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Crafting Stories Using a VPA Approach

A produced film about an individual's experience is never isomorphic with that experience. A coherent and satisfying ethnographic film, subject to genre-specific expectations and judgments, cannot include the almost infinite complexity of any individual's life or represent full subjectivity; the structure of a film narrative, by necessity, must highlight some and elide much or most of it (MacDougall, 1998). The visual psychological anthropology method is used to iteratively and inductively craft and present stories that say something about an individual's biography and subjectivity *in relation to* themes and concerns in contemporary psychological anthropology. This connection is precisely what makes these ethnographic films per se and is accomplished through the filming, editing, and post-production process.

Chapter 7 discussed the processes of filming in the field. We reflected on the nature of longitudinal PCE interviews and how they impacted the material gathered during film production and, hence, the possibilities for participant representation. This chapter turns to the process of crafting stories that, while occurring during the production phase through line of interview inquiry, shot selection, and other choices made in the field,

occurs most intensively during the editing process. This is a similarly iterative plan of action, where we must settle on narrative themes and topics and develop a narrative structure and visual style to support those.

There are tools at our disposal, to be used or not as suits the tone, themes, or development of a film. While the bulk of most ethnographic films will be comprised of observational and/or interview footage, the creative aspects of visual or multimodal anthropology include a variety of visual strategies to both situate and enrich the ethnographic narrative. Every filmmaker has a host of materials and techniques at the ready. While some craft films with a unitarian style – for example, all direct cinema like Frederick Wiseman (e.g., Wiseman, 1967, 2001) – an intermediary approach is also possible. These additional stylistic devices can support elements of ethnographic storytelling such as providing historical or cultural context, structuring a narrative motif, or scaffolding significant narrative transitions (Lemelson & Tucker, 2017). For the films here, we discuss the incorporation of archival footage, paintings, and other stylistic elements.

Furthermore, given the VPA emphasis on emotion in meaning-making, we must choose the filmic means we will use to achieve emotional connection and understanding between participants and viewers, who may come from different cultures. Here we discuss our use of juxtaposition and montage, music and sound design, and purposeful selection of participants' emotional displays.

Crafting Narratives

Once the editing process begins, the task is to find a narrative focus and shape. In other words, we must continue to develop our ideas regarding what the film will be *about* and how we will impart this to a viewer. This larger decision begets numerous other decisions, including choosing the main theoretical focus of the film (and thus its major storyline), choosing a narrative structure and style to tell this story, and choosing or developing visual or sound elements that support the development of that story. This process builds off of earlier pre-production theorizing, the

emergent qualities of participant storylines and narratives, and how these fit (or do not fit) with the pre-conceived ideas we brought to the field.

VPA Narratives: Theorized but Inductive, Responsive, and Emergent

There is rarely a linear progression from concept to research to narrative plan to shooting to editing and, finally, post-production. Rather, the process is almost always iterative, as new material emerges across the entire production process which either supports or questions initial schemas for understanding a participant's experience, and we develop helpful ways to digest and then adapt the material for film. Given this, all films are, to a certain extent, emergent and it takes time to decide on a central narrative in the post-production process. This is not unusual for ethnographic or documentary filmmakers. David MacDougall describes the pivot that came in the making of *The Doon School Quintet* (MacDougall, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004), which switched from representing the school as a "crossing place" for students with diverse backgrounds, to exploring the institution as a locus of enculturation, which seemed much more relevant to his subjects (Earthsayers.tv, 2014). Oppenheimer describes the ideas for the themes, structures, and devices of *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer et al., 2012) and *The Look of Silence* (Oppenheimer, 2014) as coming only once he was well into filming a project on globalization and plantation workers, after a fieldwork incident led to a striking insight about the performances of proud impunity (Roosa, 2014).

We have found this process of constant change begins as soon as we begin filming with our theorized interests; continues through the editing process as we view footage and keep abreast of developments in our participants' lives; and persists even long after we have "finished" and released the film, since, through screening discussions and writing, we keep reflecting back on both the process and the product. Throughout the entire life of a VPA project, there is always more to be discovered.

In general, though, the first step in our pre-production process is to theorize the project, considering the applicable anthropological domains

and theories. All of the films discussed here emerged from pre-existing fieldwork, so we did have some initial understanding of the contexts and meanings that could potentially shape a film. Then, more specifically, we consider which stories are suitable for a visual treatment. This "etic grid" (Duranti, 1997), or set of interlocked and interrelated assumptions and concerns, we consciously or subconsciously bring to the field, drives the early stages of the filming, but must quickly be adjusted to the field site context and practicalities. This means that some of our theorized concerns may not necessarily be as relevant there as we thought, either with regard to participant subjectivity and local set of community and family concerns or to our shifting understanding of the multiple political, social, and structural forces acting on our field and fieldwork. At the same time, we might encounter a range of new issues, domains, and/or relationships that may or may not support our original suppositions. Some of these draw our attention due to our own orientation and interest, but more often than not these new directions come from participant interviews. As they answer questions or steer the conversation in unexpected directions, we come to better understand what participants think is important and how they might craft a narrative about themselves. It, then, becomes our task to work through this more emically derived material to develop a new synthesized understanding and refocus on a new and, in some cases, entirely different set of concerns.

This general process unfolded differently for each of the three films. While all were scaffolded around fundamental areas of inquiry in cultural and psychological anthropology, for *40 Years* (Lemelson, 2009), these areas held up throughout the production process; for *Bitter Honey* (Lemelson, 2015), they shifted somewhat; and for *Thorn* (Lemelson, 2012b), they were basically overhauled.

Initially, *40 Years* was built around the question of the long-term effects of childhood traumatic exposure on individual development, which has classical roots in culture and personality studies, and influences from contemporary psychological anthropology, but also draws on contemporary trauma theory, developmental psychology, psychoanalysis, and critical medical anthropology. Given that the historic trauma of 1965, described in Chapters 2 and 5, did indeed deeply affect the lives of the cohort we interviewed, we hewed to this basic inquiry throughout; in

this case, the filming process fleshed out and nuanced our initial vision for the film.

There were more marked changes during the making of *Bitter Honey*. As discussed in previous chapters, the project initially aimed to investigate acts of sexual terror that occurred at the end of the New Order during the transition to democracy in 1998–1999. But the research rapidly shifted toward gendered violence in relation to Balinese polygamous marriage. The project then entailed linking this particular kinship form with other aspects of Balinese culture salient to the participants' subjective experiences. Here, the narrative focus further shifted over time from stories of families, with equal weight given to the perspectives of husbands and wives, to largely, but not entirely, the experiences of the wives. The theorized basis in gendered violence homed in on the structural conditions that give rise to forms of male domination; while many cultures around the world share similar enactment of male domination, the film specifically investigated how different aspects of Balinese culture interconnect to create conditions of male impunity in enacting forms of violence, control, and oppression within their own families.

The final shape and thrust of *Thorn* were in no way envisioned at the start of the project, and, thus, merit a bit more detail here. Following models from transcultural psychiatry the film was first theorized as a case study of a man with complex psychiatric symptoms for which he had been stigmatized. This element gradually fell into the background, becoming just one more detail in a family story about marital strife, multiple forms of perceived "deviance" and village social sanction, and structural violence as his daughter, Lisa's, developmental story took prominence.

