

Sikat Subar – A Hidden Colourful Feather

A film by Diogo Pessoa de Andrade

Storyline

A journey into the millennia-old practice of cockfighting in Timor-Leste and its profound impact on society, including the struggle for independence, dispute resolution, ceremonial practices, economy, employment, gender issues and domestic violence. An insightful look at the central role of the rooster in Timorese culture, daringly confronting tradition with ethics and basic human needs.

Short Synopsis

SIKAT SUBAR is a captivating documentary that takes you on a journey through the rich cultural tradition of cockfighting in Timor-Leste. Delve into the controversial and ancestral practice of cockfighting, depicted in local cave paintings for over 3000 years and still widely observed today. Explore the close ties between this millennia-old practice and the country's history and society, including its impact on nation-building and identity. Witness the use of roosters and cockfights during the decades-long independence struggle and their presence in sacred ceremonial practices. Gain an insightful look at the central role of the rooster in Timorese culture and the influence of cockfights on human life, public health, employment, economy, gender issues, and domestic violence. This comprehensive film provides a thorough examination of the significance of cockfighting in Timorese culture, daringly confronting tradition with ethics and basic human needs.

Synopsis

The title of the film "Sikat Subar" is a term used in Tétum, the official language of Timor-Leste, that can take on different meanings depending on the context. It refers to something secret or hidden that can be used to gain an advantage in order to win. In the context of cockfighting, it is believed to be a concealed feather, used as a tactic to deceive the opponent and secure victory.

"Sikat Subar" is a documentary that delves into the rich cultural tradition of cockfighting in Timor-Leste, exploring how it relates to the country's history, beliefs, and society. The film begins with a traditional legend about the friendship between a boy and a crocodile, illustrating the deep relationship between the Timorese people and nature and the origin of the belief that the Timorese are descendants of crocodiles. It then addresses the animist beliefs of the Timorese, highlighting other sacred animals such as buffalo and pigs, which represent values of masculinity and femininity, respectively, and the rooster, which, although not considered a sacred animal by the Timorese, symbolizes bravery, courage, masculinity, and maturity. Looking at the symbolism of the rooster and ancient practices involving roosters, such as resolving disputes, forecasting the future, and ritualistic practices, the film analyzes the presence of cockfighting in Timor-Leste's history, and how this millennia-old practice, that is portrayed in local rock paintings dating back more than 3000 years, still plays an important role in contemporary society.

The director observes the influence of cockfighting on the country's resistance to the brutal Indonesian occupation from 1975-1999, known as the "Timor-Leste genocide," and the struggle for independence. Through this, viewers gain an understanding of the role of roosters and the practice of cockfighting in Timorese society during a time of great social and political turmoil. Additionally, the documentary explores the cultural significance of cockfighting in Timor-Leste and its connections to the country's economy, politics, religion, art, and culture, as well as examining the effects of cockfighting on the daily lives of the Timorese people.

The film takes a close look at the lives of cock-fighters, breeders, and trainers, giving the audience a personal perspective on their relationship with cockfighting. Through these character's stories, it delves deeper into the social issues surrounding the sport, including its impact on social relations, masculinity, gender inequality, domestic violence and public health.

The documentary also features perspectives from a diverse group of individuals, including an anthropologist, government officials, an artist, a bishop, former resistance fighters, a police chief, an activist for human rights and women's rights who also works for environmental causes, a professor of art and illustration, a Timorese film producer and director, a member of a martial art group, and a

Timorese independent working woman who graduated in the United States, as well as a Timorese female artisan. Through their personal perspectives and expert insights, the film examines the practical effects of cockfighting on Timorese society and the cultural and historical significance it holds, raising controversial questions about tradition, culture, identity, and ethics for the viewer to reflect on.

The film offers a unique perspective on the culture and society of Timor-Leste, and the ways in which this ancient tradition continues to shape the country today.

Overall, Sikat Subar provides a provocative and comprehensive look into the world of cockfighting and its significance in Timorese society.