

BITTER HONEY

PRESS KIT



ELEMENTAL
productions

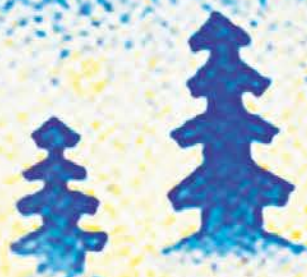
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SYNOPSIS



The hidden faces of polygamy in Bali

View trailer at

<http://vimeo.com/92084411>

Bitter Honey is a feature-length documentary presenting an intimate and emotionally charged portrait of three polygamous families in Bali, Indonesia. Following these families over a seven year period, the film portrays the plight of Balinese co-wives, for whom marriage is frequently characterized by psychological manipulation, infidelity, domestic violence, and economic hardship. (81 min)

WHY THIS FILM MATTERS



Living in a society where men have authority in many domains, these women have little voice in steering or protesting the conditions of their domestic lives. Yet, perhaps because of Bali's world-renowned image as a "tropical paradise" for tourists, local, national, and international communities have looked the other way. *Bitter Honey* draws attention to the struggle of Balinese co-wives, documents the work of those taking steps to better protect and empower them, and aims to trigger a wider conversation about contemporary polygamy and women's rights in Indonesia.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I have been making documentary films in Indonesia for almost twenty years. After I made a film about the mass killings that occurred there in 1965-66 I began to investigate political brutality, in particular the horrific mass rapes that occurred during the 1998 economic crisis and the fall of the Suharto regime.

Realizing that this episode of violence was only one piece of the larger puzzle of gender inequality in Indonesia today, I began to interview a number of women who had suffered domestic violence or abuse. Some of these women were Balinese and a number of them turned out to be part of polygamous families. I overcame some initial hesitance to start a project about polygamy because, trained as an anthropologist, I was reluctant to portray a kind of marriage that certain audiences might judge negatively. But I soon realized that the emotional stories these wives have to tell held a powerful message about the rela-

tionships between men and women and the ways social rules and structures can put women at a disadvantage—or even trap or subjugate them.



For the families I got to know, ongoing male domination and control determine the course of women's domestic, intimate, and economic lives. Yet in this and other ways, polygamous unions are similar to typical marriages. The struggles of polygamous wives are simply an extension of the over-

all diminished sense of choice and agency that women still experience in many public and private spheres. Yet this film shows that there are potential solutions and tangible ways to improve the conditions that cause women to suffer.

