form a useful framework for analysing the agency of Oka Rusmini’s alias Men Coblong. As Lyn Parker (2005a: 16) asserts, “[...] agency is mainly an issue of power; it necessarily addresses relations of social inequality; and it comes into play in the operation of power differentials between genders and between other social groups.”

The power that Oka Rusmini is (re)claiming through Men Coblong is the right to confront, protest, and resist through words. Men Coblong reclaims power not through political activism but through enacting everyday agency.
**Men Coblong**

Starting out as a column in the *Bali Post*, Oka Rusmini’s alter ego Men Coblong offers, among other things, a feminist perspective on mothers and women and the social relations and cultural practices that confine them. Men Coblong, a middle-aged woman with a son, voices her responses to religious sensitivities, culture, politics, and everyday life.

Many of the essays in *Men Coblong* form a dialogue between the narrator Men Coblong and either her neighbour, her friend, or her son. In an understated manner and a frequently laconic tone, we are reminded of the roles Men Coblong fulfils and the expectations demanded of those roles. As well as being a woman, a mother, and a journalist, she describes herself as a wife and – notwithstanding her relatively youthful age of fifty years - a *manula*, a senior citizen. This then is the structure within which Men Coblong enacts her resistance. The hegemonic and patriarchal systems and processes that she exposes and resists include government policies and procedures, the education system, and social media.

The opening paragraph of the essay *Epolet* (Epaulet) sums up the general bewilderment Men Coblong feels at the state of affairs in Indonesia:

> Men Coblong becomes an abnormal woman whenever she hears the news or reads the newspaper. It feels as if her heart stops beating. This country seems like a nation with a constant supply of new stories. Stories that make no sense to her. Could it be because she’s getting older? Because she measures everything against her own ideals? As a woman, a wife, and a senior citizen? 

But she is puzzled by the responses of those around her to her bewilderment:

> “You’re always reading the news, watching the news, it’s making your life uncomfortable.” Her friend took a sip of water and got Men Coblong to sit down. Whispering, in a tone of surprise, she asked Men Coblong whether she was planning to run for legislative office? Men Coblong fell silent. So was it the case that the only people who should be thinking about and expressing concern for this country were those who were interested in becoming legislative candidates? Could an ordinary person like herself not think about her country? About her land? 

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2 The name of the narrator, Men Coblong, is rich in Balinese symbolism. “Men” is an abbreviation of *meme*, meaning ‘mother’. A *coblong* is a small clay bowl filled with water, placed in the shrines at Balinese temples along with *carat* (small clay jugs). Oka reports that she identifies the *carat* with the penis and the *coblong* with the vagina. (Personal communication).


The essays in this collection are underpinned by Men Coblong’s perpetual question: “What is happening to the people of this country?”⁵ (Rusmini 2019: 139). “How difficult it really is to be a citizen of this country”, Men Coblong laments in the essay *Hamba* (Slave)⁶ (Rusmini 2019: 158). The reasons for this lament are frequently and unambiguously stated throughout the essays. In *Hina* (Insult), for example, she bemoans the culture of kneejerk response to criticism that she sees as a characteristic of governance in contemporary Indonesia. Citing a law (UU MD3) that prevents individuals, groups or legal entities from undermining the honour of the Indonesian Parliament and Members of Parliament, she can only ask: “Does that mean that constructive criticism that has led to progress in this nation is actually considered an insult? If that is the case, when will this country progress, if criticisms raised by the people as the holders of the highest sovereignty are silenced and considered insulting?”⁷ (Rusmini 2019: 126).

What is clearly painful for Men Coblong is that she loves her country, which makes the absurdities and inconsistencies she witnesses on a daily basis even harder to bear. On occasion, however, Men Coblong’s spirits are lifted when she meets a young person who cares about the history and future of Indonesia. For example, she describes with pride the outrage expressed on social media by a teenager at the theft of four priceless artefacts from the National Museum in Jakarta. Her faith in what she calls the now generation is somewhat restored: “a great nation is a nation that respects its history”⁸ (Rusmini 2019: 85).

