

# CHILDREN OF THE CROCODILE

A FILM BY  
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*“Some say we must be Indonesian, some say Portuguese. But we are the children of Grandfather Crocodile. We are East Timorese.”*

CIDALIA PIRES, REFUGEE OF 1975

STUDYGUIDE

ISSUE 29 AUSTRALIAN SCREEN EDUCATION

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**C**HILDREN OF THE CROCODILE celebrates East Timor's independence through the story of two young Timorese-Australian women. The film explores identity, cross-cultural issues and the struggle to make a difference in East Timor.

Cidalia Pires and Elizabeth Exposto were babies when their families fled East Timor in 1975 and came to Australia. Home movies, photos, and TV footage show the families' escape from East Timor and their early life in Australia against the backdrop of events occurring in their homeland.

Through Cidalia and Elizabeth's voices, their commitment to East Timor unfolds. Viewers discover Cidalia's passion for music and theatre, Elizabeth's devotion to human rights and justice, and the strength of their community and culture.

The story of Cidalia and Elizabeth parallels key turning points in the history of East Timor - from the Indonesian invasion in 1975, to voting for independence in 1999 and the destruction which followed, and finally to the birth of a new nation.

East Timor's independence fulfills their lifelong dream, but it also brings difficult choices. Elizabeth decides to move to East Timor and work as a liaison officer for

the United Nations, a job she finds challenging and stressful. Cidalia chooses to stay in Australia, but she also travels to East Timor to record traditional music and dance.

*Children of the Crocodile* chronicles the personal journeys of these young women over a two year period. It's a universal story of struggle, commitment, family, and the strength of a culture which has given birth to the world's newest nation.

#### CURRICULUM LINKS

*Children of the Crocodile* is an excellent resource for middle to senior secondary



LEFT: CIDALIA WITH DANCERS IN BAUCAU, EAST TIMOR

colonial powers in Timor, signed a treaty dividing the island in half, with the Portuguese in the east and the Dutch in the west (except for the enclave of Oecusse which the Portuguese retained).

#### WORLD WAR II 1939 - 1945

After the bombing of Pearl Harbour in 1942, over 400 allied troops landed in East Timor under speculation that the Japanese would use East Timor as a stepping off point for further invasion to the south.

The Japanese sent troops to East Timor and were held off by Australian forces fighting alongside the Timorese people. Unable to defeat the Japanese, the Australians withdrew, leaving the Timorese to bear the consequences. Over 60,000 Timorese people were killed by the Japanese in reprisal for their assistance to Australian soldiers.

In 1949 Indonesia obtained independence from the Dutch and West Timor became one of its provinces.

#### EAST TIMOR BEGINS RECOVERY

During the period 1951-1953 all of Portugal's overseas territories became overseas provinces. The 1960s saw the economy picking up, with increased coffee production, road building and communications established.

#### TURNING POINT 1974-1975

Portuguese decolonisation gave rise to new political parties in East Timor. The two major parties UDT and Fretilin favoured independence, but infiltration by Indonesian agents caused UDT to stage a coup in August 1975. A brief 'civil war' between UDT and Fretilin ensued and Fretilin's victory provided a pretext for Indonesia's subsequent invasion.

On 28 November 1975, Fretilin established the Democratic Republic of East Timor and declared independence. Accusing Fretilin of being 'communist' and enlisting tacit support from the USA, Britain and Australia, Indonesia proceeded with plans to invade.

On 7 December 1975 Indonesian forces invaded East Timor.

#### INDONESIAN RULE 1975 - 1999

During twenty-four years of Indonesian occupation an estimated 200,000 East Timorese, 1/3 of the population, were killed or died from starvation and war related disease.

From 1975 onward, Australian governments recognised Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor, which was never recognised by the United Nations or any other country. The UN General Assembly repeatedly called for

the withdrawal of troops from East Timor and for East Timorese peoples' right to self-determination.

On December 11, 1989 the Australian and Indonesian governments signed the Timor Gap Treaty to jointly exploit oil in the Timor sea.

