

THE BALI BOMBINGS 2002: MEMORIAL COLLECTION



T-Shirts with slogans
Photo: George Serras



As Australians living and working in Bali for many months in the year after the bombings of October 2002, the experience created not only a unique documentary by John and Sara Darling, but also an insight into the Balinese people's way of dealing with the situation.

The Film

The Healing of Bali is an intimate longitudinal documentary that was screened on *The Cutting Edge* on SBS on 7 October 2003. This film looks at the aftermath of the tragic events of 12 October 2002 from the Balinese point of view. When two bombs exploded in Kuta, John Darling, an Australian filmmaker who had lived in Bali for some seventeen years, felt intense pain for everyone touched by the tragedy. *The Healing of Bali* lets those affected by the blasts tell their own personal, intimate stories. Balinese people, some who have known him over twenty-five years, relate to him and reveal their inner feelings, knowing that he will respect and value this disclosure.

Filmed over a nine-month period, this documentary reveals the grieving and gradual recovery of each of those interviewed. The theme of this fifty-minute film is tolerance in an age of terrorism that we all so reluctantly find ourselves living in today. People from Hindu, Muslim and Christian backgrounds open their hearts and tell their stories. The film was directed by John Darling and co-produced with his wife Sara Darling.

This was the ninth documentary film on Indonesia that John Darling has directed. His first was *Lempad of Bali* which he co-directed with Lorne Blair in 1978. His other documentary films include the three-part *Bali Triptych* series, *Bali Hash* and *Below the Wind*. Darling also directed one episode in *The Human Face of Indonesia* series entitled 'Master of the Shadows' and also an episode called 'The Five Faces of God from Slow Boat to Surabaya'. All these films have been screened internationally.

The Insight

Although many Australians have visited Bali, and have witnessed Balinese behaviour, how many realise that to display anger in this culture is considered inappropriate behaviour? How after an incident as large as these bombings, did people express their feelings?

There were many sources of anger and several outlets in this culture. The first visual expression of emotion was the range of t-shirts which are now part of the 'The Bali Bombings 2002 Memorial Collection - John and Sara Darling' at the National Museum.

In Bali, just over two weeks after the bombings, with a culture still in shock, there was a basic white t-shirt on sale in stalls with 'Bali Cries' written in small print in black on the front. On the back was the slogan, 'Peace Now More Than Ever. 12 October 2002'.

There was shock and anger at the fact that medications ran out at the Sanglah Hospital at one o'clock on Sunday morning. No hospital in such a setting could have been prepared for this carnage, and supplies would have dwindled in any hospital. A flight to Jakarta where there are medical supplies is only two hours away by air. Many people we interviewed queried the time delay as medical supplies did not arrive from Australia until the following afternoon and felt this impacted on the death toll. Some broke down in tears as they expressed their frustration at watching people suffer and being unable to offer relief.

Many tourists visit Bali regularly and make close friendships with Balinese people. Hence there was even more pain for the people of this island as they discovered friends of many years amongst the dead or injured. One Balinese man told me of his distress at not being able to recognise tourists who were his friends in the hospital, as their faces were so swollen and distorted from burns injuries.

There was also shock and disbelief at the final death toll. These numbers were questioned by several of the people interviewed for the film. Apparently the Indonesian police only counted the staff from the Sari Club and Paddy's Bar as well as taxi and truck drivers. Indonesian pedestrians walking along the road were not included, nor were sex workers, beggars and illegal immigrants.

In addition, as the hospitals and clinics in Bali were stretched to the limit on the weekend of the bombings, some Balinese went home to their villages where they died of wounds and infected burns. They were then cremated by their fellow villagers and not included in the final count.

For others there was anger at the reality of how these bombings would impact on Bali's tourist industry. One Balinese man we interviewed who was a *banjar* or village head in Kuta described the ceremonies that were being performed to appease the gods on the island. Speaking in beautiful English, he stood proudly wearing black temple dress and with his *kris* or curved sword in its scabbard attached to his belt, facing the ocean at Kuta Beach in the evening, where he was lit by the setting sun. He was a magnificent sight.

When we asked the question, 'What would you like to tell the world?', the tears that had rimmed his lower eyelids throughout the interview overflowed as he sobbed 'Please don't abandon us'. The film crew stood silently, as we were all deeply moved.

In response to the colour of black worn by Balinese for cremations, a range of t-shirts in this colour appeared with 'Bali Cries' and 'Ban Terrorists' written in red. Next a range of t-shirts appeared in both black or white, with expletives about terrorists written in thick red lettering, the colour of dried blood.

The Purification Ceremony

There were many priests (or *pedandas*) involved with the Purification ceremony itself on 15 November, and also the preparations in the days leading up to it. One high priest we interviewed told us that, when Bali was first settled, the gods told the people to build temples at particular locations along the coast. These were significant places for religious reasons as Dang Hyang Niaratha, an ancient Hindu saint from Java, had meditated at these locations on his pilgrimage around the island. It was believed that these temples would create a 'spiritual fence' around Bali to protect it from the evil of the outside world. However, with the development along the coast, with luxury hotels and golf courses now jutting out across the cliffs, this 'fence' has been broken. Hence the terrorists could enter Bali.

Tourists in Bali are called *tamu*, which is the word for guests. Hence tourists/guests are always welcomed in Bali, and if guests make mistakes or something untoward should happen to them while they are in their culture, the Balinese regard it as their fault.

The Balinese believed that the bombings were a message from the gods, as they had been neglecting their temple religious duties, and had focused too much on materialism. This needed to be corrected with increased time devoted to temple duties and the *Taur Agung* or Purification ceremony. The Balinese were in fact blaming themselves for the bombings. How many Western people blamed themselves after the 11 September 2001 disaster at the World Trade Centre in New York?

On the day of the Purification ceremony 20,000 white t-shirts were handed out, with 'Bali Loves Peace' written in English and Indonesian, and incorporated in a red and blue pattern. Worn by large numbers of Balinese and Westerners on motorbikes, at the bomb site and on the beach for the ceremony, these gave a sense of unity and strength.

For over three decades young Australians have made their way to Bali. In the late 1960s and early 1970s there were no direct plane flights, so tourists had to fly via Jakarta or Surabaya, and then take a train or bus to the east Java coast. Next they had to catch a ferry to Bali, and then finally a bus across the island to the west coast, a trip of several days and without modern comforts. But still they kept coming.

It has become almost a rite of passage in some parts of Australia for teenagers to travel to Bali with their families. For many sports teams it has been a regular destination for their end-of-season trip. Bali was once safe for the innocents, for a first overseas experience with their family and friends.

Finally, about six months after the bombing, 'Osama won't catch me' was written in black on the front of a white t-shirt. However the humorous punch line was on the back, where written in large print was 'Osama don't Surf'. Humour: an important element in the healing process. 🗣️

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