During the initial interviews with Iman and Tri, we paid little heed to their daughter listening and observing. Indonesian cultural norms of discussion make it common to have various family members present for film sessions, and Lisa was still quite young. After these initial few years in the early 2000s, we temporarily discontinued film work with the family. Imam's character and disclosures didn't seem to make for a compelling story, plus we had settled on six other individuals to be the subjects of *Afflictions,* a series of films on culture and mental illness in Indonesia, of which Imam's story was originally to be a part.

We did maintain contact with the family, however, and returned to interview and film them in 2008, at a particularly tumultuous time for them. In the intervening years, the family relationship had continued to degrade, and Tri was preparing to leave the marriage. In another striking development, Lisa, the former silently observing child, had grown into a young woman and now had much to say. Her emerging subjectivity pushed her to the foreground, as did her compelling situation of being so full of promise but growing up in such challenging conditions. A new focus on Lisa dovetailed with an interest in child development and the impact of growing up with multiple vulnerabilities explored in *40 Years*; thus, we decided to restructure the narrative from a different perspective. In this way, what was initially theorized as a film on one rural Javanese man's mental illness, drawing on theory in psychiatric anthropology and transcultural psychiatry, became a family drama about how stigmatization and structural violence restrict people's scope of action and leave them to make difficult and even traumatic decisions for their lives. There would have been no way for us to predict this at the start since there would have been no way to know how Lisa would develop as a person, nor how her parents' secrets would come to affect their lives over the course of more than a decade.

While the shift in *Bitter Honey* came fairly early in the filming process, the shift in *Thorn* came much later, after much editing had been done. We went even further and made Lisa the narrator of the film, discussed below. This decision required reworking the edit. Before we prioritized Lisa as the narrator, many of the shots we had chosen focused on her parents and did not include her. We retrieved shots with Lisa in them and edited her voiceover, recorded when she was much older, onto some of this older footage. Once she emerged into adolescence in the second half of the film, though, she began telling her own story in "real time" as events unfolded. This gave viewers much more access to her internal world and reactions to all that was happening to her.

Narrative Style and Structure

The above examples show how the initial narrative focus of our films shifted over time as we encountered the realities of our field sites and became more familiar with the concerns of our participants. Once the basic themes and storylines are found, there are further decisions to be made about how to structure and present the narrative. As filming and editing continue, we need to decide what stories to focus on, which ones to exclude and why, and then balance the aesthetic and pedagogical requirements of a compelling ethnographic film in the film's style and structure.

While all ethnographic and documentary films ostensibly have some organizing structure, not all follow a traditional narrative arc, and certainly not all are narrated by a voiceover. We have used a narrator or central narrative device for each of the films discussed here, but each of a different kind: *40 Years* relied primarily on the voices of expert historians and myself, an anthropologist, *Bitter Honey* used a traditional cultural authority in the form of a *wayang* puppet show, and *Thorn* used first-person participant voiceover. The incorporation of visual and sound components, including archival footage, art, animation, music, and sound design, can mirror, amplify, or give further texture to the development and argument of narrative put forth by the narrator and the ethnographic film footage we collected.

Years

Researcher(s) as Narrator

Through direct address by anthropologist/film director, explanatory factual title cards, and historian commentary, the *40 Years* narration is provided by researchers and academic experts. While film participants share their testimony and personal accounts, these historians serve as the "guides" for the viewer, commenting on the political, cultural, and social contexts of pre-1965 events, the mass killings, and their aftermath. Our rationale for the inclusion of the "authoritative" expert voice was

twofold. First, the film aimed to demonstrate the instantiation of major historical events into individual lives and subjectivities, and this required an authoritative account of those events. More importantly, the "expert" accounts anticipated and counteracted the potential viewer reaction that the participant testimonies were suspect, as Indonesians have been so thoroughly indoctrinated with the idea that the survivors are, in fact, the ones to blame.[1]

Critically Repurposing the Archive

This "expert" contestation of the existing historical record on '65, which was incomplete or erased, biased, and state-controlled was visually matched in *40 Years* with the inclusion and critical repurposing of archival movie and newsreel footage.

The archives, in fact, served multiple functions. They provided a visual window into a period of Indonesian history about which many American or international viewers might know little. Secondly, they stood in for observational footage of our participants' accounts of 1965 and subsequent years which, of course, we did not have. But most importantly, we used the archival footage to contest the monolithic state narrative of 1965, which was maintained, in part, through the state's own carefully crafted, selected, and screened film imagery.

At numerous points in the film, we critically repurposed footage that had been either used as state propaganda or collected under state control and manipulated to support its goals. For example, we juxtaposed Degung's story of his mother's imprisonment with archival shots of women prisoners, from an ABC news piece shot during this period. These women serve as a visual surrogate for his mother, but our use of the

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[1] We were lucky to work with three of the most respected and dedicated historians of these events. We faced criticism, though, for including only one Indonesian expert. This was understandable, given that these were Indonesian stories and concerned Indonesian history, but there were relatively few historians in Indonesia publicly grappling with this history during the period in the early 2000s when the film was shot. Father Baskara, a Jesuit priest and historian, was one of the few publicly commenting on this history during this period, and he has bravely faced numerous threats and attempts to intimidate and silence him over the years. More recently other Indonesians scholars have publicized research on the topic, such as Dr. Soe Tjen Marching (Marching, 2017).

shot also reframes them. The foreign journalists filming these prisoners were told the women were Gerwani members who had participated in the sexual torture of the murdered generals. They took this account at its word and framed the women as perpetrators. But, given our current understanding, it is highly likely that these women, even if Gerwani like Degung's mother, were, in fact, themselves victims of torture by state actors. In this repurposing, we talk back to a state-controlled historical archive of images, in a sense, redefining their meaning, just as Degung was reclaiming his mother's story from the one enforced in his family's collective memory.

We didn't call out the footage of the female prisoners as "propaganda." But we did so with other visuals, such as the clip from the New Order film *Pengkhianatan G30S PKI* (Betrayal of the Nation by the Communist Party). We used this film to illustrate the events of that time and how they were framed by the New Order, presenting the regime's propaganda to invite the viewer to see the state narrative about the events of 1965 as such.[2] Indeed, Indonesian viewers have cited this segment in our film as being influential in helping them reorient and reinterpret their own history – even as millions of Indonesians still watch and comment positively on the version of *Pengkhianatan* uploaded to YouTube (Parahita & Yulianto, 2020).

We also used archival music in our soundtrack, specifically different versions of the song "*Genjer genjer*" (Arief, 1942). This East Javanese folk

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[2] This archival footage was difficult to find. Soon after the massacres began, as the violence in Indonesia was progressing, foreign journalists were increasingly removed from the country and/or forbidden from reporting. Furthermore, when we were making the film there was not yet the technology or infrastructure for such source research online. We contacted a number of news outlets that operated in Indonesia in the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties, such as NBC, BBC, and ITN. In what turned out to be a months-long back and forth process, the broadcasters sent us mostly handwritten log sheets of unbroadcasted B-roll, with date, time stamp, and a brief description of the shot sequences. Once we reviewed these, we could request particular shots or scenes for viewing. Sometimes the news outlets would have to telecine 35 mm footage so it could be viewed in a digital format. They then sent DVDs of the requested shots. Most of this footage had never been previously broadcast, and thus, much of the archival footage we used in *40 Years* had never been seen by the general public.

