9

Ethical Issues in Visual Psychological Anthropology

The primary edict for any ethnographic fieldwork project is to "do no harm" (American Anthropological Association, 2012). In some anthropological work, where there is little chance of negative consequences for research participants, this issue of "harm" is merely a formality. But given first, the topics of the films discussed in this book, which address personal experiences of trauma, violence, and stigma; and second, the particularly revealing nature of the PCE interview approach central to VPA described in Chapter 7, for us the ethical questions of potential harm were central, ongoing, and multilayered. Our goal could not be just to thoughtfully or empathetically represent the forces impinging upon our participants, but also take these forces into account in structuring an ethical fieldwork and filmmaking environment.

The risks to participants associated with the *40 Years*, *Bitter Honey*, and *Thorn* film projects (Lemelson, 2009, 2015, and 2012, respectively) were numerous. The most extreme risk was that of dire physical harm or even death. Participants in *40 Years* shared histories of political oppression, violence, and trauma; at the time of filming the associated dangers had subsided but were by no means past. Participants faced potential

repercussion for their public testimony, such as interrogation or imprisonment by police or military state actors, or extra-judicial violence, including murder at the hands of state actors, militias, or vigilantes. Some participants in *Bitter Honey* were publicly sharing experiences of domestic abuse that might have put them in danger of retaliation from their husbands. In *Thorn*, both Imam and Tri had faced past episodes of violent vigilante justice and there were concerns that, given their ongoing stigmatization, the family might face this again.

There were also social risks in publicly discussing difficult, painful, or socially sanctioned thoughts and behaviors. Interpersonal repercussions that occur outside of the fieldwork setting, such as social isolation or antagonism, may be unpredictable and may fall outside the eye or control of the filmmaker (Pink, 2013, 2019) and end up creating protracted difficulties for film participants.

Related, but distinct from these concerns, are the potential psychological risks of disclosing past traumas or addressing past experiences or ongoing contexts of violence or stigmatization. We know interviewing people about their memories of or reflections on violent or traumatic events to a certain extent re-exposes them to traumatic triggers. We prepared for these effects as best we could during interviews and in follow up post interviews.

First, given the risks, the chapter discusses obtaining and maintaining informed consent. Here we address a number of different consent issues, loosely in the order in which they arise during the filmmaking process: consent to participation, consent to filmic representation, and consent to screenings and distribution. Then, we turn to the second major concern in these three films, which is ameliorating harm to participants, specifically those that might come from the filmmaking process. We provide for psychological protection and support during interviews on painful or potentially triggering topics, but amelioration of harm must continue after interviews, to address the dynamics that arise when we begin to develop caring relationships with participants and when our participants begin to reconcile with the images of themselves onscreen. Here we reflect on the ethical issues of conducting or facilitating interventions and the potentially neocolonialist or moralizing underpinning of these issues, and those implicated in the processes of making public the

trauma, stigma, and violence participants have experienced, or at the very least recording and presenting emotions that in their everyday cultural context would not typically be seen in public.

Finally, we address advocacy or activism activities with participants who have multiple vulnerabilities or have been subject to trauma, gendered violence, or stigmatization. We think through our responsibility to participants after filming, in terms of trying to support positive changes in their lives via intervention or advocacy. We also ask what role the films might play in advocacy work; what audience were they intended for, and to what uses have they been put? What role do participants have in advocacy, and how might we react to their increasing sense of purposeful investment in the film and its use?

Much, if not most, of the events and interview material we discuss in this chapter happened outside of filming proper, whether before fieldwork, during but outside of filmmaking, or long after the shooting was done and the films had been wrapped, released, and distributed. Considering these ethical dimensions of our project then "widens the frame" yet again, situating the experiences of our participants in our project as well as the longer reach of their lives, and in the sets of global viewership of the films, while focusing on the ethical issues raised by their exposure.

Consent

Issues of consent have been primary in these projects. Processes of consent are always undertaken before filming can begin, continue throughout the production, post-production, film screenings, and distribution. Each phase of filmmaking has its own challenges and quandaries. While informed consent remains the AAA ethical standard, debates about the concept's validity and/or practical meaning and application continue. Some reject it on claims that no ethnographer truly adheres to the rigorous procedure ongoing (and not simply initial) informed consent requires and that, even if they did, it is impossible for ethnographic subjects to truly consent to what ultimately amounts to their own objectification (Bell, 2014). Others (e.g., Corrigan, 2003) argue that the negotiations of informed consent can often be decontextualized from

Fig. 9.1   Made Darma and his children

the lived experience of those it is supposed to protect. Regardless of these objections, the process of thinking through with participants what their consent entails, and the implications of that consent, remains a centrally important undertaking (Fig. 9.1).

Danger to Safety and Well-Being

The contextual reasons for subject protection, evident in the three film chapters, include in order of increasing severity, the chance of raising awareness about the life experiences and personal history of the participants, which could expose them to further approbation, shunning, and stigma in their local communities; potential community violence due to anger and subsequent retribution over a range of potential disclosures; arrest and imprisonment should these disclosures be brought to the attention of state authorities; and finally, violence or even murder at the

hands of community members or state actors. Awareness of the nature of these risks, participant social positioning vis-à-vis these risks, and any individual participant's ability to grasp these risks in their complexity, affect the degree to which he or she can give true "informed consent." Here we select one example from each phase of the filmmaking.

Questions of consent arise before filming begins, when participants are deciding whether or not to join the project. The first steps, after meeting and explaining a project with potential participants, is to discuss the possible risks and dangers of participation. For *40 Years*, these included the danger that, as I put it in initial discussions with participants, "participation in this project could lead to your imprisonment or death." For ethnographic films on political violence, this risk is not hyperbole (cf. Nettie Wild discussing her film [1998] in Hartzell, 2003). While all subjects in *40 Years* were at risk for violence, these risks were not equal for each participant and their families.

Lanny and Degung saw their participation in *40 Years* as part of their pre-existing activist work and were familiar with such risks. Furthermore, these risks may have been mitigated for them, given their high levels of education, higher SES, positions of authority (and attendant cultural capital and the forms of protection these can offer), and their consciousness of the political forces and realities acting against them. Kereta and Budi, however, both less affluent than Lanny and Degung, with limited education and attendant cultural capital, would be telling their stories publicly for the first time. So, our concerns and discussions were different for each person, accounting for the potential higher level of danger Budi or Kereta's families might find themselves in as a result of film participation.

Discussions of consent, with regard to potential danger to safety and well-being, continue during editing/post-production phases. Over the course of making *Bitter Honey*, we realized that the wives' participation in the film – depending on what they said, and their relationship with their husband – might lead to their physical harm. The team regularly checked in with them over the years to ensure they felt comfortable continuing with certain avenues of discussion that might anger their husbands. Here is a typical exchange at an all-female screening of an edit of the film, before we showed the cut to their husbands, moderated by psychologist and women's advocate Livia Iskandar, who collaborated on this project:

LIVIA: First, actually I have a question, is there a problem? Do you feel safe enough? So, for example, is it possible that if the men watch this, later they'll get angry? And if that happened, that's what I'm honestly worried about, if the men watch that and then they get angry, what would that be like for you?

MURNI: From the very start, it was him being filmed. So he has to see the results of the filming. … Maybe by seeing that, he can change.

SUCIATI TO PURNIASIH: You weren't insulting your husband, you were speaking about your feelings, about what was in your heart. But your husband definitely won't want to hear that, accept that, you speaking badly of him. He must have told you to just say good things, say this, say this. Even though he told us to lie, someone asked you while they were filming you, and since that was clearly what you were feeling, that was what came out. Later when he watches it, he definitely won't accept it, and then there will be arguments in the household. That's what she's asking. … You can imagine if they don't agree with it, right? But clearly if they don't, then it's us who have to be with those men who are like that.

MURNI: Yes, they're violent people, those men of ours.

KIAWATI: They'll think we're insulting them. They'll be upset about it later.

PURNIASIH: I don't know if my husband will agree with it or not. But I already agreed to it.

RASTI: You don't understand … Tomorrow your husband will see you saying that in the film, being filmed by those tourists,[1] and he'll say that to you, that you said this and this and this. He'll be angry, your husband, and he'll hit you again at home.

The women helped each other negotiate the potential scenarios resulting from a husband hearing them "speak their true feelings on screen," but these were unpredictable. In another interview, Suciati explained how her husband's reaction to a filmed statement she made could be as mild as an annoyed question, if he was in a good mood, to something "excessive" if he had other worries on his mind. Ultimately, after extensive discussions

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[1] "Tourists" is typically the way many Balinese refers to foreigners, even those they have known a long time.

of the risks these participants faced, we left it up to the women to navigate these contingencies, based on what they felt was important to say in the film. But given this, worries about potential harm stayed primary in our minds and discussions, and we followed up multiple times with them to check if there was any negative response to their participation. Thankfully, both in the immediate aftermath and in the long run, there have not been any reported violent or dangerous events related to their participation.