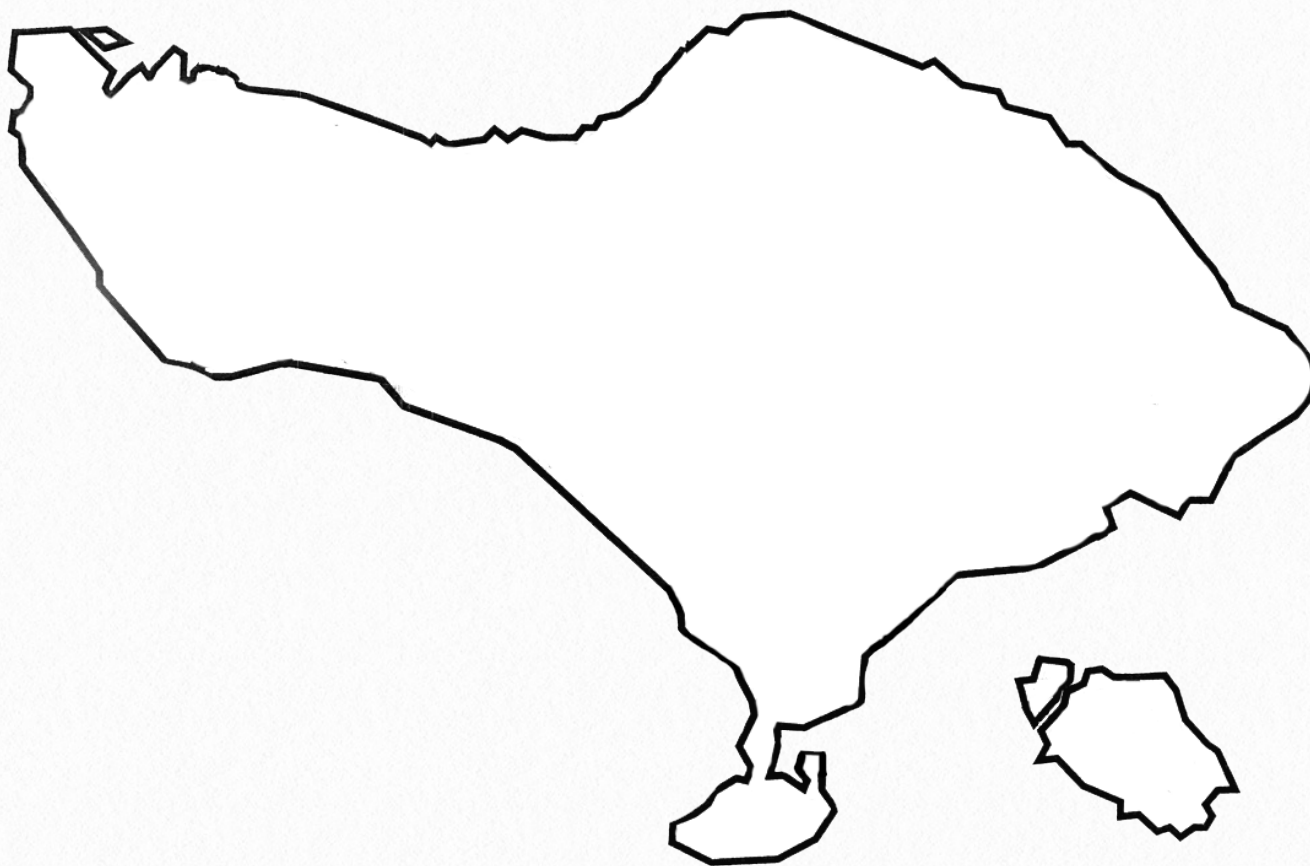


I was lucky to work with a team of Balinese collaborators who advised me in making this film. We hope that it accurately portrays the complexities of the lives of these families. For Balinese viewers, film screenings with activists have already spurred discussions amongst women about their options and the opportunities for empowerment and positive change in their lives. For others it will offer a window into a world rarely seen, or seen accurately, by outsiders.

TOPICS OF INTEREST

Located in the Indonesian archipelago, **Bali** is a small island that is home to about 4.2 million people. Despite multiple outside influences, the island has maintained its local culture, language and religion. Today Bali is world-renowned as a tourist paradise but most visitors only scratch the surface of cultural complexity and everyday life on the island.

Existing in many different cultures and amongst people of many different faiths on every continent worldwide, **polygamy** is the practice of having more than one spouse at the same time. The subtle differences in polygamy from place to place reflect the different social, political and kinship structures of the given society in which it occurs.



Some Balinese women find themselves in polygamous marriages against their will, but have little social or legal recourse. This reveals deep and widespread **gender inequality** that persists in Balinese society and Indonesian law.

Some Balinese women experience **domestic abuse** in their polygamous marriages. Women's rights activists suggest that such treatment may be present in many monogamous marriages throughout Bali as well, but **violence against women** remains poorly documented. Many women fear the stigma of reporting an incidence of violence and remain unaware of their rights and the social welfare services at their disposal.

Women may face significant difficulty if they try to end unsatisfactory or violent marriages. While **divorce** is legal in Bali, it generally comes at a high cost to women, leading to social stigmatization and financial instability. Women who follow through with divorce will frequently also face the loss of their children, because **Balinese customary law** grants custody to the father.

Some men in polygamous marriages also seek sexual relationships outside marital bonds, including with sex workers. Indonesia is home to one of Asia's fastest growing **HIV/AIDS** epidemics; about 380,000 Indonesians are currently living with AIDS. Among those most at risk of infection are sex workers and their clients, who often do not wear condoms.

CHARACTERS



Sadra and Family

The eldest son of a polygamous rice farmer, Sadra is a Balinese man in his mid-forties with two wives and eight children. Sadra married his first wife, Purniasih, when they were both in their teens, eloping against the wishes of her family. Soon after she moved into his family's home, she began to see another side of Sadra, who would rage against his father and hit his mother. When Purniasih became pregnant with their second child, Sadra became violent towards her as well. Sadra began se-

cretely dating his second wife, Murni, keeping the affair from his wife and also lying to Murni, who believed he was unmarried. After Murni became pregnant, Sadra forced Ketut to consent to a new marriage by threatening to send her home to her parents without her children. Rather than join Sadra's household, Murni chose to live separately from her husband and co-wife, and continue to work to support herself and her growing family. While Sadra does not believe polygamy to be inherently wrong, he admits to having deceived his wives and allowed his desires to outweigh the greater good of his family.



Darma and Family

Made Darma claims he was destined to be polygamous. After dropping out of high school, he married his first wife, Kiawati, and moved in to her family compound. After catching Darma cheating with another woman, Kiawati was granted a divorce. She now supports herself by doing menial labor for \$1/day. After the divorce, Darma found success and prestige in the informal economy, using his size, strength and natural charisma to carve himself a niche as a local tough—running gambling games, su-

pervising cockfights, and providing private security services to local political gatherings. Darma's second and third wives, Suliasih and Rasti, were shocked when they arrived at their wedding day to find out that he was planning to marry both of them at the same time. Darma started seeing his fourth wife, Suci Ati, while she was still in junior high school. When she found out that Darma was already married she tried to end the relationship, but he kidnapped and forcibly married her. Darma met his fifth wife, Purnawati, when she was only in junior high school. Having already been intimate by the time she found out about his wives, she felt as though it was too late to turn back. Now in his late forties, Darma has few regrets about his polygamous lifestyle. He runs his large household with a firm hand, rotating his sexual affections among his wives according to a nightly schedule.