During the editing process, when we were still deciding which archival shots we might want to use, we would place watermarked, low resolution versions of the images they sent, in the edit as inserts. Only at the end of the process, when the film was locked, did we request the final versions. This was because the price for such shots is by frame, not by cut or scene, so we had to ensure that each frame used was crucial to the film.

song about the *genjer* plant, which grows abundantly in the region, was originally recorded as encouragement during the hardships of Japanese occupation of Indonesia and later appealed to the communist party for its message of peasant perseverance, becoming quite popular. It was further associated with the communist party when the New Order government alleged that the song was sung during the murder of the seven high-ranking military officers during the September 30th coup that precipitated the mass killings. The song was banned until Suharto's fall in 1998, and while no longer officially banned, its stigmatized history still clings to its lilting tune, and it is rarely sung in public. For that reason, we did not ask an Indonesian performer to sing it for our sound-track; instead, we invited the Los Angeles-based band Dengue Fever to do so. The lead singer of that band, Chhom Nimol, decided to sing it in Khmer, which was a surprise to us but referenced connections between the '65 history and history of the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia.

Bitter Honey

Traditional Cultural Authority as Narrator

In *40 Years*, the film narrators are research experts who are, for the most part, outsiders. The "narrator" of *Bitter Honey* is a cultural authority from inside Balinese culture, namely, a shadow play puppeteer.

Wayang kulit, or shadow puppet theater, is a centuries-old prac-tice found throughout Indonesia that serves multiple cultural functions simultaneously. It allows the gods to join people on earth, provides wise commentary on behavior to alleviate suffering, keeps evil spirits at bay, entertains, and "cleanses" the village (Anderson, 1965). As such, it has historically been performed at crucial times for villages, and as part of family or village celebrations (Keeler, 1987). *Wayang kulit* provides a medium through which to reflect upon cultural values and societal conditions, typically weaving improvised sketches and storylines respon-sive to current events and the present audience into a repertory of

narratives drawn from two Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahab-harata, and situating all of these within a context of local values and history.

We saw that this interesting juxtaposition of drama, moral instruction, and sheer entertainment could be an excellent way to narrate the film, but we hesitated at first, as it has been used in other films (such as Weir, 1982) and we feared it might be taken as a caricatured referent for Indonesian culture. Ultimately, however, we used this narrative device because it was locally legible and because we believed it could say something interesting and fresh. We commissioned a shadow play focused on polygamy by the Joblar Tum Bak Bayun Troupe, run by puppeteer I Ketut Muada, working in the genre of "new creation" theater (B.I. *kreasi baru*), a form of the post-Suharto era. The New Order government wanted to present Indonesian culture as "timeless," presenting dance and other performances at a rarified remove from politics, history, or contemporary social issues. Once the New Order fell in 1998, Indonesia witnessed innovation and critique in numerous genres of performance. In the early 2000s, "new creation" shadow puppet performances began to more explicitly engage with topics that had previously been off limits. Muada himself had created performances addressing corrupt leadership, the underbelly of tourism, the Bali bombing, and the AIDS crisis, but never on polygamy.

We told him the stories of the three families and the themes emerging from interviews. We tried to stay as experience-near and emic as possible, presenting the issues as they arose in the participants' lives rather than couching it in ethnographic terms or concepts. Muada was able to quickly craft a three-hour long puppet show which included, as always, sections from the classical epic and comedic sections.

For the film, we selected sequences mostly from these comedic segments, which featured Twalen and Merdah, the father-son pair of clowns. Some of their conversation was purely for laughs (e.g., the father tells his son that he looks like a monkey because when his parents were making love, there was a loud noise, and his mother made a startled face like a monkey). But other statements were prescient to ethnographic themes emerging from the participants' narratives. The father clown character was promiscuous and polygamous, with ten surviving and

five deceased wives. In some ways, the clown characters became stand-ins for various participants, voicing common tropes about polygamy, including its cultural history (e.g., gods and kings were polygamous), practical function (e.g., first wife was barren), karmic cause (e.g., past misdeeds), and requirements (e.g., provide for all your wives and children equally and keep them happy). The clown dialogue also critiqued the way husbands in some polygamous marriages treat their wives, such as taking new wives without the previous wife's consent. This comedy couched some real pain, as in jokes about a wife forced into such a situation killing her husband with black magic, and another being reincarnated as a man to seek revenge.

This was not a sanitized performance, although members of the polygamous families featured in the film were in the audience. Voicing a so-called modern view of polygamy in a changing Bali, Joblar joked that only "monkeys" are still polygamous. He also poked fun at the female anatomy, compared co-wives to prostitutes (objects of male lust), and made a few choice digs at women, such as saying that women like polygamy as long as it boosts their wealth and status, because even as a rich man's a second wife, you still go from "eating sweet potatoes to eating hamburgers." While both men and women were subject to his "roasting," Joblar's show in some ways performed Balinese cultural norms of male-dominated discourse.

We didn't include the entire puppet show in the film, of course, especially since the clown commentary was interspersed with more classic themes drawn from the Mahabarata and Ramayan epics. We instead selected those excerpts that best suited the film's narrative needs. Our hope was that this framing strategy would appeal to both Balinese and non-Balinese viewers, and that its presentation of key concepts would be clear, engaging, and relevant to both audiences.

Cultural Continuity

As with *40 Years*, we selected supporting graphics for *Bitter Honey* to suit the theoretical point and narrative frame. This film was concerned with the subjective experience of cultural traditions. Given the large number

of participants heard from in the film, from three different families and their communities, in addition to leaning on the *wayang* puppeteer as a guide for the viewer, we organized the interview material with title cards that signaled major themes to be discussed. The graphics underlying the title cards for each section were selected from an extensive collection of original paintings commissioned by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson during their 1930s fieldwork project in Bali on themes such as daily life, ritual activity, mythology, dreams, and fantasy. In Hildred Geertz's (1994) analysis of this remarkable collection, she found multiple additional themes of psychocultural relevance such as childhood, power and violence, loss, and redemption. These images, thus, tie the film to one of the earliest forays into the integration of visual and psychological anthropology and illustrate psychocultural themes, almost three generations deep, in Balinese cultural life. As such, they underscore certain elements put forth in our contemporary analysis, such as the image of man seated on a throne surrounded by women, which visually echoes the shots of Tuaji on his throne, and family and villager testimony that a man's number of wives remains one display of, and mechanism for, gaining power.

Standing on the Edge of a Thorn

Participant as Narrator

It made sense to have a narrator for *40 Years* and *Bitter Honey* because those films included so many participants, with four storylines in the first film, and three in the second. For these two films, the diversity of subjective experience of shared cultural and historical phenomena was a main point.