Some risks may arise in film release and distribution: The family in *Thorn* reveals personal experiences of stigmatization which implicate a number of other actors in their social world. In telling of the violence done to them, they reference villagers from Tri's hometown who beat them, men who raped Tri, and later in the film, Tri's boyfriend who attempted to kidnap Lisa, potentially with the intention to traffic her into sex work. While no one is mentioned by their real name, the film could possibly make such actors feel exposed or threatened, and perhaps retaliate. Less of a concern, but not impossible, might be physical attacks on or scapegoating of Imam who, as discussed in Chapters 4, 6–8, was previously stigmatized for his psychiatric illness and/or may have deeply affronted those Javanese viewers who felt he had gravely violated norms of morally acceptable behavior.

Triggering Surveillance Fears

The risks and dangers of participating in an ethnographic film about trauma, gendered violence, and stigma map onto and quite likely exacerbate pre-existing fears about surveillance.

In *40 Years*, those identified by the state as communists or affiliates were familiar with state-directed surveillance, where to stay as "invisible" as possible was to stay safe. In *Bitter Honey* and *Thorn*, female participants were subject to everyday surveillance, from their husbands and broader society. Kiawati, Suciati, Rasti, and Tri and reported being "scared" to go places unaccompanied or to talk to men in public because, as Suciati said, "there are eyes everywhere." This sense of surveillance

impacted the women's sense of freedom to tell their own stories: Participation in the *Thorn* film was just one more aspect of her life that Tri kept secret from her boyfriend, Wiji.

Participants, who had been subject to state, community, and/or family level surveillance, worried about how they would be both literally and metaphorically "viewed" by their families, communities, and state if they said certain things "on the record" for the films and were then "found out." Whether subject to state, community, or family surveillance, the feared end point of surveillance was punishment, again most likely physical violence. We took pains to avoid, ameliorate, or reduce these ever-present fears, through ongoing discussions about the range of negative effects their participation could evoke. In addition, we worked with participants to develop plans for managing any potential negative effects of their participation, such as immediately notifying local collaborators, such as Dr. Mahar and Father Baskara Wardaya, a Jesuit priest and professor, if they were to have a negative experience with someone who watched the film or developed any safety concerns.

Of course, when surveillance is conducted by the state and local community, the potential consequences cannot be entirely and appreciably mitigated. If state or local actors wanted to mete out punishment to the families as a result of film participation, there is only so much our team could have done to protect them. Given the public nature of film, we remain aware of the limitations and potential inadequacy of these efforts, particularly with the increasingly slippery nature of digital media, which is so easily reproduced and disseminated, as discussed below.

Impact on Participant in Family and Community

In consenting to their participation in a film, participants often anticipated others' interpretation of or response to their involvement in the project. In addition to or aside from physical danger, participants risked other negative repercussions in their family or community. There are two issues here; first is that we were asking the interviewees for their consent, but in subsequent interviews they could potentially reveal things about other people, who had *not* consented to their lives being "revealed" or

the resulting risks. Second is that participants' families or communities might not approve of either participation in a film project more generally, or what specifically is revealed during the course of filming, based on what the participants themselves chose to disclose (perhaps, with their own agendas).

Degung explained how his own interest or comfort level was not the only thing he took into consideration:

> For me to talk about this, with a camera or without a camera, I find it very, very, very, very therapeutic in a way. But sometimes I question myself, this story I tell […] what implications it has. I don't really know … But I'm worried sometimes if I tell this kind of story, whether other people will be in a problem or, you know, my family will be in a problem.

Degung was well aware of potential unintended consequences to his testimony. Given the history of '65 where people were targeted for violence due to things someone else said about them, he proceeded with trepidation. Furthermore, given the pre-existing disenchantment and anger from one side of his family at his activism, who might see his participation as further "dredging up the past," and the wariness of those who also consider themselves survivors on the other side who warn him not to "commodify" his suffering, he knew further public statements on this topic could quite likely create new problems in his family, village, and Balinese social network. He continued:

> Ethically it's very, very hard for me to explain sometimes, because … Logically, I find, you know, this story has to be told, the experience that we've been through. But ethically we [are] brought up with the Balinese style of knowledge with the spirit of *ajawera* (secrets). Which is, you know, don't disseminate knowledge, because knowledge can harm people. Sometimes, I think [that's] true … But sometimes we need to disseminate knowledge in order to enlighten other people.

Similar to Degung's worries of how his film participation might affect his family relationships in a compound already politically split and full of disharmony, in *Bitter Honey*, some of Darma's wives seemed to similarly fear that having an available record of their discord might flare

up old fights. After many years of participation, Suciati worried that, while the co-wives had developed much more amicable relations than they had during earlier periods of filming, the record of their conflicts on film threatened this fragile harmony. On the one hand, this fear is practical; Suciati has learned to be ever mindful of the other wives' angry and jealous feelings, which might play out negatively in her daily life within this complex kinship system. At the same time, these fears about interpersonal discord are linked to fears over open discourses about 1965 through Indonesian cultural understandings of social and societal harmony; in a psychocultural context where to discuss, portray, or otherwise refer to conflict is to risk conjuring it anew, such strife is never really "past."

Mini's case illustrates what happens if some of these fears about disrupting a fragile harmony came to fruition. Her relationship with her family, always tense, was exacerbated by disputes over her role in *40 Years*. Mini participated in the film because she wanted people to know the truth about '65, particularly that many of those who had been targeted were innocent. And while *she* felt this mission was successful, Mini's natal family did not want the film screened or discussed. In one instance, after a film screening at Atmajaya University, a professor wanted to visit their family to learn more. Mini's sister – who learned about the screening and interest from an employer's son, who works at Atmajaya – dissuaded him, saying the film's stories were lies.

Mini thinks her sister was, in part, jealous of her participation in the film, and the associated "fame" or "importance" of having a relationship with highly educated Indonesians and foreigners. People may assume Mini has been paid a high sum for her participation, a common concern for our participants – Sadra and Darma, too, worried neighbors assumed they had made money from the film, a fear supported by Balinese hyper-cognization of jealousy (B.I. *iri hati*, Shaver et al., 2001). In Bali, this gossip or jealousy can lead to more serious concerns, like being targeted with black magic (B.I. *ilmu hitam*), which has powerful repercussions on social relations and personal well-being. Whether the heart of the dispute comes from jealousy or lingering fears over discussing '65, Mini believes the family has retaliated against her for her participation. She now lives on a shared family plot and, after the film's release, her brother-in-law

began using the land immediately adjacent to theirs as a chicken coop. She says he poisons the rats there and leaves them out to rot, hoping the smell will drive her away.

Ultimately, we must remember that when weighing risks and dangers, participants are considering the impact on their whole family and community and on themselves *as situated within* a particular family and community. But is it enough to say that participants have the best understanding of the risks of their exposure and so are they ultimately the ones to best weigh those risks? Or, given the tight family and social networks in Indonesia, are we as filmmakers and/or ethnographers responsible for reviewing risks and dangers and/or getting consent from the entire extended family unit or discussing the film work with the broader community? Certainly, on such topics as these, if we did so, consensus would be difficult to achieve and the films would probably never be made. Furthermore, despite due diligence, some of the effects simply cannot be predicted (Lipson, 1994; for a comparative example of unanticipated consequences of filmed disclosures despite extended consent discussions see David Paperny (Paperny, 2002, as cited in Hartzell, 2003) on his documentary *Kink* [Paperny, 2001–2006]). Still, we feel it our responsibility, as anthropologists and filmmakers doing VPA to consider, digest, and thoroughly discuss these risks with the participants as part of our expanded notion of informed consent.

Representation

While risks and dangers to participant safety and well-being are addressed "first"/before filming begins and then throughout, some issues of consent only arise at later stages of filming. The major issue of consent that arises during the editing phase is what footage is to be included in the film. In essence, by consenting to the inclusion of certain scenes (or not), this phase is when participants consent to how their lives and selves are being represented.