#### THE WORLD SEES AND RECOGNISES

On 11 November 1991, Indonesian troops opened fire on people attending a funeral service in Dili's Santa Cruz cemetery. At least 200 people were killed and many more were injured. These events were witnessed by journalists and filmed by a British cameraman. The footage was smuggled out of East Timor and shown on TV around the world.

Timorese resistance fighter Xanana Gusmao was arrested in 1992 by Indonesian soldiers in Lahane, Dili. He was charged with rebellion, undermining national stability and masterminding the November 11 demonstration and was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

In 1996 the awarding of a Nobel Peace Prize to Bishop Carlos Belo, head of the Timorese Catholic Church and Jose



Ramos Horta, Timor's representative to the United Nations, drew further world attention to East Timor.

### THE PEOPLE DECIDE

Under growing international pressure and a weakened economy, Indonesian President Habibie offered East Timor special 'limited autonomy' status in 1998. This was rejected by East Timorese leaders who called for an internationally supervised referendum on East Timor's future.

Despite a campaign of terror and intimidation aimed at preventing the ballot, the referendum went ahead. On 30 August 1999, 98% of East Timorese voted with 78% wanting full independence.

### THE VIOLENT AFTERMATH OF THE BALLOT

Following announcement of the results, militia groups backed by Indonesian military went on a rampage of killing, burning and destruction. An estimated 150,000 East Timorese were forced to cross the border into West Timor and were held in paramilitary camps.

In Australia and around the world there were massive demonstrations calling for the immediate deployment of peacekeepers. Under pressure from world leaders and threatened with the loss of crucial World Bank loans, Indonesia agreed to allow a UN peacekeeping force into East Timor.

On 20 September 1999 an Australian led peacekeeping force arrived in Dili. In the two weeks before their arrival, the infrastructure of East Timor was almost totally destroyed and many people's homes were razed to the ground.

### A NATION BORN

Under the United Nations Transitional Administration (UNTAET), peace was restored and preparations made for the establishment of an independent government.

In an election on 30 August 2001, representatives were chosen for a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. The Fretilin party, led by Mari Alkatiri, won 65% of the 88 seats.

The Constituent Assembly approved a new constitution which puts primary power in the hands of parliament, but also includes a directly elected president as head of state. On 14 April 2002, resistance leader Xanana Gusmao was elected president, winning 82% of the vote.

On 20 May 2002 the UN handed over control of the government to the East Timorese and East Timor became the world's newest nation.

### PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDINGS

#### ACTIVITY 1

- What do you already know about East Timor?
- What would you like to learn about East Timor?

#### ACTIVITY 2

- Starting with the answer 'East Timor' write down all the questions you can think of that could be linked to this answer. You may work in groups.
- From both of these activities develop a class list of knowledge and understandings about East Timor.

### KEY EPISODES IN CHILDREN OF THE CROCODILE

52 minutes

### PART 1: LIFE IN AUSTRALIA 0-25 MINUTES

Elizabeth and Cidalia recall the story of their families' escape from East Timor

- Growing up in Melbourne in the 1980s
- Issues of identity, cultural heritage, school and family
- Connections with East Timor
- East Timorese organizations and people in Melbourne
- Celebrating the referendum outcome, then anguish over escalating violence.
- Struggles over the decision to go to East Timor

### PART 2: REBUILDING EAST TIMOR 25 - 52 MINUTES

- Images of East Timor
- Work in East Timor at the United Nations
- Recording traditional dances and songs
- Maintaining and struggling with identity
- Insights into the resistance
- Living across two cultures and countries
- Hopes for the future

### AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

### THEMES

### EAST TIMOR - THE COUNTRY

- Describe the geography of East Timor using an atlas. Include location, size of the island, proximity to Australia and

- Indonesia, climate and topography.
- Read the account of the Crocodile legend at the end of this Study Guide.
  - What is the meaning of the legend?
  - How does the film's title reflect this story?
  - Think of some other titles that might also suit the film.
  - Find out some legends about Australia from aboriginal stories.

The first scenes in Part 2 of the film show the country of East Timor. Other scenes in the film show women and children dancing and a resistance leader's hideout.