Thorn, however, "zoomed in" to focus on just one small family of three. Even so, we didn't conceive of the film as having a narrator until Lisa's voice came so powerfully and sympathetically to the fore. While the story told focused on all family members, the voice narrating the film is Lisa's. This is, in fact, the first film we ever made with first-person voiceover narration. We collected most of this narration in PCE, filling

in the rest with an interview conducted near the end of the project. We found that PCE interview methodology, which focuses on co-creating a coherent narrative about the interviewee's life (see Chapter 7), proved amenable to a first-person narrative structure, as it explores aspects of a person's subjectivity. We also screened the film for Lisa and, as she watched, we interviewed her about her relationship with her parents and her reactions to what she was seeing onscreen.

Visually Referencing Subjectivity and Development

Thorn did not use graphics that were as evidently distinct from the interview and observational footage as those in *40 Years* and *Bitter Honey*. But we still consciously selected and edited imagery that would support the subjective and developmental perspective created by the use of Lisa as a first-person narrator.

Throughout the film, we referenced the narrative tension of a developmental perspective, where things hang in the balance as people grow and change, by using the visual motif of roads. By returning to these, we referenced the proverbial "path" the family was walking. These images took on additional subjective resonances depending on their placement in the film narrative. So, a shot of Imam wandering on the street evoked the disorientation of his mental illness episode; a shot of Iman, Tri, and Lisa walking away from the camera along a dirt road evoked a poignant temporary togetherness that the viewer intuits cannot last; and a streetlight shot against the darkening dusk sky creates a sense of ominous and melancholy foreshadowing, immediately followed by Tri's tearful discussion of her rape.

Throughout the film, we selected imagery that had simultaneous ethnographic and subjective resonance. In this way, shots of barren fields, for example, represented the backdrop of poverty and scarcity against which members of the family made certain wrenching decisions; but they also evoked a more subjective or emotional loneliness, representing how Lisa felt being unable to call upon her parents for psychological (or practical) support.

Near the end of the film, we shifted the style of the film to match Lisa's brightening future, a decision we question in our discussion on endings, below.

Discussion: Strengths and Weaknesses of Different Stylistic Choices

These three different narrative structures and visual strategies illustrate the power of editing in conveying a story and its meaning. All three films are grounded in participant narratives, but due to the differences in narrator and visual elements, the resulting films feel quite different from one another. These different forms of narration and visuals intersect differently with the person-centered ethos we espouse and with the broader pedagogical concerns of ethnographic film, meeting their ends in different ways. But each narrative structure poses its own problematics.

For *40 Years*, for example, we had long editorial debates about whether to include any narrative framing devices and how – or whether – to include me in the film. We ultimately did include a "director's introduction," which provides the theoretical anthropological rationale for the film, and my commentary throughout.[3] Given the goal of holism, providing more complete context via expert narrators (or contextualized local interpretations via cultural insiders as we did with *Bitter Honey*) seemed desirable. In retrospect, I question our use of such didactic styles, since anything that takes the audience out of the world of the participants can interrupt viewer engagement with that world. And while a main goal then was to introduce film as a novel approach in psychological anthropology, *40 Years* went on to reach a much broader audience than anthropologists and students, an audience for which this more theoretical introduction might not be as relevant.

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[3] I also provide some historical commentary, although I am not a trained historian. My contributions were included after we were far along in our edit and needed to address historical elements the historians had not yet referenced. As we were under a production deadline, and I was already included in the film, it made sense for me to furnish the explanation we needed. In retrospect, I think it would have been better to have solicited further historian commentary even if that meant pushing back film completion. This is an issue familiar to most documentary film makers.

In addition to the structuring device of the *wayang* puppet show, *Bitter Honey* used title cards as section headings to signal different themes in accounts of marital life and illustrate the primary didactic and contextual points we wanted to make in a concise way. We have used title cards in a similar fashion in many of our films but, in retrospect, I also question this choice; Perhaps their presentation of information echoes an outdated, pre-Boasian anthropology, exemplified by E. B. Tylor (1832–1917) and L. H. Morgan (1818–1881), who organized aspects of complex cultures into categories like "technology" and "economics," a practice that continued sporadically until the 1960s (e.g., Murphree, 1961). And yet title cards are one way to provide what we felt to be crucial contextual information. Furthermore, they give the viewer a break from all the visual and emotional content to be processed – the mostly blank screen and centering text offers the chance to think about and process the previous segment.

In any case, with different narrative structures and devices, we have tried to balance the demands that come from the genre of ethnographic film with the use of certain film techniques and storytelling strategies that might contribute to the power of its impact. It may be that having the main character as narrator, as in *Thorn*, is most closely aligned with the person-centered ethos, and might be the most impactful.

While not using PCE per se, many ethnographic and documentary films aiming to put a human face on potentially otherwise abstract numbers and facts addressing political violence (Douglas & Moreno Andrés, 2015; Panh, 2018; Zamora, 2015) or gendered violence (Hallacy, 2018; Scharlatt & Montell, 2014) via individual stories, using a first-person perspective or even voice-over. The technique is commonly used in auto-ethnography (Russell, 1999), but even when the protagonist is not the filmmaker, this perspective can effectively build sympathy and reveal inner thoughts and feelings not otherwise apparent. For example, *The Woman's Olamal* by anthropologist Melissa Llewellyn-Davies (1985) follows one adolescent Maasai girl as she prepares for and undergoes a traditional female circumcision. The film presents the ritual to the audience from her perspective, including her narration and focusing on her emotional reactions. Her subjectivity as a younger female is further underscored by Llewellyn-Davies's depiction of the men, seen onscreen

only from a woman's perspective. Following one central character's experience through the entire film creates an intimacy with the viewer, a sense of rapport and even identification that humanizes a controversial topic.

The *Daughter from Ðàn˘ăng* (Dolgin & Franco, 2002) tells the story of Heidi, brought to the United States as part of the post-Vietnam War "Operation Babylift" and reunited with her biological mother, Mai Thi Kim, 22 years later. The filmmakers create a dual storytelling model that uses the first-person technique to portray the subjective viewpoint of both daughter and mother over observational, archival, and found-footage shots. This allows the viewer access to the characters' internal worlds, which, in turn, leads to more nuanced understanding of on-screen situations and a more visceral impact. For instance, during a trip to an outdoor market, both women appear happy, yet a voiceover from Heidi reveals her deep discomfort with her mother's presence.

While the use of first-person participant voiceover poses its own problems, particularly in creating the impression that the film is the product of the participant(s) rather than the filmmaker, we find this access to subjective, emotional viewpoints it affords to be desirable. We believe emotion to be central to ethnographic meaning-making and VPA methodology was developed specifically to support the elicitation of emotion from the participant and the activation of emotion in the film viewer.