**Men Coblong’s strategies of resistance**

A key strategy of these essays is Men Coblong’s situating herself – as woman, wife, mother, and/or journalist – vis-a-vis the issue she is addressing. In her book, *Notes from a feminist killjoy: essays on everyday life*, Erin Wunker (2016) describes situating oneself as being “the deliberate practice of locating your own identity and experiences as coming from somewhere and being mediated by certain things such as your race, gender, and class”. Put simply, expressing your identity and experiences establishes for your audience your “way of being” in the world (Wunker 2016: 30). While it is true, as Wunker asserts, that this serves to “(open) yourself to the truth that you don’t have access to every experience”, in my view “owning” one’s circumstances in this way also strengthens one’s voice: This is who I am and this is how I negotiate the obstacles and impediments that those circumstances present.

Men Coblong is proud of the way in which she successfully fulfils the various and diverse roles demanded of her as a Balinese woman. For her, being active in the public domain has been transformative. She observes that

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⁵ “Apakah yang sedang melanda manusia-manusia di negeri ini?”
⁶ “Alangkah sulitnya sesungguhnya jadi rakyat di negeri ini.”
⁷ “Berarti kritik membangun yang membuat bangsa ini maju justru dianggap penghinaan? Lalu, kapan majunya negara ini, kalau kritik yang diajukan rakyat sebagai pemegang kedaulatan tertinggi dibungkam dan dianggap menghina?”
⁸ *Bangsa yang besar adalah bangsa yang menghargai sejarahnya.*
it’s common to encounter women playing active roles in both the public and the domestic spheres. This duality of roles for women has ultimately created a shift in family values. Men Coblong relishes that duality. She’s proud to be a wife. She’s proud to be a mother. She’s proud to be a writer and journalist. For her, this role switching has made her a complete woman. Even though she is burdened by trivial domestic matters, she still has a healthy amount of me time to cater for her physical and spiritual needs. Moreover, her work outside the domestic sphere enables her to transform into a “single” woman who can do anything.⁹ (Rusmini 2019: 86).

Men Coblong repeatedly reminds us, however, of societal expectations placed on a woman who plays a role in the public domain. In a wry tone of resignation, she reports that “Getting up at 4.30 to a cup of coffee and a plate of watermelon is a mandatory breakfast routine for Men Coblong. When you’re approaching your forties, you must maintain your stamina as a woman. So that you stay fresh, slim, and of course fashionable” (Rusmini 2019: 5).

In their paper on contentious women’s empowerment, Sohela Nazneen, Naomi Hossain, and Deepta Chopra (2019: 458) compile a long list of obstacles that women still face when they seek to reclaim power. These include “the need to negotiate the demands of mobility and public presence with those of family, society, and powerful societal norms about women’s bodies.” Notwithstanding the ironic tone of her comment, Men Coblong’s repeated observation about the need to stay fresh, slim, and fashionable illustrates the pervasiveness and stickiness of gender norms pertaining to women in the public domain.

While Men Coblong writes with obvious love and respect for the two men in her life – her husband and her son – she is also frank about their different worldviews, which for her is clearly gendered: “Women do always see things differently. And men usually find them difficult to understand. Men Coblong, too, feels that the two men in her house - one of them her child and the other her husband – are often of the view that her various ideas don’t make sense” (Rusmini 2019: 132). It is clear that, despite her many roles and talents, Men Coblong has found it difficult to break down the resilient nature of gendered roles within the family. This is a universal phenomenon; expectations of her as a wife and mother will ring true for women everywhere. “What if one day Men Coblong didn’t cook? Had coffee and cake in a café? Then went to

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10 Bangun pagi pukul 4:30 dengan secangkir kopi dan sepiring semangka adalah sarapan wajib Men Coblong. Menjelang 40 tahun, stamina sebagai perempuan harus dijaga. Agar tetap segar, tubuh langsing, dan tentu saja tetap fashionable.

see ‘Man of Steel’ at the cinema and had dinner at her favourite restaurant?’
(Rusmini 2019: 44).12 Men Coblong follows through: she does go to the movie, and it gets her thinking again about familial roles. In modern Indonesia, she reflects: “The father is always synonymous with the complex world of work, and he cannot be disturbed, while the mother runs around performing multiple roles in order to keep the family intact and running smoothly in accordance with prevailing social norms” (Rusmini 2019: 44-5).13 Gender norms are sticky indeed.