Compromising Material

As discussions in Chapters 5–7 illustrate, when conducting ethnography with participants who may have been stigmatized or traumatized, who have expressed emotions that strain against cultural norms, and/or with participants whose behavior may be perceived as shameful – or even, illegal – often the thing most important in their lives is something they both feel a drive to talk about and simultaneously want to keep hidden (Herman, 1992). This can lead to complications around consent; consent may be freely given to include sensitive material at one time, but years later viewing that same material elicits feelings of sadness, regret, and shame, that may make participants reconsider their consent or wish they hadn't given it – sometimes long after the film has been released. Karl Heider has summed up this consent dilemma:

> If a filmmaker acknowledges an obligation to obtain permission, or releases, from the people in the film, then how can the filmmaker arbitrarily declare that the obligation is fulfilled at the time of shooting and that thereafter the subjects have no more rights? On the other hand, if the subjects exercised rights of review throughout, then few films would ever be finished. (Heider, 2006, p. 112)

Interview or observational footage that frames certain participants as victims – and simultaneously other participants as perpetrators – of violent, dangerous, or morally questionable acts, poses another problem: What of this material, if any, to include in the finished film? The ethnographic approach of "do no harm" which opened the chapter includes doing no harm to personal dignity. Here, the seemingly simple ethnographic goal of presenting marginalized or stigmatized individuals as accurately and empathetically as possible is anything but. Should filmmakers tone down or eliminate aspects of the story that are embarrassing, or even incriminating – but accurate – out of ethical considerations? Is inclusion of such material akin to critiquing or condemnation of individuals who have opened up? What if this behavior is important to understanding the themes being explored in the film? How can you balance the "truth" of an ethnographic film, participant protection, and

Fig. 9.2 Darma attending screening of *Bitter Honey*

the subjective responses of multiple participants who may feel differently about what material is accurate or acceptable? These questions, not easily answered, point to the unique requirements and challenges of ethical visual or filmic ethnographic representation versus written forms of representation and analysis (Fig. 9.2).

Ethnographic Representation on Film Versus in Writing

When thinking about ethnographic research methods and presentation, this anticipation of participant and/or community reaction may impact ethnographic filmmaking differently than writing. Viewed critically, visual ethnography puts participants at greater risk for exposure than written forms, because it presents actual faces and actual places. When writing, ethnographers can take certain precautions such as giving pseudonyms to both people and places, creating composite characters, or otherwise altering key identifying details. (We did offer *Bitter Honey* participants the option to use pseudonyms, but ultimately decided against it as their faces would still be recognizable to their local communities.)

It is possible that a written monograph may more freely include diffi-
cult details important to the case, because arguably the writing will not
impact the participant's life as directly. Participants are less likely to read
or share an academic book or article, due to both logistical and experi-
ential access (i.e., written in academic English, perhaps behind a journal
paywall, etc.). Historically, written ethnography was not geared toward
the community it is written about. There have been cases of real upset
and anger when participants encountered depictions of their lives that
they felt pathologized or indicted their communities, culture, and/or
themselves (e.g., Scheper-Hughes, 1983). This impact does not end with
the participants in the ethnography, but can extend over generations;
some children and grandchildren have felt harmed by ethnographies
long-past published, such as the descendants of Malinowski's subjects
(Stuart & Thomson, 2011).

More recent feminist and indigenous film efforts shifted this orien-
tation somewhat, and ethnographers who work closely with individuals
over time have chosen to include participant feedback in their books,
as in projects of "reciprocal ethnography" (Lawless, 2019), but these
efforts (such as Frank, 2000) remain in the minority. And it holds that
the impact of revealing certain details might be mitigated by the genre
of written presentation. A foundational assumption for visual ethnog-
raphy is that film will be more immediately accessible to participants
than writing would be, since it is in their language, and in a globalized,
popularized format that requires no specialized access. Of course, hypo-
thetically an ethnographic filmmaker could choose to release a carefully
edited trailer and show entire films only at conferences, but keeping such
material out of the digital realm would be a trade-off. It would relegate
the film to a certain degree of obscurity and it would make it inacces-
sible to participants and local audiences who may come to feel a sense
of ownership over the film and find new, locally meaningful uses for
it, as we discuss at the end of this chapter. Films in the digital realm
can be more readily accessible to local and global communities. This
confers benefits, but with the participants immediately recognizable, it
can also have serious implications which call for a different construction
of consent and can influence what is included in the finished work.

Given the differences between releasing films and publishing written work, and given a commitment to multimodality inherent to VPA, one possible way to balance the desire to share important details while protecting personal privacy would be to share different material in the film versus in the writing. In other words, films could be edited to present a more sympathetic or at least neutral picture of some participants, and a more complete or nuanced picture could be shared in writing. Of course, such disparate representations pose their own ethical problems – if participants didn't want to be represented a certain way on film, then surely, they wouldn't want to be represented that way on paper. Unless explicitly stated, if the participant declines permission for including the material in the film, it is assumed they decline permission for other modalities as well. Given this, certain material we gathered that would be useful to understanding some of the main topics of the films and this book has been purposely left out.

In the ongoing balancing act of faithfully representing life events while remaining protective of our participants and their wishes, we strive to stay as close as possible to lived experience, without revealing too many details that would be too shameful or have too much of a negative impact within participant communities. For us, achieving this workable median requires ongoing negotiation and reworking, incorporating bidirectional intersubjective acts of empathy in the editing room: How are viewers going to perceive and understand what is going on? How would participants feel watching certain scenes?

Editing is then followed up with the interactive process of screenings of works in progress, to obtain the actual opinions of both participants and focus groups. This process influences what shots, scenes, and narrative trajectories are selected, for better or for worse: On the one hand, film ethnography may more accurately reflect participant lived experience, history, and subjectivity because it undergoes a vetting process whereby participants can tell you whether you "got things right" in the work in progress, a process not frequently available in written ethnography. On the other hand, this same process might influence a filmmaker to edit out potentially illuminating material, knowing a particular participant may not want it included. Participants can assert agency over their representation on screen by approving or vetoing certain scenes or themes

in evolving drafts of film edits. Different participants may have different ideas about the accuracy or acceptability of certain scenes, but a balance can usually be reached, and a version achieved that everyone agrees upon. We always screen versions of our films-in-progress for participant feedback, and their consent to the material, while crucial, raises its own set of ethical considerations.

In-Progress Screenings for Participant Consent and Feedback

Holding screenings and reviews with participants goes back to the beginnings of ethnographic film (Asch et al., 1981; Flaherty, 1922). Some ethnographic filmmakers choose to share daily rushes with participants; current practice, at the very least, includes vetting rough cuts and final edits with participants (Gill, 2014). In our screenings, in addition to vetoing the inclusion of certain scenes that make participants feel uncomfortable, unsafe, or that they feel to be inaccurate, we solicit participants' reactions and suggestions. We record this process and sometimes include it as a reflexive element in the final films.

Whether shown in the film or not, this process can be delicate. As previously discussed, screenings and discussions with the wives from *Bitter Honey* were often held with an eye towards their safety; we did not want their husbands to retaliate against them for saying something perceived as unfavorable. We also wanted to guard their psychological welfare; since the film depicts some unhappy aspects of their marriages and outlines multiple sociocultural factors that limit their agency in improving or leaving these relationships, we worried they could feel overwhelmed or overexposed. The internal politics between Darma's co-wives made the situation more complex; Suciati was often made into the family scapegoat, and we worried that blame for any upsetting scenes might fall more heavily upon her. Given this last point, in 2013, we decided to first screen the film for only Suciati, who watched it alongside Anggreni, a lawyer and women's advocate. Suciati had a positive reaction to the film during this private screening and said she would be comfortable showing the film to her co-wives.

We moved forward with a larger private screening for all of Sadra's and Darma's wives and adult daughters. Indonesian psychologist, Livia Iskandar, and community mental health researcher, Ninik Supartini, facilitated. In the post-screening conversation, filmed by an all-female crew, the situation we feared did not materialize; rather than being divisive, the film united the women, at least for the duration of the conversation. They talked about seeing themselves as sharing the same suffering and positioned themselves to protect one another.

> PURNIASIH: It's like this, I see that these friends here, they have the same sad fate.
> KIAWATI: The same fate.
> SULASIH: The same fate – bad luck, bad luck.

They also liked the idea, proposed by Anggreni since initial consent conversations, of attending screenings at various Balinese villages to facilitate discussions about women's experiences of marriage – this despite the fact that they had initially only felt comfortable with the idea of screening the film outside Indonesia. The only caveat was they wanted a certain scene removed.

The women felt the scene of Darma going to a brothel ("café") and putting his arm around one of the women there was shameful and "unrelated" to the issue of polygamy. However, in our emergent framing of polygamy within Balinese courtship practices and within a larger sphere of male desire and male prerogative, the fact that the men continue to seek sexual encounters outside of their marital relationships seemed relevant, since it is often through these encounters that future co-wives are selected. Secondly, due to high rates of STDs among sex workers, unprotected sexual encounters have the potential to put wives at serious health risk. But the women asked that if the film were to be screened for Balinese audiences, this scene be removed.