Editing for Emotion

Crafting an ethnography to highlight emotional experience and elicit an emotional response means espousing an approach that goes against positivistic understandings of anthropology as an objective science (Pasqualino, 2007). While the idea of a strongly positivistic anthropology has been rejected, by and large, by most cultural and social anthropologists, criticisms against such an emotional approach remain, leaving the emotional components of much social research "hidden" (Blackman, 2007). It can be argued that individual emotional accounts are "unreliable," and shared emotional experience is an illusion (Beatty, 2010). Purposeful elicitation of emotion onscreen, it has been said, privileges

Western takes on film, narrative, and emotional engagement (Worth & Adair, 1972). At the very least, emotional "reading" of a narrative may be limited to viewers who generally share similar values and beliefs (Yeshurun et al., 2017). A related risk in activating emotional response is "overdoing it." If an audience does not respond with what feels like an "authentic" emotion, they may instead feel they are being emotionally manipulated, which would, instead, result in *dis*engagement.

Arguing for Emotion

It is our opinion, however, viewers will more deeply engage with the material presented, and empathize with the characters in the film, when that material is emotional. This is supported by recent neuroscience findings, which suggest that, at least for Western audiences, an emotional, character-centered film narrative is the most successful at empathic activation and information retention (Lemelson & Tucker, 2020). We hope this emotional engagement will support viewers in understanding variable and variegated cultural worlds and motivate them to further explore what they have just seen.

So, there are reasons for trying to make the emotions of the viewer connect with the emotions of the participants. That being said, it's a tricky proposition to use participant emotional expression to generate response from Western audiences, who may not "read" emotion in the same way it is expressed by Balinese or Javanese. There is long-standing debate in anthropology about the degree of cross-cultural translatability of emotional expression and its meaning (Beatty, 2013; Lutz, 1988). Given this debate, some may worry that, due to different cultural psychologies of feeling, as well as norms concerning emotional expression, in the act of editing a film to connect different emotional worlds, the filmmaker may write over other people's lives and experiences to make them more closely align with the conventions and expectations of the filmmaker's culture. These worries may be heightened by the subject matter discussed in this book, returning us to concerns raised in Chapter 1, that the "performance" of suffering might be rendered voyeuristically, or flattened into a neocolonialist trope. Indeed,

in Chapter 5, we raised our own theoretical concerns about the research and representation of trauma, gendered violence, and stigmatization. There, we argued that to understand the lived experience of these, we must look outside our etic frame for them. Is rendering these experiences within a framework for emotional experience and expression that comes from outside the culture of the participants portrayed just, once again, putting them back inside an etic frame, albeit this time a cinematic one? In other words, does editing for emotion enact the opposite of what our theoretical orientation calls us to do? This is a seeming contradiction that must be addressed. But the answer may not be found in editing "less" (if we read less visible editing or post-production strategies as "less manipulation").

All editing creates an embodied emotional response in viewers. The visual and the emotional are directly linked through shot choice and editing style. Film techniques scaffold an emotional viewer response, but without them, an emotional response still arises. The lack of this scaffolding was arguably a weakness in some classic ethnographic films in that what it evoked in the viewer was detachment. For example, *Dead Birds* (Gardner, 1964) includes the funeral of a child, but having taught this film many times to undergraduates, in general this depiction does not elicit a strong empathic emotional response. Another classic of ethnographic film that shows a funeral, *Ongka's Big Moka* (Nairn, 1974), also filmed in Papua New Guinea, also fails to connect. Why? In *Dead Birds*, it may be primarily due to the way the film was narrated; the "voice of God" mode of explanatory voiceover can stultify emotion. Here, the opportunity for emotional identification is foreclosed by explanation intended to build cultural understanding of "what's going on." In *Ongka's Big Moka*, it may be that the observational, wide-angle shots of florid emotional displays, so different from the Western habitus is what fails to connect. Arguably, the filmmakers did not find a way to bridge cultural differences of emotional experience or expression for the viewer.

A counterexample to this, also taken from the ethnographic film canon, would be John Marshall's camera work in *A Joking Relationship* (Marshall, 1962), which does evoke a mirrored mood and emotional response in the viewer. Here, a majority of extreme close-ups and reaction shots, without much contextualization, draws the viewer into the

ritualized relationship between N!ai and her great uncle Ti!kay, characterized by playful mockery and sexual innuendo. By withholding context until the end and keeping the shots tight, Marshall successfully echoes the intimacy between N!ai and Ti!kay, creating a sense within the viewer of how this kinship relationship might be experienced in the Kalahari. Indeed, this "close-up and reaction shot" style is commonly used in conventional filmmaking to communicate and evoke emotions such as sadness, surprise, or fear. In a hypothetical scene where a person is crying over a dead pet, it would not be solely the close-up of the dead pet, or the reaction shot of the person crying, but the balance of the two which communicates powerful emotion. These close-up, point of view, and reaction shots can be considered a "subjective" way to film, in that they are intended to mirror or evoke what is happening internally to the characters or participants in the film. Observational wide shots are considered more "objective" in that the goal is to capture the wider environment or scenario without evoking the inner experience of any one character.

Which storytelling style is more suitable to ethnographic film, and which one is more emotionally evocative, is still up for debate (Heider, 2006; MacDougall, 2021), but our experience suggests that that in order to make emotion recognizable and relatable in the participant and evoke it in the viewer, it may be helpful to follow some subjective cinematic conventions, such as close-ups and reaction shots, rather than more objective or observational ones more typically associated with classical ethnographic film. While this involves a bit more manipulation of footage than pure observation, if a filmmaker *doesn't* edit to elicit emotion from viewers, viewers may come away with an inaccurate understanding of the participants as somehow emotionally detached, or their cultural habitus or traditions of emotional expression merely a curiosity. To return to the examples of the funeral films above, a viewer could come away from *Dead Birds* or *Big Moka* thinking that, somehow, the people in those cultures depicted "don't feel grief." Indeed, Balinese people have been subject to this kind of gross ethnographic misrepresentation (Geertz, 1974) as we describe further below. It is only by experiencing the "force" of emotion for themselves, such as Rosaldo famously describes (Rosaldo, 1989), that a viewer/outsider can "get into" the experience of

a participant in a meaningfully way. This perspective is integral to VPA method. Our longitudinal person-centered interview method is designed to elicit emotion from participants in the field over time, and our editing strategies are designed to communicate this emotion and evoke it in viewers.

Techniques for Emotion

Given this perspective, there are cinematic conventions to use, and strategies to evoke and express emotion, and to make a more embodied, felt connection with the viewer during the editing process. These include juxtaposing significant shots, incorporating music, and selecting footage based on emotional displays of participants that align with those expected by viewers of Westernized or globalized cinema.

Juxtaposition and Montage

Observational shots can be edited together to evoke emotion (Taylor, 1923–1947/1998). For example, we created a *Bitter Honey* sequence that crosscut between Sadra's two families. We juxtaposed shots of Murni's small son crying in a room with a broken door, alone, while playing with a cheap little toy, with shots of Purniasih's children and relatives gathered in a pagoda, laughing and watching TV. This sequence highlighted the contrast between the two wives – one who had family support and one who was isolated, one who was provided for and one who was not. While individual viewers might "read" and respond to these scenes differently, we intended to evoke compassion for Murni's children, while also simultaneously inviting a sense of affront, that this setup was not "fair" toward either wife nor their children.