Insofar as the Socratic Method14 is the search for an answer or solution through intelligent questioning, Men Coblong uses this as a way of seeking answers to the conundrums, contradictions, and injustices she witnesses on a daily basis. Her interlocutor is variously her son, her neighbour, or her friend.

Upon reading a newspaper article about increases in the price of rice and the possibility that Indonesia may have to import rice, with a sense of incredulity Men Coblong asks her son:

“How can that possibly be? Isn’t this an agrarian country? We have the expression gemah ripah loh jinawi toto tentrem kerto raharjo to describe the state of the motherland of Indonesia. Gemah ripah loh jinawi means abundant natural wealth, while toto tentrem karto raharjo is a state of peace. However, the above expression no longer applies to our beloved country.”15

Strumming his guitar, her son replies with a quote from social media: “As the Koes Plus song ‘Pond of milk’ goes, people say our land is the land of heaven. Hooks and nets are enough to feed you, fish and shrimp land in your lap. But that situation is 180 degrees different from the life of Indonesian people today.”16 Men Coblong follows this up with another question: “So what should people do if they can’t buy rice? If the cost of all life’s necessities goes up? What do they eat?”17 After wryly observing, “No wonder none of my friends aspire to be farmers.”18 Men Coblong’s son poses the burning question, to which it

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12 Bagaimana kalau satu hari Men Coblong tidak memasak? Ngopi-ngopi di kafe sambil menikmati cake. Terus nonton film “Man of Steel” dan makan malam di restoran favorit?
13 Ayah selalu identik dengan dunia kerja yang rumit dan tidak bisa diganggu. Sementara ibu berperan pontang-panting. Memainkan beragam peran untuk menjaga agar sebuah keluarga tetap utuh dan berjalan normal sesuai pakem-pakem sosial yang berlaku.
14 The Socratic Method can be defined as “a dialogue between teacher and students, instigated by the continual probing questions of the teacher, in a concerted effort to explore the underlying beliefs that shape the students views and opinions”. [Retrieved from: https://tlt.colostate.edu/the-socratic-method/]
16 Kata lagu, orang bilang tanah kita tanah surga, seperti yang tersirat dalam lagu band Koes Ploes yang berjudul “Kolam Susu”. Kail dan jala cukup menghidupimu, ikan dan udang datang menghampiri dirimu. Namun keadaan tersebut berbeda 180 derajat dengan kehidupan masyarakat Indonesia sekarang.
17 “Terus orang-orang yang tidak bisa beli beras harus bagaimana? Kalau semua keperluan hidup naik? Mereka mau makan apa?”
18 “Pantas aku sampai hari ini belum mendengar teman-temanku bercita-cita jadi petani.”
appears there is no answer: “If it rains the rice fields are flooded, in the dry season the fields are dry. Haven’t the Indonesian people found a solution to that problem, Mi? […] Haven’t sophisticated technologies been found to make agriculture in Indonesia more advanced?” (Rusmini 2019: 107-110).

Men Coblong’s narrative, peppered as it is with rhetorical questions, often conveys a sense of ironic wonderment. And women themselves are sometimes the target of her incredulity. Reflecting on the corruption case involving businessman Ahmad Fathanah, who allegedly laundered money by distributing it to 45 women, Men Coblong is incredulous: “Just imagine, a man named Ahmad Fathanah, able to distribute money to 45 women. What Men Coblong can’t understand is why the women were willing to accept so much money? From a man they didn’t know. A married man into the bargain” (Rusmini 2019: 29). While there is a sense here, and in other essays, of women sometimes being their own worst enemies, one can also read this as an example of what Nazneen, Hossain, and Chopra (2019) call “the resilient nature of gendered norms that serve patriarchy”. The resilience of those norms is such that women themselves sometimes fail to see them. When her friend accuses Men Coblong of being old-fashioned in her views – what woman wouldn’t want to be given millions of rupiah? – Men Coblong asks herself what fighting for women’s rights is all about.

“Who’s going to develop the consciousness of women, if not women themselves?” she asks (Rusmini 2019: 29). As she often does, she speculates as to what Kartini would think of this situation:

In her noble literary style, R.A. Kartini invariably wrote intelligent letters. They were timeless letters, posing sublime questions, questioning the “equality” of women’s social status in religion and society. It’s sad to imagine the situation if R.A. Kartini were still alive today. What would she have to say about women who are willing to enter an unregistered marriage to another woman’s husband? Their reasoning doesn’t make sense. Do such women want to be married just to be more financially secure? Socially secure? Secure in their religion?