We had planned to show the film to the men and their sons the following day with a male-only crew. We asked the women if they would be comfortable with us showing the film to their husbands:

NINIK (community mental health researcher): The last question from us is if, for example, we gather together your husbands, and also your sons, and we show them the film, what do you think will happen?
JULI: He would complain again.
SULASIH: No.
JULI: Maybe.
SULASIH: If he saw it for himself, maybe he wouldn't do that as much.
SUCIATI: He would be aware.
SULASIH: He could become aware.
JULI: He could be ashamed.
SULASIH: He could be ashamed of himself.
JULI: Seeing himself like that.
SULASIH: You can show it.

It is interesting here that the wives were most concerned about a scene that didn't have them in it because they wanted to uphold and protect their husband's dignity. In part, their husband's behavior shames them by extension, but as seen in Chapter 6, protecting a man's dignity is seen as a wife's duty; it is also self-protective, if the man's reaction to feelings of shame is to lash out. The most important audience – the one whose opinion and response has the most direct effect on the participants' lives – is local. When disclosing sensitive information, participants care what their families and communities, not audiences across the world, will think.

Ultimately, after the follow-up screening with the husbands, the agreement reached was that the scene could be kept in the "international" version, but should the film be screened in Bali, as the wives were now in support of, the scene would be left out. When the "screening" here referred to live screening events, which we had control over, this agreement would stand, but it could not realistically cover Internet viewing. With the advent and rapid growth of streaming platforms such as YouTube, which came out in the mid-2000s, all of a sudden, much visual research is potentially instantly accessible anytime, anywhere in the world, for free. So, a Balinese person could end up watching the "international version" via some such site should it be posted there. We discussed these distinctions with the participants, so they would understand that while we agreed not to screen the "offensive" scene at Balinese events, we

Fig. 9.3 First author, Robert, and collaborator, Ninik, watch a rough cut of *Standing on the Edge of a Thorn* with Imam and Tri

could not guarantee control over digital copying and distribution that is an inevitable part of the digital reality (Fig. 9.3).

Screenings, Distribution, and Digital Media

As the discussion with the women in *Bitter Honey* illustrates, consent to what can be shown is related to *where* the finished film can be shown, and this is complicated by nature of today's media environment.

Ethical issues regarding the life of the finished ethnographic film are emergent due to rapid and ongoing developments in digital technology, which add new challenges to long-standing issues. Anthropologists, film-makers, and their participants have long negotiated the particulars of credit, profit, access, and control over the products of visual ethnography alongside processes of informed consent (Asch, 1992). What a filmmaker

can reliably promise when it comes to the distribution or use of a participant's image in a film has been recently questioned (Heider, 2006). The nature of new digital technologies and social media which now permeate our lives facilitate unauthorized reproduction and rapid dissemination of moving images. In this era of global media sharing, it is easy to "burn," "bootleg," or otherwise reproduce digital footage, which can then be screened in venues and/or framed in ways that may be outside of the filmmaker's control, despite best efforts (for a comparative example on unauthorized screenings of ethnographic film that changed its context and interpretation, see Stout, 2014).

Our consent discussions were based on the premise that while the films are largely educational, geared toward Western, Indonesian, and global academic audiences, if the film were to circulate digitally on a site such as YouTube, it could be seen by anyone, anywhere, at any time. This is obviously quite different from previous generations of ethnographic films, where 16- or 35-mm analogue films, and then videotapes, were screened at universities or conferences with limited additional distribution. However, some of our participants were unfamiliar with digital media sharing, such as is now common on social media. For example, in an extended (recorded) discussion of consent with Sadra, we tried to determine what screening formats he felt comfortable with. While he readily agreed to have the whole film or excerpts screened on YouTube, it became clear he was unfamiliar with the Internet. He didn't use email or social media, and from the conversation appeared to think of film as a material object that would be physically transported to screenings and guarded in the interim. The team tried to explain the nature of digital media sharing; we agreed that Sadra would be informed before any digital or live screenings. But does this gap in lived experience temper Sadra's ability to give true consent?

Social and Psychocultural Dynamics of Consent

These consent discussions arising at different phases of filmmaking share a concern: the impact of Javanese/Balinese expectations and habitus of social interaction, image management, and emotional expression,

discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. Given the often-ambivalent relationship of participants to emotions raised and scenarios depicted in the film, consent is already complicated; it becomes even more so as the negotiation of consent is subject to social dynamics and intersubjective interpretations.

Our discussion of consent to risk, pre-filming, referred to participant considerations of family and community, rather than just themselves, when making decisions to join the project. Regarding representation, when participants give their consent to a certain cut of a film at a screening, is there a certain amount of inherent social pressure? Might people answer differently if they were somehow asked anonymously, or didn't have to answer directly to the filmmaker, research team, or fellow participants? And might the social pressures of consent be culturally shaped? Balinese and Javanese cultures are collectivistic and value consensus (Van der Kroef, 1953) and are also largely hierarchical. Depending on class and education levels, some are likely to defer to authority or those in power, which may mean that they are more likely to go with whatever educated research team member, or others with authority in their lives, recommend or request.

These and other psychocultural concerns came into relief dramatically in response to an unauthorized screening of *Bitter Honey* footage, which unearthed a string of previously obscured problems with consent. When original consent was being obtained for *Bitter Honey*, it was agreed that formal screenings would only occur in other areas of Indonesia or abroad, not in Bali. This was due to participant anticipation of shame; participants felt most comfortable with the film being screened where audience members would be complete strangers. Once the film was completed, however, there was a request from Anggreni's organization, LBH Apik, a Balinese NGO working in the area of women's empowerment and protection, to screen the film for Indonesian parliament. Ninik Supartini, a long-term member of our Indonesian research and production team, and an LBH representative went to speak with Sadra to confirm his consent to such a screening.

He gave his consent to this screening at the time, in 2014. But when later interviewed, in 2015, he said he hadn't actually wanted to give permission but was "afraid" to say no because he heard the other families

had already consented. He then explained how the very first time the film team had asked to film him seven years ago, he hadn't "really" wanted to participate, but felt like he "couldn't" refuse because Degung, a participant in the *40 Years* film and one of the research team members for *Bitter Honey*, was his boss Alit's brother. He didn't want Alit to think he was ungrateful for the work he and his wife had been given at Alit's organization. So, enmeshed in this local network of obligations, he named the filming conditions that he felt most comfortable with, but he never "really" wanted to. We formally apologized but felt trust had been broken and damage done. Given that certain reservations might only emerge after the film has been screened, we now realize it might be difficult to ensure "true" consent. And given the cultural specificity of consent negotiations, we must ensure that consent is, in Indonesian terms, given with "sincerity" (B.I. *ikhlas*).

A related concern: Should consent be considered "true" consent if it is being used by the participant as a negotiating tactic? Again, with *Bitter Honey*, we realized that, at times, some participants might have been viewing their consent somewhat instrumentally. While it is understandable, welcome, and ethically required for participants to be adequately compensated for their role in research (American Anthropological Association, 2012), how might this contingency influence the way we view consent per se?

In preparations for the Indonesian Parliament screening Darma, like Sadra, was asked for and gave his consent – and, after the fact, similarly said this wasn't "real" consent because he felt pressured to give it. While the negotiations of consent for this screening were conducted in good faith and with conscious intent, a clip of the film also aired on national television *without* the film team's planning or even knowledge. This happened when the NGO screened a clip of the film for journalists as part of their advocacy work. In violation of our agreement, an NGO worker also copied the feature-length film from DVD from which the clip came and gave this "burned" version to a reporter from TV Bali, who then broadcast parts of the film on Balinese news. Word got back to Darma when his neighbors teased him. He recounted, "It shocked me when somebody said, 'Are you an actor now?' 'Why?' 'I saw you on TV!'

Many people said that to me. 'What was it about?' 'Polygamy.' And they all laughed at me."

This screening had personal and social repercussions for Darma. He lost face among his local community and his entire extended family. Darma says:

> I am not the only one who feels ashamed; I have many parents-in-law because I have many wives, right? … [Their brothers ask me] Why I did that to their sisters. Why I let their sisters become subjects in this film … As if we don't have any dignity. I'm not supposed to treat them that way.

The unauthorized screening also had repercussions for our personal and professional relationship with Darma and the ongoing project. During the subsequent field visit, I explained the difficulties with consent in the age of the Internet. Darma said he understood this but still felt disappointed; he went on, seeking my reassurance that another unauthorized screening would never occur, something that, I tried to clarify, I could not promise.

Darma explained how, from his perspective, the screenings violated the original agreement that the film would not air in Bali. Once he had heard a clip had aired on television, this violation of trust led to him "giving up" on the idea that his consent mattered at all and, so, he gave permission for the film to be screened elsewhere even though he didn't "really" want to. During this conversation another point of contention emerged. Part of his disappointment seemed to be that he hadn't made any money from the television screening. First, he was suspicious that a significant amount of money may have been made but hadn't been shared with him equitably, and second, he worried that others would think he, himself, made a lot of money from it, and be jealous – or, they would think he had been taken advantage of because he didn't.