   In other instances, the emotions displayed by those onscreen are edited in such a way to evoke a very different emotion in the viewer. Again, from *Bitter Honey*, for example, is the inter-cut between the puppet-show where the clowns crudely joke about "men these days" hiring prostitutes, observational footage of Darma at a "cafe" in the red-light district, and interview footage of Darma's wives casually talking about

their (mis)understandings about the risks of contracting AIDS (they just insist that Darma take a shower before sexual relations). This assembly creates a sense of urgent threat in the viewer, to realize that these women who have become familiar over the course of the film might be exposed to a potentially deadly virus. A different example is in *Thorn*: while Iman and Tri talked, we cut to young Lisa. She sometimes seemed to be paying no attention to her parents' conversation, but sometimes looked at them curiously. The more difficult and upsetting their stories became, the more Lisa's impassive, innocent face evoked a sense of alarm and dismay in the viewer.

We use more formal montages to open all the films, to establish key thematic concerns, and sometimes introduce key characters. Montage situates the audience in a time, place, and culture, efficiently providing information about the physical and social environment and simultaneously introducing significant themes of the film. While the individual shots are carefully selected, the impact comes from the shot sequences and juxtapositions – the whole, not just the parts (Morante, 2017; Suhr & Willerslev, 2012). The opening montage of *40 Years* was crafted to provide historical context and signal important themes to come, but we were also trying to immediately and viscerally communicate the fear, chaos, and despair of the time. We purposefully evoked horror, by including graphic archival recordings of the violence as part of this montage, including one man's beating and, essentially, another's murder. While these brutal acts are difficult to watch, the inclusion of these scenes allows viewers to directly witness events later denied or "spun" by the state propaganda machine and demonstrate the absolute impunity that was part and parcel of the extermination campaign of 1965.

While surely a reaction of visceral horror would be near-universal, other images in this montage might evoke strong emotions for cultural insiders while having little emotional impact on those unfamiliar with Indonesian culture. For example, a shot of a foot stomping on a pamphlet printed with an image of Lenin illustrates more than the "stamping out" of communism. In Indonesia, the sight or touch of the sole of the foot, as the dirtiest and lowest part of the body, is demeaning and particularly loaded in this cultural context. Similarly, in

the following series of shots depicting military raids, arrest, and imprisonment, we see a soldier, sitting above a crouched woman, rip her headscarf off and force her to look at the camera, as if to exhibit her guilt. This action also has loaded cultural significance; in Indonesian belief, the head is the most respected part of the body, and for Muslims, the headscarf is a sign of modesty and piety, so the act of removing the scarf and touching a woman's head without permission is deeply violating.

Music and Sound Design

In addition to the use of shot juxtaposition or extended montages, emotion can be evoked through the use of music and sound design.

These three films use original scores, previously recorded songs, and diegetic music (recorded live), each selected for its ethnographic significance, but more importantly, its ability to amplify the emotional resonance of the scene (Lemelson & Tucker, 2017). For example, in *40 Years*, a popular Balinese lullaby sung by a famous Balinese vocalist, Nyoman Candri (n.d.), is played over a montage of mass graves, evoking the poignant wishes that the victims of '65 might "sleep well" or "rest in peace" despite the violations they had suffered. Sorrowful instrumental music plays as the *Bitter Honey* wives discuss their feelings of jealousy, while ominous music plays under their discussions of physical abuse. Composed by Malcolm Cross, Elemental's long-term collaborator and composer, the original soundtracks for these films sought to preserve Indonesian musical instrumentation and tone while adapting it for global audiences. This led to some unexpected choices, such as featuring a dobro in *40 Years*. This slide guitar is more typical of American folk/roots music, but the pentatonic minor blues scale it uses is analogous with local Indonesian scales, transculturally and sonically communicating a mournful sound (from composer Malcolm Cross's liner notes [Various Artists, 2012]).

The use of soundtrack in ethnographic film has been long criticized on the grounds that it takes the viewer out of an immersive ethnographic experience and is manipulative (Grimshaw, 2011; Heider, 1976). Diagetic or source music may not be subject to the same critique

– arguably, this kind of music further immerses the viewer in an ethnographic locale, even as it, too, can illustrate powerful emotions, or emphasize narrative themes in an emotional way. So, for example, viewers can feel the moral force of cultural tradition evoked by the resounding puppet show gamelan music in *Bitter Honey*. At the end of *40 Years*, they can see and hear the healing power of social connection and the solidarity of found community as Budi's brother Kris performs a politically trenchant song, "Destiny of My Nation," with other "children of communists" who, like him, had been ostracized.

They can hear the purity, sincerity, and hope radiating from Lisa's sung prayer in *Thorn*. This prayer was placed at a key transitional moment in the narrative. Throughout the first half of the film, Imam and Tri argued over sexual fidelity and sexual violence, in an ongoing battle over broken promises and mutual entrapment. Tri and Imam's orientation to their story and their lives was fatalistic: in their own eyes, in some ways, their story was done; they were both "ruined." But for Lisa, something meaningful still hung in the balance. Being young, both vulnerable and hopeful, with major milestones to be navigated and major decisions to be made, her orientation was toward the future. As the storyline shifted in focus for the second half of the film, while sexuality and sexual destiny, in many ways, remained a concern, the substance of this concern shifted. We maintained thematic continuity in the transition between the two sections of the film; the first half ends with a young Lisa saying that her parents are "*nakal*," which is directly translated as naughty but can also suggest sexual transgression. As the second half of the film opens, jumping about a decade forward in time, the first thing that the viewer hears is Lisa's lilting recitation of a Quranic verse about preserving chastity: "I take refuge in Allah from the cursed Satan, and those who turn away from falsehood and all that Allah has forbidden, and those who guard their chastity. Whoever seeks beyond that are the transgressors." This cut both implies a moral judgment on Lisa's parents, where the verse stands in for the mores of their community and establishes defending sexual purity as a major issue for Lisa to come in the next part of the film. This was a conscious choice, as we recorded Lisa chanting many different Quranic verses on a number of themes. Such

recitation is a standard element of Islamic education, at which she was quite skilled.

Finally, beyond the realm of music, sound design can shape or enhance viewer emotion. One example of sound design comes in *Bitter Honey*, during Purniasih's account of Sadra's abuse. This account arose in an interview, but instead of simply showing her speaking, we chose to put her testimony over visuals of a night scene, where Sadra sat alone in a pagoda, surrounded by darkness, while Purniasih worked alone in the kitchen. The only sound besides Purniasih's account of violence is the droning chirp of a cricket. The contrast of the quiet, intimate atmosphere of a house at night with her story of being beaten was intended to evoke feelings of cruelty, pain, and fear. The imagery underscored the rifts that such violence creates, as embodied in the character's literal isolation from one another onscreen.

Emotional Displays

Another way to elicit emotion in the viewer is to include the emotional displays of participants. As discussed in the previous chapter, we aimed to establish situational and relational contexts in the field that, over time, helped create a setting whereby participants felt comfortable revealing emotionally painful material with corresponding affect, instead of following the Indonesian social convention of sharing even very grue-some or tragic stories with a smile or a laugh, which is considered more respectful or polite to one's interlocutor (Kurilla, 2020; Lee, 1999).