Tuaji and Family

Sang Putu Tuaji is a Balinese man in his eighties who has had ten wives, five of whom are still living. Closely related to a Balinese royal family, Tuaji was well known in his younger days as having been a powerful man whom few people in his village dared to cross. During the 1960s, when Bali was rocked by political turmoil that ended in the massacre of over 100,000 alleged communists, Tuaji was famous as a leader of a local anti-communist militia who carried out the violent political agenda

of the military and paramilitary forces. He went on to become a village moneylender, earning both the allegiance and fear of those who used his services. Today, his wives and neighbors say that it was all those factors—royal status, wealth, and a reputation for violence—that helped him to attract his wives. While some women sought him out for the high standard of living he promised, most of his wives felt that once he chose them, they had no choice but to comply. Two of them, Sang Ayu and Widiastuti, his seventh and tenth wives, are sisters. While Tuaji’s wives acknowledge that during their marriages there have been petty disagreements and jealousies among the wives, they say that Tuaji has treated them fairly, and has provided them with a comfortable life.

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QUOTES

"The suffering started when I found out he already had many wives."

-Purnawati, Darma's fifth wife

"In Bali now, there is still a lot inequality."

-Anggredi, woman's rights attorney

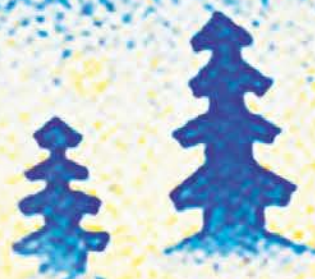
"If they want to be with me, I'll marry them.

That's because I'm afraid of karma."

-Darma, currently has four wives

"Karma becomes a way for people to escape responsibilities for their actions."

-Degung, anthropologist



FILMMAKERS



DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

Robert Lemelson is an anthropologist and documentary filmmaker whose work focuses on the relationship of culture, psychology and personal experience in Indonesia. Lemelson's area of specialty is Southeast-Asian studies, psychological anthropology and transcultural psychiatry. He is currently an adjunct professor of anthropology at UCLA and a research anthropologist in the Semel Institute of Neuroscience at UCLA.



PRODUCER

Alessandra Pasquino has produced broadcast commercials, documentaries and special projects for over 10 years. She has collaborated with many filmmakers and artists including: Oliver Stone, Wayne Wang, Klaus Kinski, Gregory Colbert, Leonardo Di Caprio, Pietro Scalia and Matthew Rolston. She is currently a freelance documentary producer and independent filmmaker.



EDITOR

Chisako Yokoyama has worked as an editor and assistant editor on studio motion pictures, independent features and narrative and documentary films. Her credits as editor include the English and Japanese language independent films “Saki,” “Takamine” and “Goemon” and as first assistant editor, “American Gangster,” “Memoirs of a Geisha,” “Black Hawk Down” and “Good Will Hunting.”



DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Wing Ko has collaborated with a who's who of modern artists, musicians and filmmakers. He worked with Spike Jonze on several music videos and edited the pilot for MTV's “Jackass.” Wing helped create more than 80 music videos for Nine Inch Nails, Soundgarden, Public Enemy and other top bands of the time. For more than 15 years he has traveled around the world and crewed skateboard videos.



MUSIC COMPOSER

Malcolm Cross has been a professional composer for film, television and stage since 1996. He composed the score for “Oh Saigon” a feature-length documentary broadcast on the Sundance Channel. He scored the independent shorts “I Dream of Dog” and “Insomniac,” and wrote the theme and incidental music for the television series “America's Prom Queen”

ELEMENTAL PRODUCTIONS



Elemental Productions is a documentary film production company based in Los Angeles that is dedicated to making documentary films on social and cultural issues in Southeast Asia and the United States. The company was founded in 2007 by anthropologist Robert Lemelson, and evolved out of years of fieldwork and thousands of hours of footage gathered in 1997.

Amnesty International Movies that Matter Film Festival, 40 Years of Silence

United Nations Association Film Festival, Standing on the Edge of a Thorn

Nominee, Best Limited Series, International Documentary Association Awards, Afflictions Film Series

Nominee, Best Documentary-style Reality Production, Impact Media Awards, Standing on the Edge of a Thorn

Nominee, Most Innovative Production, History Makers Awards, 40 Years of Silence

PRODUCTION STILLS

Sadra and his two wives are tense as they discuss the challenges of running a polygamous household.