During our conversation, Darma seemed to see an opportunity and asked that I pay for his health insurance since, as he said, "You must be ashamed and feel you still owe me something." In appreciation of his family's participation in the project, I agreed to help pay for his family's insurance for a year. After this matter was settled, Darma pivoted from his dismay over the unauthorized screenings to emphasize the friendship

between himself and the team. Darma concluded by saying that we can screen whatever version of the film we want, wherever and whenever we want, as long as I agree not to be a "fair weather friend," only helping him out when I need something for the film but forgetting about him when he's old and sick.

So how are we supposed to view this? On the one hand, we can say that Darma has successfully negotiated the terms or compensation that he feels to be appropriate. But how does Darma "really" feel about the film being screened on various media outlets Indonesia? Is this new blanket consent enough from an ethical standpoint? Can we even determine his "true feelings" about the film and is it our responsibility to do so? Do such "true feelings" even exist, or will they be constructed anew at various points in the future?

All consent negotiations share a commitment to minimizing participant risk and discomfort as they join the complex endeavor of making an ethnographic film. Other aspects of filmmaking support this goal, in efforts to ameliorate the potential harms of participation.

Amelioration of Harm

Like consent, amelioration of harm comes at every stage of the filming process. It comes during pre-production, when we prepare a support team for interviews on sensitive matters. It is considered during fieldwork and filming, when the team encounters situations of potential intervention. It is raised again as we think through the implications of film screenings and the impact these screenings have on participants' psyches and lives.

Psychological Protection and Amelioration of Harm for Participants During Sensitive Interviews

Interviews with those who have been – or still are – subject to fear, violence, and stigmatization must be conducted with forethought to possible negative psychological consequences or sequelae. There are risks

here, particularly for people telling their story for the first time. (If the story has been told before and it is somewhat rehearsed by the time of filming, the tellers may have most likely habituated to the emotional component of it and therefore may have less difficulty managing their emotional and psychological response; Beddard-Gilligan et al., 2017.) Of course, even a repeated trauma narrative may elicit overwhelming reactions. Primary of these is re-experiencing the pain, loss, fear, and other complex emotions associated with episodes of trauma, stigma, or violence. Just rumination and "imaginal" exposure present risks to the traumatized person, even in a therapeutically supportive setting (Echiverri et al., 2011; Maddox et al., 2019).

At minimum, we knew interviewer and interviewee must be prepared for a strong emotional response. Before any filmed interview where we anticipated painful material would be narrated, we had off-camera discussions with the participants about this eventuality and informed them that not only would we approach these topics or memories sensitively and slowly, but that they could stop the interview at any time if the material was too painful to recount (as is standard in informed consent for ethnographic interviewing; Iphofen, 2013). We conducted off-camera interviews with some participants before filming, to help them prepare. This is a debated practice; while pre-interviewing helps build rapport and allows helps participants relax, it can also be fatiguing and make interviews sound rehearsed (Barbash & Taylor, 1997). We sometimes used a skeletal crew; particularly when interviewing women about traumatic episodes of gendered violence, such as Suciati's abduction or Tri's rape, we used a single camera and only one female interviewer to create a more intimate setting.

Having the appropriate mental health professionals on our field-work team, such as Mahar, Ninik, and Livia, was invaluable. A small percentage of people being interviewed about their traumatic experience will have an acute and negative psychological response, up to and including psychosis (Kinzie, 2007). We were attuned to reactions outside of the cultural norm, which could potentially point toward a serious negative impact on the participant's mental health, and always had clinically trained support available should a participant decompensate and have a more serious psychiatric response to an interview question. We

also checked in on participants and significant members of their family and social network who were involved in the production after interviews where troubling content was revealed, or where participants had an emotionally difficult time.

There is a tension here, in that the purposes of filmmaking desire strong emotional responses, even though they may be overwhelming for participants. This doesn't mean that they should be provoked, but, should they emerge, there are ways to sensitively and thoughtfully capture and represent them.

These concerns were magnified during our interviews with children and youth. Some of the material of Budi and Lisa as young children is the most memorable and moving footage of our whole film corpus. But filming *any* child, who as developing beings have agency but are inherently vulnerable (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007) raises a host of issues, let alone filming those who have been traumatized or stigmatized, although numerous visual ethnographers have done so (Büttner, 2011; Demetz et al., 2008; Koch, 2013; Mourão, 2006; Qin, 1997; Seftel, 1992; Wolowic, 2008).

When filming children, we used the same person-centered methodology as with adults, albeit with a gentler approach to questioning about painful events, memories, or processes. Above all, we let the children guide the interview. For the films discussed here we had our psychological support team in place, and adhered to protocols and guidelines in the field, including obtaining informed consent from the appropriate responsible adult, giving the child as much control as possible over the interview, asking open-ended and nonjudgmental questions, keeping interviews to age-appropriate lengths and being vigilant for signs of emotional exhaustion, and using their imagery and commentary judiciously with a primary responsibility toward their well-being (Chin, 2013; Iphofen, 2013).

We have found that filming children requires a more patient, gentle, and quiet approach where interviewer and film team need to be as tuned in to who the children are as people as much as the story they are telling. This supportive relationship building with children can amplify the already protective instinct typical to an adult–child dynamic, which sometimes elicits the urge to intervene more directly to alleviate their

suffering. On numerous occasions, Ninik and/or I found ourselves spontaneously assuming the role of confidante and counselor. For example, in the early interview with Budi featured in the beginning of *40 Years*, he ultimately broke down into tears and could not continue. Ninik came to his side and comforted him, as seen in the film. This gesture and this moment began an enduring relationship between Budi and the research team, which has now lasted for almost twenty years.

Sometimes these protective impulses toward children translate into more direct and extended intervention, as when a moment of overwhelming concern moved Ninik and the team to take on a significantly involved role in Lisa's life, which raises the question of intervention.

Interventions

Intervention is much debated in anthropology; stances run the gamut from absolutely no intervention to full investment and involvement in participants' lives. Some filmmakers have included their interventions into their subjects' lives in their films. For example, *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (O'Rourke, 1991) documents the daily life of Aoi, a Thai sex worker, but also presents the filmmaker's problematic relationship with her. Not only are they in a sexual relationship, but also he has offered her the "reward" of a rice farm for participation in the film. Given Aoi's evident discomfort in some scenes, his involvement with her comes troublingly close to mirroring the exploitative exchanges of voyeurism and prostitution.

We have found that even well-intentioned interventions into family dynamics, even in situations of family violence where we feel greatly compelled to intervene, are bound to backfire and are ethically best avoided, if only on that ground. We have discussed that ethical problem at greater length elsewhere (Lemelson, 2013; Lemelson & Tucker, 2017). And yet sometimes we are still moved to intervene.

Financial Support and Mentorship

The desire to intervene is a consistent ethical challenge, as Lisa's case makes clear. In 2012, Ninik went to interview Lisa and found her in distress. Lisa was living alone in a rented room; her mother, seemingly unwilling or unable to care for her further, had gone to live with Wiji. Her father, apparently in the throes of a breakdown after his marital dissolution, had disappeared. Over the course of the interview, the building sense of Lisa's abandonment, loss, and longing for her parents turned dire when Lisa revealed that Wiji had become threatening and predatory.

   Ninik, who had been offscreen during the interview, stepped in to provide both emotional support and practical protection. She said:

   NINIK: You have to listen to this, OK? Please stay away from him. OK?
      … Do not stay in the same house with him. If you miss your mother,
      text her to visit you here. Why do I say it? You know, if he gets angry
      at night while you are there, your mother becomes powerless, what can
      he do to you, do you think?
   LISA: He can do anything he wants to me.
   NINIK: Exactly. He can do anything he wants to you. For that reason,
      if you miss your mother, or if you feel fed up here … you want to go
      places, you can text me, take a bus and get off in front of my office and
      I can pick you up there. OK? You're much safer at my place than in the
      same house with your mother and [Wiji]. Remember that, OK?
   LISA: Yes.

Ninik's involvement in Lisa's life continued, long past the movie's 2012 release. The team was quite concerned that Lisa was in danger of being trafficked into the sex trade. After extensive discussions, we decided to help her avoid this by providing enough financial support for her rent, school fees, and daily expenses, a situation she alludes to near the end of the film. We only took this step because, by then, after having worked with the family for over a decade, Ninik viewed Lisa almost as an adopted daughter. Within the normative and "widespread practice of informal fostering" in Java, where "most [children] establish relations of ritual kinship with several adults beyond the nuclear family" (Beatty, 2002, p. 475) she felt that this sort of intervention was appropriate and could

potentially alter the course of Lisa's life in a very positive way. The alternative was to do less (or nothing) and possibly witness Lisa being sexually victimized and exploited.