Indeed, when strong emotion arose during the course of filmmaking – such as a participant breaking into tears – we took that as a signal that we had touched upon something of great importance to the participants. Emotional expression alerted us to pay close attention and delve further, and strongly motivated us to keep that footage in the film. For example, Tri spontaneously broke into tears when discussing how Imam refused to marry her, leaving Lisa technically fatherless on her birth certificate. This scene was not in the early cuts of the film, but it served as a powerful clue to us that something else was going on, and remained pivotal in the final cut of *Thorn*.

This incorporation of participant emotion can be somewhat straight-forward, less so when the participants may not visibly emote all the emotions they report experiencing (Lemelson & Tucker, 2015).[4] During filming, Lanny's expression still crackled when recounting her episodes of anger at her family struggles, but she did not emote any sadness, despite the fact that she reported experiencing it; perhaps this was because, as she stated, she emphatically views emotions such as sadness as weakness. To make Lanny's experience of grief more vivid for viewers, we turned to the testimony of her family members about the episodes of loss and trauma in *their* lives. Her brother Edy conveyed the fear, desperation, and devastation that her family endured as her father was taken. Freely weeping, Edy recalled the moment when the military officers searched their house.

> [T]hey took all the valuable items … My younger brother, the sixth child, was told to sit on one of the soldier's laps. He was questioned, "Are there any pistols? Does Daddy have a pistol?" "Oh, he does. Lots!" my brother replied. He didn't know anything about it, but his imagination was like any other kid his age. He was just seven years old. He was just a little boy … Mom was furious … I always cry whenever I talk about it … In anger and despair, Mom beat him and said, "you killed your father!" … Seeing my brother, who was still so little and skinny, being beaten up by Mom, who was out of control, Mom also crying … I don't know why, that memory leaves a mark.

This is not to say that grief or sadness is the only emotion we seek to highlight, nor the only one that will engage audiences from different cultural backgrounds. Anger such as Lanny expresses is a powerful emotion, all the more so in the Javanese context where anger, particularly women's anger, is conventionally downregulated (Chapter 6). A single participant may not evoke all of the relevant aspects to their emotional experience to the same degree. Ultimately, the filmmaker must decide

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[4] Of course, although there is an ethological basis for the universality of some emotional displays, much of the non-verbal gestures, some unconscious, related to the internal experience of emotion may still be visible, though interpretation of this is difficult due to both individual and cultural differences in emotional gestures and expression, leading to possible misinterpretation in the audience.

which emotions to highlight in the films, considering both the meanings they have for the participants *and* the desire to have viewers empathetically connect or identify with those participants. For some, the work of the filmmaker in shaping and framing participant emotional experience to affect an emotional experience in the viewer may remain questionable. But we stand by it, particularly in these films on these themes. When dealing with these painful, often erased histories of trauma, gendered violence, and stigmatization, we cannot afford for viewers to not pay attention or not care – or to come away thinking participants don't care. We want to engage viewers, to move them to do something, a motivation we further address more in the following chapter when we discuss advocacy and activism. But in bringing a film to an audience and in engaging them in a story, this dilemma of emotional "editing" is not the only one that remains, to a certain extent, unresolved.

The Artifice of Endings

There is another dilemma inherent to VPA: life goes on, while ethnographic films create stories of a certain expected digestible length. The longitudinal approach of VPA means that each film was shot over the course of multiple years – four for *40 Years*, seven for *Bitter Honey*, and eleven for *Thorn*. Each film functions on two different timelines– the retrospective and the ever-unfolding present – and, through weaving these together, witnesses a holistic representation of life course development. But the ethnographic product still cannot come close to capturing the ongoing processes of growth and change that is life itself. As Biehl and Locke point out, "ethnographic creations are about the plasticity and unfinishedness of human subjects and lifeworlds … views of people … in the process of becoming" (Biehl & Locke, 2017).

In crafting a bounded product out of the raw material of life, there arises the matter of an "ending." Any ending is, of course, an artifice – even when participants die, their impact reverberates within families and communities. Before such eventualities, our film work with participants continues after the film proper is finished, in the service of the larger

ethnographic project. So, how do we know that a film or a storyline within a participant's life is "done"?

In reaching an endpoint, it is easy to be swayed by subconscious desires for some kind of closure. There is also a Western narrative convention that compels us toward a "happy ending"; on the whole, viewers are most satisfied with a film that ends on a hopeful note. For the ethnographic filmmaker, this requires balancing a portrayal faithful to the truth of life as lived with a narrative that will not totally disappoint its audience (Heider, 2006). We are accordingly motivated to end a film when the participant is in a better place than they were when we started, or has achieved a new understanding. The endings of each of the three films have incorporated an element of this optimistic, temporary closure, while gesturing toward the ever-unfolding aspect of our participants' lives with a hopeful "gaze into the future." At the end of *40 Years* and *Thorn*, Budi and Lisa are looking toward their futures as adults with a more optimistic orientation than the despair or sense of hopelessness they had experienced earlier in the film. Collectively, the wives in *Bitter Honey* are also looking toward the future, wishing their children less suffering and more agency and control in their lives. To be able to include such moments in our films, we must stick with a participant through difficult times in hopes that such a positive development will come.

By the same token, we can't let longitudinality prevent the completion of a compelling story; filming more will not necessarily make the final film better. Our goal is to document the experience of individuals within a particular cultural milieu and craft *theoretically significant* stories about them with the available tools of our own society. Accordingly, the film can be considered "finished" once there is a narrative arc that illustrates our theoretical analysis in a coherent and emotionally resonant way. Despite our working methods that advocate for longitudinality, there is no set time frame for completion of a film. For example, the bulk of one of our films, albeit a much shorter one than those discussed in this book, was shot over the course of three days. *Ngaben* (Lemelson, 2012a) documented a son conducting a cremation ceremony for his father. It was conceived as a film rebuttal (joining other scholars such as Jensen & Suryani, 1992) to Clifford Geertz's assertion that individual Balinese are of "no genuine importance even to themselves. But the masks they wear,

the stage they occupy, the parts they play, and, most important, the spectacle they mount remain, and comprise not the façade but the substance of things, not least the self" (1974, p. 35). The overwhelming emotions and poignant reflections gathered in those three days were enough to realize our goal. Still, the film subject, Nyoman, had been a friend for over a decade at the time of shooting. So we had earned his trust and knew his feelings about his father and his father's death.

In any case, when settling on an ending for our longer films, we must consider our intended audience. Our films are oriented toward global academic and advocacy audiences, but also toward Indonesians impacted by and invested in the issues portrayed. The ending of *40 Years*, which highlighted the inexorable losses participants had experienced but included scenes of hope from Indonesia's gradual emergence from the silence surrounding the 1965 tragedy via political activism and artistic expression, worked well for both audiences. But the final sequences that ended Lanny's story was problematic for Indonesian audiences. Lanny shared her Javanese and Buddhist-informed belief that those who committed acts of violence would receive their proper karmic punishment, and that rather than seeking retribution, her time would be better spent conducting good works. The scenes we included next showed her conducting relief after the massive 2006 earthquake. We intended to demonstrate Lanny's resilience and the meaning she found in helping others, but some Indonesians took it as an implicit endorsement by the filmmakers of Lanny's belief in cosmic justice. In other words, some Indonesian viewers felt we were suggesting the earthquake was karmic retribution. For those who may have lost their homes or loved ones or experienced hardship during the disaster, such a message was offensive. This was not our intent, and a reminder to us that films for transcultural audiences must take the narrative logics and histories of both American and Indonesian viewers into account.