In enacting everyday agency, words are perhaps Men Coblong’s most powerful weapon. By this I mean not just the use of discourse and journalistic strategies, but her choice and repeated use of particularly forceful words.
Men Coblong is fierce in her attacks on anything she deems to be *lemot* (*lemah otak* – ‘dumb, stupid’). All government policies, she declares, seem *lemot*, as is everything on the news, as is the President (Rusmini 2019: 40). The rules and regulations around finding a school for one’s children are *lemot* (Rusmini 2019: 45). And inevitably it is women who suffer on account of everything being *lemot*. Women are the ones who have to figure out how to feed their families when the price of everyday necessities keeps going up. Women are the ones who lie awake at night worrying about their children’s schooling. At one point, Men Coblong holds out faint hope that social media might be the way to make governments accountable for being *lemot*. After all, social media is the forum where people feel free to express their views and criticisms of things that are *lemot*. But then she remembers that social media also provided space for 15 year old girls to sell themselves.

One of Men Coblong’s favourite expressions is “doesn’t make sense (*tidak masuk akal*)”. Indonesia’s education system, for example, does not make sense. This is a conundrum usually viewed through the lens of her own experience in finding schools and seeking the best education for her son. She and her friend are confounded by what they see as entrenched corruption and inequity in the Indonesian education system. Men Coblong ponders:

Does it make sense that a child with mediocre abilities all of a sudden becomes so intelligent? Men Coblong knows why, she gets it. This is the era in which everything is instant. Everything is fast, on a constant roll. Like a ball that has no master, everything is in free fall. That’s our education system. So, how do we go about measuring a child’s intelligence?23 (Rusmini 2019: 55).

Furthermore, having grown up in a family where education was highly valued and stressed as a means to become a better person, Men Coblong is confused at the current state of affairs whereby “it’s actually mostly highly educated people with high academic scores and degrees from overseas who are causing chaos in this country” (Rusmini 2019: 137).

Aspects of governance in Indonesia are, to use another of Men Coblong’s favourite words “*gila* (crazy)”. When contemplating the budget allocated to the implementation of the 2013 curriculum, she remarks, “It’s fantastic. Crazy. So much money to build a smart generation of Indonesians? How do we know that the money has safely reached its designated destination?”25 (Rusmini 2019: 2).

Men Coblong demonstrates fearlessness in confronting topics that, even in democratic Indonesia, remain contentious. Corruption, for example, is a

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24 Namun, belakangan ini, di negeri kita justru banyak orang-orang berpendidikan tinggi dengan nilai akademik menjulang dan tamatan sekolah di luar negeri, justru sering buat kisruh.

frequent target. Corruptors, laments Men Coblong, “carry on like famous artists” (Rusmini 2019: 78). After expressing her incredulity at the behaviour of Susno Djuadi, former head of the Indonesian National Police Criminal Investigation Agency, and Djoko Susilo, former Head of the Indonesian Police Traffic Corps, Men Coblong’s friend posed a question that seemed fanciful in light of the corruption and money involved: “I wonder if they could ever calculate the wealth of corrupt public officials and then return that wealth to the public? Just think about it, corrupt wealth returned to the people. How much money would that be? Surely more than they’re trying to save in this tug of war over the cost of fuel” (Rusmini 2019: 19).

In an everyday act of resistance, Men Coblong has challenged entrenched corruption by refusing to sign a receipt for an honorarium that does not match the amount she actually received. As a result, she has often been dropped as a speaker or moderator in events involving government agencies. Was it a petty act on her behalf, she asks. “It appears petty. However, if these little things are left unchecked, won’t they just continue to grow? It will become more and more ruthless, like the corrupt behaviour of the populists in this country” (Rusmini 2019: 95).

Men Coblong is intrigued by a proposal by a Balinese politician to include anti-corruption lessons in the moral education (Budi Pekerti) curriculum. The problem, though?