> NINIK: Well, if for some reason your mother can't give you pocket money, in fact you need to eat, run out of rice, do text me. OK? … With one condition, you study seriously and stay away from dangers. Alright? … Your biological parents may not be able to take care of you now but there are other "parents" who are willing to support you.
> ROB: Lisa, you know that we want to help you. I have worked with Dr. Mahar and Bu Ninik for 15 years and they're good people. Their hearts are full of love for you. If you have problems, please call her. (*Lisa nods her head*). We have big hopes for your future.
> NINIK to LISA: Now you're relieved, right?

Of course, these sort of moralistic, neocolonial "savior" behaviors stemming from our fantasies about the impact we might have on our participants' lives are problematic, although perhaps more forgivable, given Lisa's age and promise, and our long-standing relationship with her. In this case, they soon collided with the realities of Lisa's life. Although the $50 or so a month we were providing was sufficient to meet her basic needs, she took actions to further improve her economic standing, including working in billiard halls and karaoke clubs. These jobs are considered gateways to, if not euphemisms for, sex work as described in Chapter 4. So, if our intervention was intended to have kept Lisa away from such activities, it was clearly misguided.

Our financial support and mentorship of Lisa was our longest and most involved attempt to intervene to date, but there were situations that moved us in all three films and, in general, we have found a non-interventionist stance to be quite difficult. The various interventions differed – and some might not necessarily be obvious as such to the viewer. Some were initiated by the participants and some by the filmmakers, as the example just described; some were put to film purposes and others' greatest impact was beyond the frame. Here we share examples from the other two films.

Confronting Perpetrators

There were two instances of what could be considered interventions in *40 Years*, with different approaches, motivations, and participant involvement.

The first occurred after an interview at the orphanage where Budi stayed; with his parents, Mahar, Ninik, and me present, Budi expressed the desire to return to, or at least see, his home. He above all wanted to live with his parents, but also wanted to go back to the house they had lived in three years prior, before it had been destroyed. We were hesitant to bring him there, as we knew he would probably be overwhelmed; there was also the risk of running into the same hostile villagers that had burned down the house. But we realized such a scene could provide a resonant visual representation of the loss that '65 survivors felt (Chapter 5). We brought Budi and his mother to their old house and both of them did indeed have a powerful emotional response. This scene ultimately became a significant turning point in the film, as it allowed Budi to reflect upon his past life and Mini to reflect upon her attempts to morally train her children in response to violence and oppression. While this was a rather minor intervention, and one requested by the participants, it was still not something they necessarily would have done without the film team's involvement.

In the second instance, the film team initially suggested Degung's more direct confrontation of a neighborhood perpetrator, which for him posed a dilemma. On the one hand, Degung had longed to confront this man – who claimed he wanted "reconciliation" – for years, and the film finally gave him the "excuse" and structure for doing so. But Degung also worried his extended family would be enraged; convinced as they were that the man had a hand in the murder of Degung's father and others in the compound, they all had been avoiding him for years. Here, Degung's personal feelings of fear, grief, anger, and indignation conflicted with what he saw as an ethnographic need for objectivity, politeness, and respect.

DEGUNG: This is a hard one … I haven't seen him. I try to avoid talking with him. […] I worry, to be honest with you, my family will be pissed

off with me. That, I try to approach him when my family does not see him – but the thing is, he lives in front of my family.

ROB: I know what's the good stuff and […] some sort of, if not resolution, some sort of change, makes for dramatic tension in the film.

LESLIE (Anthropologist, '65 Expert, and Degung's wife): You   know, because it's not just about dramatic tension in the film, Degung. It's about being responsible anthropologists in the sense that you can't write a chapter of a book about the 1965 Park[2] and only talk to [those] who built it and how they think it's a great thing. … You have to also talk to the other side, the people who don't agree with it, and you don't know that they're not willing to talk. You just are scared to talk to them.

DEGUNG: As anthropology, it's important. For the film, it's important. Being polite with him. I have to respect him so he can talk, you know … "The project makes me do it." Just, that should be the title of it … Because we need to talk with him. [But] I'm not reconciled with him at all, I'm telling you.

During the confrontation captured on screen, the man managed to both formally deny any wrongdoing and reassert his dominance over Degung and his family. Degung emerged no less conflicted than he had begun. He said he would continue to avoid the man, and an old visceral anger was reanimated by the exchange. When asked if he felt at all reconciled Degung mused:

I feel good to talk to him. At least I confront it … Do you think I'm reconciled with him? What do you mean "reconciled"? Because I talked to him, I'm reconciled with him? [Just] because we needed to talk with him, I'm not reconciled at all, I'm telling you. […] To talk with him and then you know, when it [will] happen again, we never know. When there is a chance to punch each other up, anytime. Anytime.

Degung concluded that the intervention elicited both anger and a kind of happiness. Clearly it didn't "solve" anything and it provided

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2 The '65 Park is an installation in Degung's natal compound that is a memorial dedicated to the victims of '65 and a space for artworks, meetings, and performances (Chapter 2). It is featured in the side bar of the closing credits of *40 Years*.
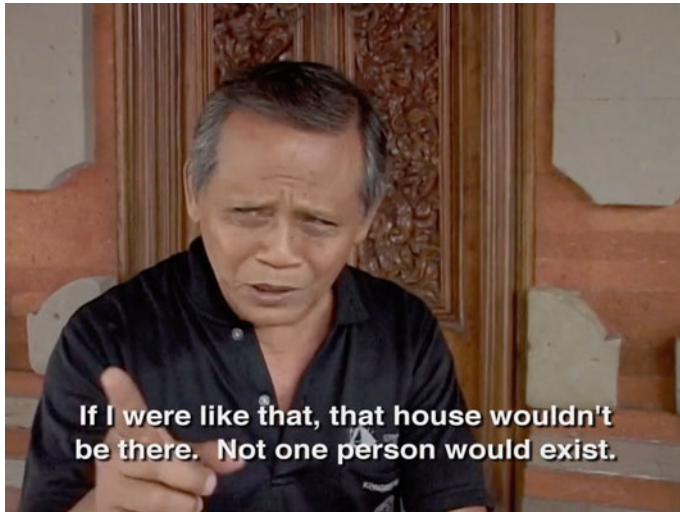
Fig. 9.4 Ketut

no real personal resolution. Still, these two participant-initiated inter-
ventions point to the way film might act as a sort of "stimulant" that
allows participants to experiment with behaviors that have deep truth
or meaning for them but that they would not necessarily undertake
or engage with outside the filmmaking process or environment. Like
the moments of *curhat* in interviews described in Chapter 7, these
film-facilitated interventions allow Degung and Budi to use the filming
process to stage a performative reckoning with their past (Fig. 9.4).

Formal Mediation

The intervention in *Bitter Honey* was the formal mediation conducted
by a human rights attorney to deal with allegations of abuse (Chap-
ters 3 and 7). Purniasih reached out for help with her abusive marriage
multiple times, and we arranged her initial meeting with Anggreni. Once
Anggreni recommended an intervention, and the couple agreed to partic-
ipate, we decided to film it. While again, this intervention was likely to
evoke a strong emotional response, we had trust in Anggreni's expertise

and anticipated the encounter could connect the overarching themes of the film.

Several years afterward, during reflexive interviews on the filmmaking process, Purniasih said the mediation had some positive long-term outcomes. She reported that she and Sadra fought less frequently, and when they did the fight was less likely to escalate into physical violence. She felt Sadra truly took to heart the advice from Alit, his boss, to stop beating her. Sadra, in a similar interview, confirmed this assessment: Having outsiders notice and disapprove of his violent behavior made him introspect and reconsider. Sadra greatly values Alit's opinion, seeing him as educated and worldly. Since the intervention, he and Alit have established a relationship that Sadra views as a sort of mentorship, and he thinks film participation and the friendship, guidance, and counsel that followed have given him valuable life experience.

In short, interventions can take different forms, initiated by either the filmmakers or the participants. Participant requests for intervention can be read as assertions of agency in the filmmaking process. While these interventions have been rare, in our filmmaking practice, if done thoughtfully, in collaboration with both the participants and knowledgeable and trustworthy partners, the results can be both a more compelling film, and possibly improved life circumstances for the participants.