- What impression of the country do you get from these images?
- Draw pictures to represent three scenes of East Timor in the film that had an impact on you. Write captions for your pictures.
- Create a collage, poster or other visual display about East Timor for your classroom.

### MOVING LANDS

Both Elizabeth and Cidalia were born in East Timor. Elizabeth was eight months old and Cidalia one and a half when their families escaped on a Norwegian cargo ship bound for Darwin and arrived in Australia as refugees seeking asylum.

- Compare this situation to the asylum seekers on board the Tampa, also a Norwegian ship, in September 2001.
- Find out what the Australian govern-

ment policy was on refugees in 1975, compared to 2002?

- What were the reasons for Elizabeth and Cidalia's families leaving East Timor?
- Drawing on issues raised in the film, develop a list of interview questions for people who have moved from one country to another.
- How do you think their answers may affect the way you welcome newcomers to Australia?

### EAST TIMOR'S STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

This section requires students to refer to 'Setting the Context' as well as the books and websites in the reference section.

- From the film and background reading, describe the relevance of these dates, people and groups to East Timor's struggle for independence:

7 December 1975  
 11 November 1991  
 20 August 1999  
 20 May 2002

Jose Ramos Horta  
 Xanana Gusmao  
 Bishop Carlos Belo  
 President Suharto  
 Fretilin  
 National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT)  
 United Nations

In the film archival images depict Indone-

sia's invasion of East Timor.

- Find out why Indonesia invaded East Timor.
- Find out how much the Australian government knew about Indonesia's plans to invade East Timor. Why didn't they intervene?

One third of East Timor's population (200,000) were killed as a result of the Indonesian invasion.

- What moments in the film make this personal to the main characters?
- How much did the rest of the world know about what was happening in East Timor?

A key turning point in the struggle was the referendum in August 1999.

- What developments in Indonesia and East Timor allowed the referendum to take place?
- Find out the purposes of a referendum.
- Give an example of a recent referendum in Australia and the result.
- Describe the response in the Pires and Exposto families after watching the news of the referendum result.

In the latter part of the film, Cidalia visits a hiding place where Timorese resistance fighters survived for 25 years.

- How do you think they survived in such conditions?
- What other stories do you know about survival?
- Imagine you are there when the Fretilin fighters could finally emerge from their hiding places. How do you think they feel? What questions would you ask them?

### GROWING UP AND IDENTITY

In some early scenes of the film, Elizabeth describes how she felt different from others.



A MAP SHOWING EAST TIMOR AND ITS NEIGHBOURS



ELIZABETH AT A VILLAGE MEETING IN EAST TIMOR RIGHT: ELIZABETH SPEARS AT A MELBOURNE RALLY.

- Why do you think she felt different?
- Write a poem, story or essay describing a time when you have felt different from others.

The film is set in Australia and East Timor.

- Discuss whether the film is about two separate cultures or the merging of Australian and East Timorese cultures. Give examples from the film of your point of view.
- Think about ways in which you could be part of a culture without living in the country of that culture.

In a powerful and moving scene, Cidalia talks about her personal and sexual identity and the response of her father in particular to her 'coming out' as a lesbian.

- In what ways is this an important part of her identity and how did her father respond?
- Why did Cidalia's sexual identity affect her feelings about going to East Timor?

In Australia people are protected by legis-

lation against discrimination on the basis of their race, religion and sexual preference. In East Timor the new constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of race and religion, but makes no mention of sexual preference.

- Find out what laws in Australia protect people against discrimination.
- Discuss the effectiveness of these laws.

Cidalia's performance in the group Surik is also part of her identity.

- In what ways does this group shape her identity?
- How do you think your personal identity has been shaped by key events in your life?
- Discuss any groups you are a part of and how they affect who you are.

### AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE TO EAST TIMOR

During World War II Australian troops fought with East Timorese against the Japanese. Elizabeth refers to this in her speech at the rally outside government

offices in Melbourne. When they left East Timor, Australian soldiers dropped leaflets saying, 'Friends, we will not forget you'.