Is the older generation, who will be passing the baton, able to set an example? How can you teach anti-corruption if the education system hasn’t been fixed? Of course, it’s still fresh in Balinese people’s memories, how banknotes magically fly around in the search for places in public schools? A headache for educators. How can the younger generation feel comfortable about learning about anti-corruption when their teachers are giving private lessons? (Rusmini 2019: 104).

Men Coblong also takes aim at the senselessness of terrorism, in a poignant passage in which we are left no doubt that she is speaking as a mother:

How could a family in this country steer their children towards dying by blowing themselves up? By assembling deadly objects in their own home. Life right now makes no sense at all. The house as a place of shelter is turned into

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26 Gaya para koruptor itu bak artis-artis terkenal.
28 Kecil kelihatannya. Namun, kalau hal-hal kecil ini diibarkan, bukannya akan terus membesar? Makin ganas seperti korupsi-korupsi yang dilakukan orang-orang populis di negeri ini.
Men Coblong asks, “Is it really true that religious life in Indonesia is peaceful? Do people practice their religion in a civil way? Do they respect differences? And beliefs? And the way others approach God?” (Rusmini 2019: 34). “Religion”, she declares, “has suddenly become a new directive that is so exclusive, and sensitive. It constrains the life of people in Indonesia” (Rusmini 2019: 74). She provides as examples the case of Susan Jasmine Zulkifli, who was rejected as lurah, allegedly because of her religion, and the banning of the Miss World competition in Jakarta. She described as “terrifying” the notion that “the country is arbitrarily ruled under the cloak of ‘religion’” (Rusmini 2019: 85).

In a strategy that emphasises the everyday-ness of her resistance, Men Coblong often juxtaposes her profound and incisive questions and observations against the apparently banal. Often, for example, she will describe the food she is eating at the time she is pondering a significant issue: “Men Coblong was quietly enjoying a slice of boiled banana with a sprinkling of honey. She asked herself, what makes this beloved country so scarred? Everything feels weird and nothing makes sense” (Rusmini 2019: 24).

One day, drinking a cup of hot chocolate (without sugar), Men Coblong has something of an epiphany about religious symbolism. She is thinking about her neighbour, who asked her why she planted so many frangipani trees in her small garden, adding “The frangipani tree is inappropriate for a garden because it’s a reminder of certain religious symbolism.” For her part, Men Coblong can’t stop wondering “since when did trees have religious symbols? Since when are trees religious?” (Rusmini 2019: 125).

In terms of situating Men Coblong’s everyday acts of resistance, it should be noted that, as well as being a woman, wife, mother, and journalist, she is also the product of a privileged social class, giving her the means to carry out those acts of resistance and to have them noticed. Inevitably, Men Coblong’s
view of the world is shaped by her social status as well as her gender, and one might ask the question whether her outrage over the issues that she raises is shared by women from other social classes. Men Coblong’s view of the world is the view of one woman; other women may well view power, and the reclaiming of it, quite differently. One might ask whether Rusmini’s (Men Coblong’s) thoughts are shaped by her social class, in addition to her gender, and whether issues that she addresses are general issues faced by all women or by women coming from the same social background as hers. Why is Men Coblong different from the other women mentioned in the essays? That will add richness and complexity in how women attempt to “reclaim power” in a male-dominated society, like the Balinese or Indonesian.

CONCLUSION
What makes these essays unique is that Indonesia is viewed through the lens of a commentator who is “a woman, a mother, and a press worker”.37 In this paper I have discussed how the multiple roles held by women, exemplified by Men Coblong, equip them to expose, question, and critique the injustice, inconsistencies, and absurdities they encounter in daily life. Men Coblong is bold, fierce, and unafraid to tackle the difficult questions she faces each day as a citizen of Indonesia. She asks questions that are usually left unasked, she unmask absurdisities that are usually overlooked, and she challenges anything that is lemot. And she does these things as the alter ego of Oka Rusmini.

As mentioned above, Oka Rusmini’s view is that Balinese women’s bargaining power when it comes to adat is nowadays relatively stronger thanks to better education. But a cautionary note about resistance and agency is warranted here. In 1998, Patricia Jeffery (p. 222) wrote “While we can celebrate women’s everyday resistance and demonstrate that women are not wholly subdued by their situations, we must be aware of over optimism about the efficacy of such resistance and of conflating women’s resistance with their agency.” More than twenty years later, this caution remains valid.

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