

# Behind The Tragedy

International filmmakers revisit the Bali Bombing in a new co-production feature. *Danny Chan* reports.

**The October 2002 Bali Bombing** was much more devastating than just the carnage and physical wreckage that it wrought. While the September 11 attacks may have united Americans, by willing their collective resolve against a common and vilified enemy – terrorism – the Bali catastrophe nearly had the effect of polarizing the world into ideological extremes. Not only did the tragic event strike in the wake of September 11 – when emotions were still raw and nery – the swirl of aftermath events and commentary that followed the bombing did not help with escalating tension.

Four years on, and just when the wounds are scarcely about to heal, along comes *Bali – Paradise Lost*, a feature film that revisits one of mankind's darkest days in recent memory.

## Interweaving Stories

Based on extensive research – including interviews with the families of real-life victims – the movie tells the stories from the perspective of individuals whose intertwined lives were forever changed by the tragedy.

Hannah Catrelle (Mirrah Foulkes) is an American woman living in Bali when the explosion occurred. In the midst of the chaos, she meets Hajj Ismail (Joshua Pandelaki), a Balinese Moslem. Through this encounter, Hannah learns more about the real Islam and how prejudice can lead to terrible misunderstandings.

Liz Thompson (Raelee Hill), an Australian reporter arrived in Bali seven months later. Accompanied by Wayan Diya (Alex Komang), a Balinese who lost a relative in the tragedy, Liz went through a journey where she finds a new understanding about the Balinese philosophy.



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 Filmed on a budget of 10 billion Rupiah (US \$1 million), the project was mooted by Executive Producer Larry Higgs as a co-production between his company, TeleProductions International and Kalyana Shira Films. Higgs had been looking high and low for an Indonesian counterpart to collaborate on the movie, and found Kalyana Shira to have "the right chemistry" for the undertaking. The movie will be released in Indonesia under a different title, *Long Road to Heaven*.

From the onset, Higgs wanted to present a balanced view of the highly sensitive event that shook the world.

"We spent a lot of time trying to keep the film in balance and not blaming

Islam for the bombings, so we focused on the dynamics of terrorists as they planned and executed the attack. Then we switched sides and examined the aftermath of the bombing and trial from a foreign perspective."

Producer Nia Dinata adds: "We were very intrigued by the story and that shows in our enthusiastic discussions. When it comes to co-pros, it is about sharing the same level of passion."

## First obstacles

Researching for the movie, the filmmakers did not find resources lacking; instead found more than what they had bargained for. Dinata says: "There were so many available

resources related to the Bali bombing event. We're so lucky that we met the right people. We received help from everybody: the government, the police, the families of the victims and volunteers from different religion and ethnic backgrounds that came to Bali to help with the recovery efforts. We even talked to the terrorists' families."

The initial challenges came in the form of several casting and location issues.

Dinata related that the photo images of non-Indonesian cell members were difficult to obtain, hence complicated the job of talent casting. It was just as onerous, if not more, looking for actors with the kind of built and features that matched those of the real-life



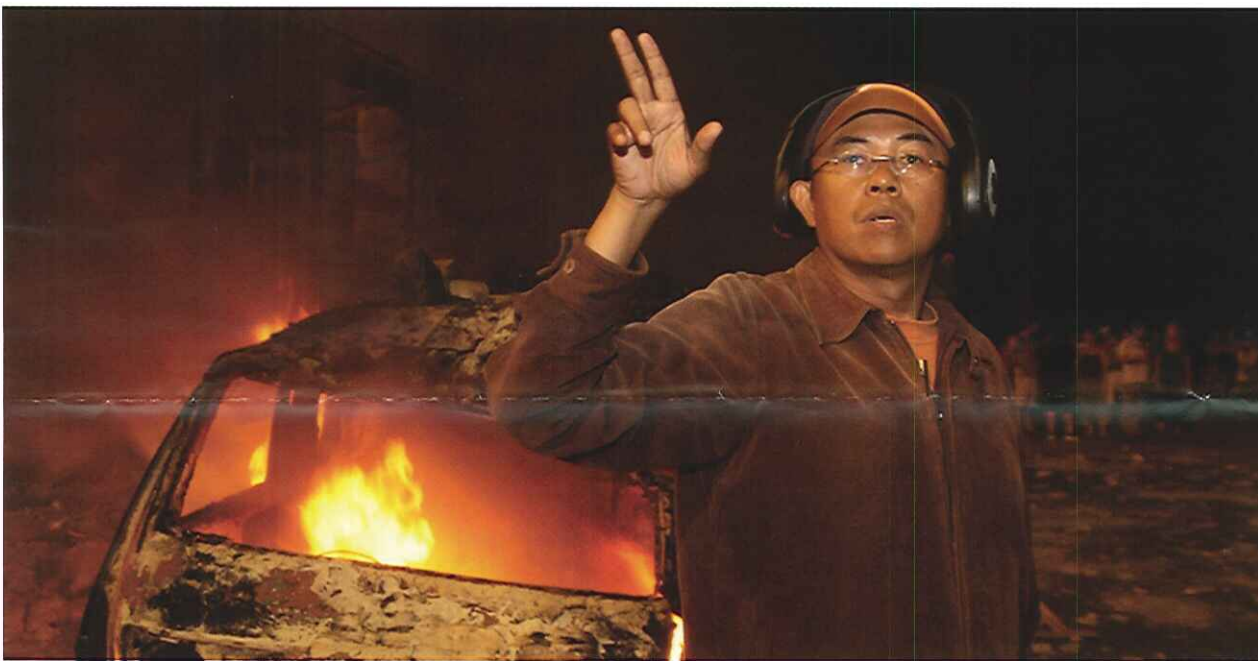
01-03: Executive producer Larry Higgs sought to present a balanced view of the tragic bombings with *Bali - Paradise Lost*



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Producer Nia Dinata



Director Enison Sinaro

characters. Producer Constantin Papadimitriou says: "This is probably the first Indonesian feature with Caucasian leading actresses. At the end, we were very happy to be able to find the right leading actresses (Raelee Hill and Mirrah Foulkes) through conducting casting sessions in Australia."