- Write an essay, story or poem based on this promise.

From 1975 until 1999 Australian governments accepted Indonesia's rule over East Timor and did little to criticise the atrocities occurring there.

- Suggest reasons why you think Australia took this position.
- What incident in the film supports the view that some Australians saw the Indonesian occupation of East Timor as a minor issue?
- Find out how Australia and other Western countries such as the USA, Britain and Canada assisted Indonesia in maintaining their occupation.

After the August 1999 referendum in East Timor, militia backed by Indonesian soldiers went on a rampage of killing, burning and destruction.

- How did the post-election violence affect Cidalia and Elizabeth?
- Were you aware of what was hap-



pening at that time and how were you affected?

- When and why did Australia send peacekeepers to East Timor?
- Evaluate the reasons why peacekeepers were not sent earlier and the consequences for the Timorese people.

### EAST TIMORESE COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA

This film depicts a vibrant and active East Timorese community in Melbourne. East Timorese communities across Australia are now playing a significant role in supporting and rebuilding East Timor.

- Find out where the larger Timorese communities in Australia are located and how big they are.
- Find out about some of the organizations in Australia that support East Timor and what activities they are involved with.

Cultural heritage is a strong theme throughout the film.

- Cite some of the specific scenes that reflect the importance of culture, despite the experience of distance from the homeland.
- Find out more about Timorese culture, including the music, dance, food, language and customs. Are there similarities with your own culture?
- Organise a presentation or performance in your school that shows the importance of cultural heritage.

The film shows Elizabeth working at a human rights centre, speaking at public events, volunteering for a community radio program, and taking part in political protests.

- Why do you think she became such a committed activist?
- What problems or issues do you or your family feel strongly about?

Xanana Gusmao's visit to Melbourne inspired Elizabeth and Cidalia to take action to help rebuild East Timor.

- Explain the reasons why Elizabeth and Cidalia went to East Timor and describe the way in which they each contributed to the

reconstruction of their country.

- Elizabeth says she took a political path in fighting for East Timor, while Cidalia's was more artistic. Discuss the many different ways that a person can express their opinions or work for the causes they believe in.

### REBUILDING A COUNTRY

In the film we see Elizabeth working as a Liaison Officer for the UN National Planning and Development Agency. Her role is to liaise between the UN transitional administration and the local community.

- Why do you think Elizabeth would be good at this job?
- What skills would she need to draw on to effectively carry out this role?
- What difficulties might Elizabeth face as a Timorese who lived overseas?

The majority of people in East Timor live in small rural communities in thirteen districts. The film shows Elizabeth in her role as liaison officer attending a rural village meeting.

- What does Elizabeth mean when she says 'the trend so far has been a top-down approach' to development?

There are many government and non-government agencies in Australia that work in developing countries like East Timor.

- Choose one agency and find out about their approach to development.

Elizabeth visits her aunt and uncle in Suai, a town on the south coast of East Timor near the border with Indonesia.

- How do you think they feel about the future?
- What things might they feel uncertain about?



From 1999 to May 2002 the United Nations governed East Timor and assisted the country in its transition to full independence.

- Find out the key mission of the UN and why it was the most appropriate organisation to manage East Timor's transition to independence.
- What consequences do you think the large UN presence in East Timor might have on Timorese society and culture?
- Find out the type of government operating in East Timor and who are the new Prime Minister and President.

### COMING HOME

Throughout the world there are many groups of people like the East Timorese who have been dispersed from their homelands. Some of these people decide to return home, after living away for many years.

- Find out what the term 'diaspora' means.
- What causes peoples to be part of a diaspora?
- From the film, describe the role that the Timorese diaspora had during the past 25 years in East Timor's history.
- Discuss how the different people in Cidalia's family responded to East Timor's independence.



Cidalia's final words in the film are about having two homes, one in Australia and one in East Timor.

- Write a story, poem or essay about your own experience or the experience of a friend or relative who also feels they have more than one home.

### CELEBRATING A NEW NATION

On 20 May 2002 East Timor celebrated its full independence.