Screenings and Malu

In cases of trauma, stigmatization, violence, and loss, the public screening of a film can be itself be considered a form of intervention, as it introduces new actions, roles, and representations into personal experience and public discourse. This kind of intervention might be positive. In cases where the losses of trauma are publicly acknowledged, the ongoing embodied memories of fear may abate and complicated grief resolved. Where acknowledgment of this loss is forbidden, they may continue, along with feelings of shame (Aron, 1992; Douglass & Vogler, 2003; Lusting, et al., 2004). Films that reframe the experiences of those who have been silenced, and thus contribute to public acknowledgment, might support this process. Or, depending on the local cultural context,

audience response, and personal reactions, it might exacerbate feelings of vulnerability, exposure, and shame.

Once film shooting and all associated activities have been completed, there remains to be considered the potential harm that might come from film screening and distribution, particularly the impact on participants viewing themselves on film. Seeing a documentation and/or public presentation of their recounting episodes of traumatization, victimization, or stigmatization again risks triggering painful psychological states or re-introducing these contexts into participants' lives in a new form. This concern is highlighted for us, given Javanese and Balinese psychocultural norms, dynamics, and evaluations regarding the public display of "negative" emotions (see Chapters 6 and 7). While not discounting these harms, we have found that confronting stigma via film screenings, having an open discussion about it with fellow Indonesians, and transforming this difficult experience into the feeling of helping others has added an unanticipated ethical dimension to the films.

Some participants reported feeling shame (B.I. *malu*) at seeing their lives depicted on screen, even when they felt those depictions were accurate. These feelings link back both to original reported reactions to experiences of traumatization and stigmatization, as described in Chapter 6, and to earlier phases of filming, as described in Chapter 7. This culturally shaped sense of "shame" can encapsulate both the "negative" and "positive" senses of shame.

Negative shame arises over losing control and failing to uphold typical norms of emotional expression; over reflecting on personal behavior that one is not proud of; due to internalized stigma; and as a result of feeling like one's bad behavior has been made public for the scrutiny of extended family, community, and even nation. For example, Edy felt ashamed of his own weeping when recounting the episode when his mother, in her shock and fear and grief, beat his little brother for likely causing her husband's capture and death. This weeping was captured on camera and included in *40 Years*, but Edy also wept during screening events when discussing that same episode with American students. He says:

> I told them a lot of stories, you know, and there was no sadness or anything like that. It went smoothly. But when I came to that part, I

cried uncontrollably. Then I realized – well, I was ashamed that I cried that way, I was indeed ashamed. I was hysterical, you see? From that event, I realized that I had trauma which I wasn't aware of for years, which did not heal for thirty years.

This excess of uncontainable emotion in Edy's case is embarrassing for him (although it might have been moving for others present) but indicates no wrongdoing. Other participants experienced shame upon viewing the films because it led them to confront and reflect on their past behavior, which they felt was wrong. Imam says:

I felt hurt when I watched the movie. How could I be like that? How could I do it? I was ashamed of myself. Really ashamed of myself, why I did what I did.

Other participants experienced shame that their socially disvalued behavior was made public for the scrutiny of family and community. Sadra said he isolated himself in the aftermath of one screening because he feared others would interpret the film as his tacit encouragement of a stigmatized lifestyle, saying, "[E]ven though in the community there isn't … anyone who says anything, I feel ashamed, and sometimes I'm too embarrassed to go out." Degung was ashamed to watch himself breaking family taboos against speaking to the alleged perpetrator responsible for the deaths in his family, even speaking politely to him.

But some shame can be considered, at least by some to be "positive" or instructive shame. Some of the wives from *Bitter Honey* say the film process and screening "taught shame" to their husbands. Rasti reports that Darma has learned to control some of his more violent impulses. Purniasih says that "Since Rob filmed us, Sadra is not as harsh as before – he feels ashamed to fight now." For his part, Sadra is not sure whether the film spurred him to this change or whether it was part of a maturational process:

First, this film brought me shame, I thought to myself, "Oh, how bad I am that a Westerner should stop me from doing such things." That's why I feel like I should change […] But actually I shouldn't learn that from other people, I should learn by introspection […] I should ask for advice

from friends. […] Yes. Well, [even] if this film didn't exist, I would have changed my violent behavior through growing up. I am old now, when I was violent let's say I was thirty years old, and now I am fifty years old should I still do it? Won't I change myself? If this film did not exist, I would have changed anyway.

While we want to avoid eliciting painful feelings such as shame with our films, this shame may not always be felt to be a bad thing – instead it may indicate to the participant, for themselves, a need for further thought, change, or even healing (Fig. 9.5).

The above dynamics of shame are primarily internal, but shame might also arise in relation to audience reactions. While narrative and stylistic devices are intended to guide interpretation, filmmakers have little control over how audiences view their films – sometimes films have actually had the opposite effect on viewers than what was intended, such as reinforcing instead of combating stereotypes (Ruby, 1995). The general American audience reaction to *Bitter Honey*, for example, seemed to engender a blanket condemnation of polygamy.

Fig. 9.5 "Women only" screening of *Bitter Honey*, attended by mothers and daughters, and facilitated by psychologist Livia Iskandar

Now there are even more opportunities for diverse communities to watch ethnographic films, and by extension such films now have the potential to play some role in influencing individual or community understanding of a particular issue, event, practice, or experience – for better or for worse. When we made *Thorn* available on YouTube, we were disheartened to see negative commentary on the family from fellow Indonesians, such as one who commented (English translation), "This is crazy, bro, I'm a native Javanese myself but I never thought that such a screwed-up demon like this could ever exist" (January 17, 2020, comment by Paket Wisata Samalona Kodingareng Makassar on *Thorn*). With such negative feedback, there is a danger of a "looping effect" (Hacking, 1995) where the meaning and interpretation given to the expression of suffering onscreen by local and national audiences might compound that suffering by impacting the participant's own interpretation. In cases of shame, conflict, and unauthorized screenings, as discussed above, this loop might be quite negative. But if the participants are met with positive audience reaction that helps them feel that their experience has been acknowledged and understood by the film audience despite having been previously disvalued or silenced in local contexts, or if they find a greater purpose in their film participation, as advocacy or activism, this loop has the potential to be positive.

Films as Advocacy, Participants as Advocates

A reaction that has arisen in us at times, in participants, in viewers: What can be done to address the violence and stigmatization depicted on screen? As described above, we have sometimes been moved to initiate, or asked to facilitate, more direct intervention. And as described in Chapter 8, via highlighting of emotional personal stories, the films we make are explicitly trying to invite this kind of engagement in viewers.

But what is our ethical responsibility as filmmakers? In the case of films like the ones we have discussed in this book, where emergent accounts reveal troubling stories of violence, abuse, stigmatization, suffering, and vulnerability, do we have a responsibility to engage in broader advocacy, activism, and/or on the ground interventions related

to the issues the films raise (Pink, 2013)? Some ethnographers might say yes, although then there is further debate as to whether such activism should be separate from the more dispassionate research collection (e.g., Scheper-Hughes, 1995) or whether the two are inseparable since anthropological knowledge arises from the anthropologist's active participation in the observed scene (Rechtman, 2017, pp. 133–134, on anthropologist Veena Das). Ethnographic filmmakers past and present, such as John Marshall with the Kalahari Bushmen (Durington, 2004; Fischer, 2018) and Jean Marie Hallacy with Burmese military rape survivors (Agrawal, 2018; Hallacy, 2018), have seen themselves as advocates and/or activists and partnered with local organizations (and indeed, in the contemporary politics of film funding that some ethnographic films might qualify for, grantors often ask about the film's envisioned real-world impact and/or any associated outreach activities).

I see the tasks of an anthropologist to be documenting, analyzing, and representing the ethnographic realities I am presented with and embedded within in as comprehensible a way as possible and sharing these with as wide an audience as possible – in America, internationally, but increasingly and especially, in Indonesia. As discussed in Chapter 1, films made with VPA methodology can be a most effective medium to achieve these goals, especially when considered alongside their public presentation and dissemination with formats such as small- and large-scale screenings, discussions with the audience, panel presentations with characters and project collaborators, and associated publications. There are multiple forms and forums in which the films and associated activities and ethnographic products can address issues of key social and societal concern.

While the goals of each film may differ, there has been a common pathway toward activism in the making and usage of all three films. All three films depict individuals not just undergoing personal development, but grappling with issues that are part of larger social changes in Indonesia. Each film's personal narratives and chronologies of trauma, violence, and stigmatization have ultimately been situated in relation to Indonesian movements that seek to shift the focus from isolated story to political engagement. The narratives of all the films are emergent and iterative and, in response to participants input and our experiences in the

field in Chapter 8, so have the films role in advocacy and activism been emergent, and the participants have had a large role to play in that.

For example, *Thorn*'s evolution into an activist film was quite unexpected. It began as a study of Imam, increasingly focused on Tri, but once the team became invested in Lisa's story and life outcome, the film eventually was put to use in a way that might protect and empower girls like her. Its use as an anti-sex trafficking awareness raising tool by NGOs and other organizations in Indonesia to advocate for vulnerable girls and women was a surprising development.