Since some of the bombing sites had been rebuilt, the team had to erect special sets for the shoots. The largest single expense of the budget was building the Jalan Legian Street set. Papadimitriou continues:

"The initial plans to use the original sites and other locations in Bali had been rejected by the authorities. Luckily, we managed to find similar-looking locations, mostly in the city of Lombok – which is located on an island close to Bali."

The producer also faced problems with location permits that would have been easily cleared, had it not been for a second bomb explosion that rocked Bali on 5 August 2003.

"The second Bali bombings just made things a bit more difficult and requires more time and patience on our part."

#### A Brooding Film

Shot on 35mm, *Bali – Paradise Lost*

involved ambitious photography. Director Enison Sinaro and DP Ical Tanjung took great pains to bring out the foreboding sense of 'death' in the scenes leading up to the explosions. Both agreed on creating a "dark atmosphere" for the more ominous scenes, using shadows to emphasize the apocalyptic theme.

Sinaro elaborates: "We wanted to surround our actors - those playing the terrorists and the victims - with an aura of impending doom. Many of the actors and extras spotted dark eyes and that was done intentionally. For example, we deliberately shot the tourists on the beach – who later became the victims in the movie – during top-light to achieve the 'dark eye look'."

One of the more difficult shots involved a scene where the characters Wayan and Liz are praying in a temple by the beach.

Besides using Porta Jib with a rotation of 180 degrees from back to front, the director wanted to raise the vertical angle simultaneously. Adding to the difficulty of the shot was the need to correct frame composition manually while the camera swivelled in a 'track-in' shot position. The light source a.k.a. the sun, at this point, had been

uncooperatively bright. Meanwhile, the nets used for reducing the light source were not big enough.

Sinaro recalls: "The fill-light needed to be balanced with the key-light, so that it will make it easier for us to do the color correction in post production, because we wanted to make it look like it is close to sunset."

Audio issues were next, as Sinaro attests: "Recording the dialogue was also a big challenge for this scene, because the sound of the waves was quite loud. In the audio sense, we needed to take note of the continuity of the wave crashing sounds. By estimating when the waves would hit the cliff, we adjusted the timing for the shoot.

"Everything about the shot had been planned in advance except the timing of the tides (waves) that changes at the time we were shooting that scene."

Further, the temple used was an actual place of worship. "We were given the permission to shoot on the condition that we stop filming when people needed to use the facilities. As you can imagine, that was really tough to do."

"All these factors combined, make this one of the most complex and

difficult shots in this film."

#### We Are Not The Judge

In the end, nobody doubts that this film would stand out from the other East-meets-West co-productions, if only for the highly sensitive subject that it attempts to tackle. On filming a politicized subject such as terrorism, Sinaro says, "In this open era, we should all be able to freely discuss sensitive and political issues. As long as we have the right balance; being neutral to the issue, I don't think people will disapprove. We are not trying to corner any particular group, because we are not the judge.

"Terrorism is something that all of us will never tolerate; I think we all agree with this. However, we need to learn how such things can happen, and the implications of such horrible acts. Although this film is fictional, it is based on facts and meticulous research."

Singaporean authors, Wong Wai Leng and Andy Logam-Tan, wrote the script and screenplay. The English script was further translated into Bahasa Indonesia – daunting work, as Dinata explains:

"In translating the English script to Indonesian, we had to use a different tone and manner in the delivery of the dialogues between the 'terrorists'. For example, we learnt that they use a specific dialect and tone according to the rankings."

Besides English and Indonesia, Malay is the other language used in the film. Indonesian dialects such as Javanese and Balinese were also spoken in the film, says Papadimitriou.

#### Borderless Post

Cutting across timelines – and relating four simultaneous stories – Editors Sastha Sunu and Cesa David Luckmansyah were challenged to tell the story in a non-linear fashion. Offline post work was done in Jakarta, Indonesia. This includes: film processing (Inter Studio), film telecine (G One), editing until picture lock (at Kalyana Shira Films) and sound mixing (at FourMix). Online, the film was posted in Bangkok (Siam Film Development) for negative matching, Dolby Digital mix, some visual effects and DI.

Due to be released in October, to coincide with the 5th anniversary of the bombing, *Bali – Paradise Lost* is a truly International co-production effort, involving filmmakers from Australia, Indonesia, Singapore and the US.

Papadimitriou reveals that the distribution plan is to release the film in theaters throughout Indonesia; and afterwards to markets in Asia as a feature, then possibly televised internationally.

Asked about what she thought would be the reaction of audiences, Dinata waxes:

"We think that this should be an eye opener for the viewers. A film like this does not get to your TV very often. It gives us another perspective about humanity and hope. The audience will be enlightened!" ♦