- Why do you think the East Timorese struggle for independence was finally successful?
- From scenes in the film, as well as research, sketch a picture that illustrates May 20, 2002 in East Timor.
- What can Australia do now to assist East Timor in becoming a strong, independent nation?

### BEHIND THE LENS - THE FILM DIRECTOR

#### (MEDIA STUDIES)

Marsha Emerman wrote, directed and co-produced the film *Children of the Crocodile*. She reflects on her experiences in making the film.

*Why did you produce the film?*

*Children of the Crocodile* combined my passion for documentary film-making with a desire to show solidarity for the East Timorese. It also provided a chance to learn more about Timorese culture - the music, dance, language and customs that nourished and sustained the Timorese people through our four-hundred years of Portuguese colonization and twenty-five years of Indonesian occupation.

#### *Making Children of the Crocodile* enabled me

to reflect on themes which are central to my own life and to the film - the search for identity, our connection to roots and homeland, and the sources of hope in people's lives.

*What were some of the decisions you had to make during the film?*

Finding the right balance between the personal and political, the small and the big picture, was difficult. Because the film focuses on a particular two-year period, we were unable to include as much history and background on East Timor as I would have liked. The stylistic choice of having the two main characters provide the film's voice meant that all information had to come through them or the people in their lives.

*What is omitted from the film?*

The film does not convey the full brutality of Indonesia's twenty five year occupation, nor the extent of other countries' complicity in arming, training and supporting the occupying forces. It offers glimpses of East Timor but doesn't fully explore the thorny political issues of rebuilding a country where the infrastructure was almost completely destroyed.

*What do you hope for from the film?*

I hope the audience who are not familiar with East Timor's past or recent history will be inspired to discover more for themselves. I also hope the film plays a role in reconciling Timorese who remained in their country with those forced to flee, by showing their shared commitment to freedom and justice for East Timor.

#### FINAL ACTIVITY

(To be completed at the end of the film or at the end of the unit of work.)

- What did you learn about East Timor?

#### THE CROCODILE LEGEND

(from which the film title is drawn)

Long ago a boy saw a baby crocodile stranded between a lagoon and the sea, fighting for his life in the hot sun. The boy took pity on him and carried the crocodile to the sea. The crocodile was grateful and promised that he would repay the boy's kindness. Time passed. The boy remembered the crocodile's promise and went to sea to call him. They were like two old friends meeting after a long time, very happy to see each other. The crocodile told the boy to sit on his back and took him on a journey. They travelled like this many times.

Then one day the crocodile felt he would like to eat the boy. But somehow his conscience troubled him, so he decided to ask the opinion of other animals. He consulted a whale, a tiger, a buffalo and finally a monkey. All of them condemned him saying he shouldn't repay a favour with a bad action.

The crocodile was ashamed and gave up the idea of eating the boy. He still took the boy on his back and they travelled together until the crocodile became very old.

Then he said, 'My friend, the good deed you did for me can never be repaid. Now that I am old and obliged to die, I will change into a land where you and your descendants will live'.

That crocodile became the island of East Timor.

For the Timorese, the crocodile is their ancestor and they are the children of Great Grandfather Crocodile.

#### REFERENCES

##### BOOKS

Peter Carey and G. Carter, (eds.) *East Timor at the Crossroads: The Forging of a Nation*, Cassell, London, 1995, pp. 259. Various contributors, bibliography, chronology.

James Dunn *Timor: A People Betrayed*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1995, pp. 365. Revised from 1983 edition. Maps, photographs, glossary, index.

*East Timor Education Kit For Second-*





## CHILDREN OF THE CROCODILE

52 minutes, 2001 | Produced with the assistance of SBS Independent and Film Victoria

WRITER/DIRECTOR: Marsha Emerman, PRODUCERS: Marsha Emerman & John Moore,  
CAMERA: Sue Roberts & Peter Zakharov, SOUND: Bob Phelps, EDITOR: Bill Murphy

Available in PAL/NTSC video format for educational use. For more details please contact:  
CHILDREN OF THE CROCODILE, PO Box 2424, Fitzroy MC 3065, Australia  
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ary, *Tertiary and Adult Studies* (2nd ed) Ciset, Sydney, 1999. Information sheets on East Timor's history, culture, religion, and politics, profiles of Timorese leaders, and suggested activities.