40 Years, which was theoretically oriented to illustrate links between childhood violence and oppression and adult outcome, quickly evolved into a political intervention offering an alternative history of 1965 and its aftermath. This had clear activist implications, which have been taken up enthusiastically in Indonesia, where open discussion and accurate information about the events of 1965 remains quite restricted.

As described in Chapter 2 of this volume, the last twenty years have witnessed radical changes in Indonesian public culture surrounding 1965, changes that have amplified since the film's release, and that I experienced firsthand. Shortly after the film's United States release, it was unofficially banned in Indonesia. Soon after this in 2009, I was denied a film permit to continue my work there. When an Indonesian employee of Elemental Productions went to the consulate to enquire about this, the information officer said that he thought I was a "communist" and political agitator. They would issue a tourist visa for me but if I did anything other than tourist activities (such as filming, meeting with Indonesians associated with the film projects, or doing any presentations, talks, or screenings) I would be arrested. It would take two-and-a-half years, multiple inquiries, and significant advocacy by my Indonesian colleagues to obtain permission to work in Indonesia again (although the proviso, off the record, was that should I continue the *40 Years* project or research any other politically sensitive topics, I would be banned from returning to Indonesia for life). However, a new Consular General came to LA the following year. He was sympathetic and understanding about the purposes of the *40 Years* project and even hosted a screening of the film at the LA consulate. This was attended by over 300 Indonesians, and the discussion following the film was lively and wide ranging, pointing

to a glimmering of change in the pall of fear and silence over '65 in the local Indonesian community.

In Indonesia, proper public screening and dissemination of the film have ultimately proved useful for those seeking to open up dialogue about the events. The first large-scale public screenings of *40 Years* occurred at Atmajaya University in 2013, when I first returned to Indonesia after having my visa denied. Other screenings at various state and private universities, community and human rights venues were well attended. One screening was hosted by the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission, Komnas HAM. Screenings at university campuses were mostly attended by students, but the public (including survivors of '65) often joined them as well. Another special screening was held in Solo, in the city hall, and was attended by students and more than 200 elderly survivors. When the first strains of *genjer-genje*r played in the film, there were audible gasps of shock, followed by tears. As in the LA screening, there were lively and engaged discussions following the film.

The questions and comments that audience members posted provided a fascinating view into how Indonesians understood the events of 1965 and their aftermath. We had one noteworthy exchange with a psychiatric resident at the prestigious Gadja Madah University who was also a Lieutenant Colonel in the army. He introduced himself in a friendly manner, then continued:

> First, there's a saying that we're all familiar with, that "revolution eats her or his own daughter or son." Probably, we are not sure if communists did something bad here. How about in Cambodia? When the communists made a *coup d'état*, how many millions died? What they did was more or less the same as what happened in Indonesia. It was a tragedy and my deep respect goes to all survivors that are here. However, we need to have a broader perspective. How about America? When I was sent to East Timor – America said that East Timor had to be overcome and, so, we were sent there. But when we were there, we were blamed for committing human rights violations. So, how about that? Actually, what has America learned after committing so many mistakes?

In the brief discussion that followed, I and historian Baskara Wardaya acknowledged American culpability but resisted the troubling comparison of Indonesia to Cambodia and asserted the difference between "being pro-communist" and acknowledging that violence done to Indonesian alleged communists was a human rights violation. After this exchange the respondent concluded:

> I don't know. I'm confused myself. As a soldier, I might have been indoctrinated about it, but I also notice – although I may be wrong – that communists cause a lot of damage … What is the true history? I don't know either, but I think reconciliation is an alternative … We should forget the past and wisely move forward with our lives.

This commentary underscored the ongoing need for first-person testimony, despite the resistance to modes of response alternative to the psychoculturally and politically supported desire to "forget." This exists in tension with questions at other screenings that bespoke an openness to exploring topics previously forbidden, such as, "So, what were the communists *actually* like"? The juxtaposition of these comments and orientations shows Indonesians struggling to understand the history around 1965, and the moral and ethical positions they subjectively take to understand this history and see its relevance for the future (Fig. 9.6).

The most interesting of the screenings have been the ones the participants attended and joined in a question-and-answer process with the audience as well as presenting statements about their involvement in the project and its meaning for them personally. For example, at a screening at Lanny's school, Budi was asked, "Do you still have revenge in your heart?" Budi responded by illustrating his internal changes and understandings of both his life circumstances and how these were shaped and influenced by the socio-political climate in Indonesia. He further said that as a result of this emergent political consciousness, he was no longer interested in revenge but rather wanted to use his experience to help Indonesians "open their eyes" about 1965 and its implications and impact.

Fig. 9.6 Ninik, Rob, and Budi answering questions after screening at Lanny's school

Some *40 Years* participants, such as Degung and Lanny, were activists per se before they began the film. Others would not identify as activists, yet many have developed what could be considered an activist orientation toward their participation in the film. In other words, they realize that through the films, they may be able to educate or empower others in similar situations or contribute to what they see as meaningful social change. While Mini does not see herself as an activist, she does see her participation in the film as a contribution to justice and posterity. She says, "I have hopes that people who used to hate those who were seen as PKI, and who also believed the empty words of Suharto, they see the truth."

The development or activation of an advocacy orientation in film participants in reaction to the film process was also seen in *Bitter Honey*. Originally intended to illustrate the subjective experience of marriage and kinship forms and male domination, the film has come, in Indonesia at least, to be seen and used as an activist film bringing awareness to women's experiences.

We did not originally intend to use the *Bitter Honey* film for advocacy purposes. After extended field research, we did engage with partnerships on the ground, with Anggreni's organization LBH Apik Bali, which works in the area of women's protection and empowerment.

But we originally saw this as separate from the film proper. Throughout editing work on the film, we did debate what kind of a film we want to make but decided against an earlier cut, which highlighted the wives' perspectives, because we felt it was too one-sided to be considered ethnographic. We were trying to avoid taking sides on the cultural practice ourselves, while still demonstrating the subjective experiences of polygamy and its associated behavior and beliefs. Despite desiring a balance that attempted to accurately, if not dispassionately, depict the lives of these families – wives, husbands, and children – some participants still felt committed to using the films in advocating for greater protections for women.

This impetus came from the wives and from Balinese human rights lawyer Luh Putu Anggreni, whose career was devoted to advocating for women's rights, and who had been invited to participate in the film due to her expertise with the legal contexts of marriage law and later, as a mediator. But it also came from the wives themselves, as over the course of filmmaking they were introduced to more activist or empowerment models for their situation, through conversations with Anggreni and others. This is reflected in the wives' gradual shift in attitude toward screenings of the film in Indonesia. If, in the early years of consent negotiations, they were opposed to the idea, by the end of filming some were enthusiastic about it. For example, Suciati, once so reticent, now embraced the idea of showing the film in Bali saying, "This film indeed needs to be shown to the society. Yes, for the future, for the women who come after us, so that they don't experience what we are experiencing now." Murni agreed the film could have a beneficial social impact for women like her:

> I am grateful for it, because […] people might think about it … and it could be a lesson for the men, what it feels like to have your husband take another wife. For both women and men, it could help to prevent it, to limit it.

This participant investment in the film's distribution and use could be seen as a quite positive development from an ethical perspective. As Pink says:

> If ethnography is seen as a process of negotiation and collaboration with participants, through which they too stand to achieve their own objectives, rather than as an act of taking information away from them, the ethical agenda also shifts. By focusing on collaboration and the idea of creating something together, agency becomes shared between the researcher and the participant. Rather than the researcher being the active party who both extracts data and gives something else back, in this model both researcher and participant invest in, and are rewarded by, the project. (Pink, 2013, p. 65)

But *Bitter Honey*'s use for activist purposes, based on participant investment, caused ethical concerns and problems with consent, which had not been granted for that purpose, with other participants – namely, the husbands. The lean toward a more instrumental use of the film by some in Balinese society to shame violent husbands or share the wives' perspectives had a significant impact on the women's and men's relationships with their families, surrounding communities, and took on a new significance in the context of political women's rights activism.

The trajectory and conflicts over how *Bitter Honey* was used by different collaborators points to larger debates about different film participants assuming a sense of collaboration and partnership while maintaining their own ideas about what the project "means" in their lives. The ways *they* work to "widen the frame" for its use are ways that we, as filmmakers, may not anticipate or intend, and the resulting feelings of empowerment or vulnerability bring new insights into the dynamics of living with and responding to violence, stigma, and trauma. The results of this use, both exciting and troubling for ourselves and our participants, add a new and final ethical dimension to our films.

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