On the other hand, *Thorn* received some negative feedback from American academic audiences, who felt the ending was unrealistically optimistic. This ending was shot in a more upbeat tone and style to purposefully contrast the melancholic mood of the preceding sections of the film. All scenes in the ending sequence were filmed out in the sun, amidst modern architecture with reflective surfaces and clean lines. This

was to suggest that Lisa had a bright and prosperous future – one where she might be free of some of the poverty and claustrophobic social sanction that impacted her mother, as embodied in the previous dark interior shots of the modest boarding houses in which she grew up. We set these shots to music akin to that in a teen romance film to communicate that Lisa was a young woman emerging into a globalized world.

Some test audiences felt this put a manufactured upbeat spin on Lisa's life conditions. But we kept this ending after consultations with several human trafficking experts, who advised us that for advocacy purposes, the film needed to demonstrate the need for and efficacy of some sort of intervention. They held that without intervention by human rights workers, community organizations, mentors, et cetera, teenage girls have a slim chance of leaving sex work, but with support, they can and will. The film has, in fact, gone on to be used by Komnas HAM, (*Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia*, the Indonesian national human rights commission), as an educational and advocacy film for a national campaign on human trafficking. We hope this ending will be motivating for those who might draw connections between Lisa's story and the experiences of young women in their local communities.

It is also worth noting that, to a certain extent, the "take-away" from someone's life and/or a film about their life depends on time and perspective. Having continued to follow Lisa and her family up until this writing, we can conduct a thought experiment about how the time stamp for wrapping the final version of the film would have changed the film's message. What would have happened if we had wrapped the final version of the film in 2015 or 2020, as opposed to 2012 when we did? If we had ended in 2015, things would have, indeed, looked bleak. At this point, Lisa was 17, had dropped out of high school, was living alone in a rented room, and working as a model, which many around her interpreted as being a euphemism for an escort, still dreaming of a better job and a better life. Tri was finally been able to purchase some land and build her own house with Wiji's help, but did not want to officially marry him, and remained sickly, despondent, and anxious. Imam married a girl even younger than Lisa in another community marriage and remained mostly uninvolved in his daughter's life. If we ended the film in 2020, though, perhaps the ending would have seemed "too good to be true."

As of this writing, Lisa recently married an upstanding middle-class man who knows her history and appears to sincerely love her. Tri finally left Wiji and soon after found an upstanding middle-class man of her own, who eagerly (and quickly) married her legally and similarly accepts her despite her troubled past. Imam is once again alone, after his young wife's father retrieved his daughter, saying that his brother had married the girl off in his stead. Imam, however, says that now that his wife and daughter are properly taken care of, he is finally at peace with his life.

The ending of *Bitter Honey* was intended to be poignant but balanced, acknowledging the ongoing reality of the burdens each wife must bear as simultaneous to the joys and hopes each finds in her offspring. We ended on the counter-narrative embodied by Kiawati. By being in a *nyentana* marriage (see Chapter 3), Kiawati was able to live outside of the normative rules of Balinese marriage, make different choices for herself and, in a sense, avoid the fate that most of the other co-wives share. While her life as a divorced mother is not easy, she still relishes her agency. The final shot of her carrying bricks up a steep hill above a riverside quarry, quite grueling manual labor, with her voiceover saying she's free, was intended to communicate this blend of burden, injustice, and devastation mixed with strength, resilience, and pride. In earlier cuts of the film, this footage had come earlier, when she was first introduced. But we felt that the image of her hauling stone was an apt representation of all the women's hardship, as well as their remarkable endurance. And yet, as an ending, it may leave the sense that this is the way it is from here on out – poignant and bittersweet, but with a focus on the positive in both the wives' and the viewers' minds. The reality is rougher around the edges.

In 2013, the team held screenings of a film cut to elicit the wives' feedback. We also conducted interviews about developments in their lives. Murni arrived dressed in smart checkered pants and flowered sandals. When asked how things were going, she replied with an arithmetic of daily demands, revealing her preoccupations with managing her time and earning money. As Sadra's finances were caught up in his older children's college education, Murni had been left the sole breadwinner for her children. She said she had no spare moment or energy for anything except working to support them. She sent away her first child, a daughter,

to serve a distant relative as a housemaid, prioritizing her more "valuable" sons. She moved in with her older brother on her natal family compound, to avoid paying rent and cut down commuting time, a move she had long wanted to make but Sadra had forbidden. Her family did not judge her marriage, but expected her to help with her brother's household tasks and care for her ailing mother in return for lodging. Meanwhile, as a wife, she sees part of her responsibility to "cover" for her husband's shortcomings, so she told her brother and her children that Sadra was providing for them. She had taken on a side job ironing clothes because her regular job didn't pay enough to make ends meet.

It was clear that her relationship with Sadra had disintegrated into dislike, even disgust. In the rare instances they spent time together, he still frequently lost his temper. She reported telling him things like, "Go try to find another wife who does what I do; if you can, I'll eat her shit!" Indeed, when talking about him, her forthright tone turned disdainful, rising as she said that for all she cares, he can go get a new wife and, "I'll loan him the money for the wedding myself! … Sometimes my ears are just flaming hearing him talk. When I fight with him, I say that there's no way he'll find another woman as strong as me."

When asked whether he is still physically abusive with her, she sneered, "He can hit me if he wants – he can also go ahead and die for all I care." She said he hit her "less" because she no longer accepted it, no longer submitted to his will in any of her affairs. It's clear that Murni's hard-won independence means she has much less help than a typical Balinese wife would have, without access to extended family resources from her husband's side. Murni clearly takes pride in her own capability and is instilling these values in her young children, who cook, clean up after themselves, manage their own pocket money, and help out with household tasks so Murni can focus on her side work. But her exhaustion showed on her face.

In this question of endings, then, there is a quandary in that crafting any sort of narrative – gesturing toward any sort of ending or resolution at all – is imposing a kind of shape to human existence that doesn't actually exist. Similarly, presenting participant experience via an edited narrative designed to move a viewer is, to a certain extent, manipulating that experience, or at least creating a telling of it that is the filmmaker's.

Both narrative arcs and emotional displays are, to a greater or lesser extent, constructions. Ethnographic field material can be gathered indefinitely, which allows for a more detailed, less determinative understanding of an individual in the constant flux of life. But a short or feature-length film – much like an ethnographic monograph – is a delimited and purposeful ethnographic product. The films are created around a theme or point, which need to be made with an ending. The films aim to engage the viewer beyond the end of the film and they do so by shaping the emotional experience of the film, of which an ending is a part. In some sense, then, people's full life stories and complex shifting subjectivities are always truncated to the story. This is a necessary aspect of VPA filmmaking, but one that must be handled with care. We continue our discussion of ethics in the following chapter, which considers additional points in the ethics of production, post-production, and beyond to film distribution, release, and use for activism or advocacy purposes.

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