*East Timor: Transition to statehood* Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 2001, pp.48. A useful summary in CIIR's Comment series of booklets about Third World countries.

Geoffrey C. Gunn *Timor Loro Sae: 500 Years*, Livros do Oriente, Macau, 1999, pp.323. The history of East Timor in a well-presented volume with photographs, bibliography, index. 323 pp

Richard Tanter, et al (eds) *Bitter Flowers, Sweet Flowers: East Timor, Indonesia and the World Community*, Pluto Press Australia, Sydney, 2001, pp.291. Contributors include Noam Chomsky.

John Taylor, *East Timor: The Price of Freedom*, Zed Books, London, 1999, pp.272. Updated edition of "Indonesia's Forgotten War". Chronology, bibliography, index.

Rodney Tiffen, *Diplomatic Deceits: Government, Media and East Timor*, University of NSW Press, 2001. pp.128. Foreword by Chris Masters. Photographs.

### WEBSITES

#### EAST TIMORESE WEBSITES

[www.geocities.com/etngoforum/](http://www.geocities.com/etngoforum/)

Key website for non-government organizations active in East Timor. An excellent resource for understanding current development issues in East Timor.

[www.easttimor.com](http://www.easttimor.com)

This web site has much information and many links to offer. The information is current and kept up-to-date. The site is closely associated with the Fund for East Timor.

[www.gov.east-timor.org](http://www.gov.east-timor.org)

Still being developed, this site will provide information on the new Government of East Timor (Governo Timor Leste) and will also include a link to the previous government of the East Timor Transitional Administration (ETTA).

#### AUSTRALIAN WEBSITES

[www.goasiapacific.com/specials/etimor/default.htm](http://www.goasiapacific.com/specials/etimor/default.htm)

Part of the 'Go Asia Pacific' gateway which collects information created by the ABC. Includes information, news stories and comprehensive links relating to East Timor.

#### INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE

[www.etan.org](http://www.etan.org)

An essential resource site for the East Timor researcher. The East Timor Action Network, an NGO in the United States, continues to maintain this information strong website.

#### UNITED NATIONS WEBSITE

[www.undp.east-timor.org](http://www.undp.east-timor.org)

After 20 May 2002 United Nations activity in East Timor will be delivered via the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) which maintains this website.

#### TAKING ACTION

If you'd like to take further action to contribute to rebuilding East Timor the following organizations will welcome your assistance.

AUSTRALIA-EAST TIMOR ASSOCIATION,  
PO Box 93, Fitzroy VIC 3065.  
TEL.: (03) 9416 2960  
Email: [aetamel@aetamel.org](mailto:aetamel@aetamel.org)

AUSTRALIA-EAST TIMOR ASSOCIATION,  
PO Box 751, Darlinghurst NSW 2010.  
TEL.: (02) 9519 4788,  
Email: [jefferson.lee@mail.bigpond.com](mailto:jefferson.lee@mail.bigpond.com)

AUSTRALIA-EAST TIMOR FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION,  
c/- Global Education Centre, 1st floor, Torrens Building, 220 Victoria Square, Adelaide SA 5000.  
TEL.: (08) 8410 1022  
E-mail: [andyalcock@bigpond.com](mailto:andyalcock@bigpond.com)

HOBART EAST TIMOR COMMITTEE,  
2/65 Bay Rd, New Town, TAS 7008.  
Tel.: (03) 6228 2727

AUSTRALIANS FOR A FREE EAST TIMOR,  
PO Box 2155, Darwin NT 0801.  
TEL.: (08) 8983 2113  
Email: [rwesley@ozemail.com.au](mailto:rwesley@ozemail.com.au)

A free resource list is available from the Australia-East Timor Association, Tel (03) 9416 2960 Email: [aetamel@aetamel.org](mailto:aetamel@aetamel.org)

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