In a rare occurrence, Darma and all four of his current wives spend the afternoon together.



Suci Ati hides her disappointment in her marriage behind an elegant demeanor.



Freedom at a price: Kiawati prefers to be divorced than in a polygamous marriage, but now must support her children on her own.

Two of Tuaji's brides reminisce about their days as young co-wives.



Darma's sons hope that they do not inherit their father's karma of polygamy.



The Elemental crew hard at work behind the scenes.

CREDIT LIST

Featuring the Families of

I Wayan Sadra
I Made Darma
Sang Putu Tuaji

I Wayan Sadra Family

Ni Ketut Purniasih
Ni Wayan Kartika
Ni Kadek Adnyani
Ni Ketut Trisna Ditya
I Komang Artawan
Ni Ketut Murni Agung
Ni Luh Sri Tresna Asih
I Kadek Widi Satya
I Komang Angga Widi Nata
I Ketut Yuda Adi Tirta
Ni Nyoman Senin
Ketut Siring

I Made Darma Family

Ni Nyoman Kamarenikiawati
Ni Komang Sri Darliskiawati Saputri

I Wayan Darkiawan Saputra
Ni Wayan Sulasih
Ni Wayan Sri Adi Yuliantari
I Wayan Nik Adiarista
Ni Wayan Rasti
Ni Wayan Eka Saputri
I Kadek Adi Yudha Ruegara
Gusti Ayu Suci Ati
I Putu Aristana Mahardika
Ni Kadek Yupik Andarista
Ni Nyoman Purnawati
Agus Dana Saputra

Sang Putu Tuaji Family

Jero Ketut Gati
Sang Ayu Ketut Manis
Sayu Nyoman Lanus
Sang Ayu Ketut Giriastiti
Sang Putu Kerta

Also Featuring

Degung Santikarma
Luh Putu Anggreni

Agung Alit
I Wayan Damai
I Wayan Sujana
I Wayan Soma
Ibu Oka
Made Moyo

People in the villages of Lodtunduh, Mas
and Petak

and

Joblar Tum Bak Bayuh Troupe

Field Producers

Ninik Supartini
Anak Agung Gde Putra
Ni Luh Gede Sri Pratiwi

Field Researcher

Degung Santikarma

Interviewers

Robert Lemelson
Degung Santikarma
Alessandra Pasquino
Ninik Supartini
Anak Agung Gde Putra
Ni Luh Gede Sri Pratiwi
Ida Ayu Martiani

Riawaty Jap
Caitlin Mullin
Indra Kusuma

Bali Camera Unit

Indra Kusuma
Anak Agung Gde Putra
Darwin Nugraha

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Robert Lemelson
Luis Lopez
Michael Mallen
Michael Massey
Emily Ng
Alessandra Pasquino
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Chisako Yokoyama
Julia Zsolnay

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Syarif Hidayat
G. Wijaya

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Pietro Scalia

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Wing Ko

Assistant Editor

Michael Mallen

Music Editor

Richard Henderson

Graphics/VFX

Yee Ie

Chisako Yokoyama

Color Correction

Incendio TV

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Producer

Christina Caldwell

Data Assistant

Elliott Hanes

Post Production Sound

Lotus Post

Re-recording Mixer & Editor

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Gamelang and Suling

I Nyoman Wenten

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Sylvain Carton

Cello

Eric Byers

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Still Photography

Robert Lemelson

Michael Massey

Alessandra Pasquino

Cebe Loomis

Yee Ie

Wing Ko

Chisako Yokoyama

Adia White

Mead and Bateson Balinese Painting Collection

Courtesy of Robert Lemelson

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Society for Psychological Anthropology

UCLA, Department of Anthropology

UCLA, Medicine, Mind and Culture Group

UCLA Indonesian Studies Program

USC Center for Visual Anthropology

Mahar Agusno

Alice Apley

Luh Putu Artini

Nyoman Asub

Carole Browner

Tuaji Gus Candri

Kamala Chandrakirana
Cynthia Close
Jenny Cool
Connie Cummings
Wayan Duana
Leslie Dwyer
Linda Garro
Byron Good
Mary Jo Delvecchio Good
Douglas Hollan
Janet Hoskins
Livia Iskandar
Megan Jennaway
Putu Keong
Jane Labonte
Dorothy Lemelson
Noah & Zoe Lemelson
Wayan Muka
Caitlin Mullin
I Made Nyandra
Steven Ritz
I Wayan Sadha
Ni Made Sadri
Irene Sukwandi
Ninik Supartini
Putu S.
Seinenu Thein
Adrian Vickers
Rochelle Winters
Mamie Wong

In Memory of Jerome Hal Lemelson

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