



the Diplomat

[a Study Guide]

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THE DIPLOMAT IS AN EXCELLENT RESOURCE FOR MIDDLE AND SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS, AND ALSO FOR TERTIARY STUDENTS STUDYING POLITICS (INCLUDING AUSTRALIAN POLITICS), INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, ASIAN STUDIES OR ASIAN HISTORY. IT FOLLOWS THE LIFE OF NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER JOSÉ RAMOS HORTA, FROM THE 1975 INDONESIAN INVASION OF EAST TIMOR UNTIL THE EVENTUAL ARRIVAL OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE KEEPING FORCES IN 1999 TO HELP ENSURE THAT THE TIMORESE GAINED THE INDEPENDENCE THEY HAD JUST VOTED FOR.

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José Ramos Horta was one of the main figures in East Timor's independence struggle. The film draws the viewer into this conflict by focusing on Horta's life during these 24 years. The viewer is encouraged to identify with the various characters; the film goes beyond the 'drier' format of the conventional history documentary. It should be a great stimulus to student interest in this topic. Many sides of José's character are presented, including the less attractive ones. Viewers also come to know José's mother, to feel the pain of the struggle and the elation of the final achievement. The film is engrossing, and so densely packed with information that it may require more than one viewing.

BACKGROUND

East Timor became a Portuguese colony early in the sixteenth century, and except for a brief period of Japanese occupation during the Second World War, remained under Portuguese control until 1975, when Indonesia invaded. During this four hundred and sixty years of colonization, East Timor was strongly influenced by Portuguese culture. The Portuguese language became widely spoken alongside local languages (there are 33 language groups in East Timor, and no common tongue or *lingua franca*), the Catholic church became well established, and the Timorese developed a distinct cultural identity. Indonesia, on the other hand, was under Dutch colonial rule, a predominantly Muslim country (although approximately 9% are Christians), with a different history of colonial struggle. Most Timorese, as the UN-supervised vote in 1999 subsequently confirmed, saw little reason to identify with the state of Indonesia.





Portugal went through a period of great political instability in 1974-75, making the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, and this created the opportunity for the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. In 1974, Lisbon granted freedom to Portugal's African colonies (where bitter wars of independence had been raging for years), and in East Timor political associations were permitted to operate openly. In 1975, local elections in East Timor saw Fretilin (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) win handsomely, creating fear among landowners that the leftist party might nationalize property. In Indonesia, powerful elements in the armed forces urged the annexation of East Timor, taking advantage of Portugal's instability and declining influence. Months of covert raids by Indonesian forces into East Timor, coupled with a coordinated propaganda campaign, triggered a three-week civil war between Fretilin and other political groups in August 1975. Portugal's governor withdrew and Fretilin took power. Unable to negotiate an official transfer of power from Lisbon, Fretilin declared independence on November 28, 1975. On the pretext that Fretilin was a Communist group which had taken power illegally, Indonesia invaded 10 days later, on December 7.

THE INDONESIAN INVASION

Although it was not Communist, the left-leaning ideology of the new Fretilin government of East Timor

was considered unacceptable by Indonesian President Suharto's anti-Communist 'New Order' government. Suharto had led the army in putting down an attempted Communist coup in Indonesia in 1965, which was followed by a purge of Indonesian Communists and their alleged sympathizers, in which an estimated 500,000 people were killed. Suharto was unable to tolerate within the Indonesian archipelago a regime that might develop close relations with Communist states like China and Vietnam. The West, in particular the USA and Australia, did not object to Indonesia's actions. After the loss of South Vietnam to Communism, the US saw containment of the left in East Timor as a plus in its global Cold War struggle against Communism. Thus began twenty-four years of Timorese struggle against Indonesian control, a struggle in which at least 200,000 Timorese were killed.

THE FILM

José Ramos Horta, appointed Foreign Minister by Fretilin, was sent on an urgent mission to the UN just before the invasion. He spent the next 24 years in exile as East Timor's roving ambassador, traveling the world and lobbying for support for his country's right to a vote on self-determination. The film opens with José speaking in the Santa Cruz cemetery, recalling the 1991 massacre when the Indonesian army opened fire on Timorese civilians attending a funeral of victims of the war with Indonesia. The massacre was a turning point in the independence struggle. A hidden video camera captured events and enabled the world's attention to be focused on the brutality of Indonesia's occupation of East Timor (a demonstration of the power of film?). A blue wash over the screen dramatically evokes the sense of terror in the cemetery when the Indonesians began firing.

In order to fully understand the *The Diplomat*, students need to be familiar with the major events in the post-1975 struggle. Most of the significant events are covered in the documentary, but not always in chronological order. The use of flashbacks to old newsreel film and interviews, whilst dramatically effective, could be confusing for some students who cannot easily identify what is happening and see the point which the old film is reinforcing. In particular, students should know something of the massive political and social upheaval in Indonesia triggered by the Indonesian economy's collapse following the 1997 East Asian financial crisis. Riots and demonstrations eventually forced the resignation of President Suharto and his replacement with President Habibie in May 1998. The hobbled Indonesian economy was dependent on international aid, and consequently Habibie was unable to resist pressure to allow a UN-supervised independence referendum.

Students should be aware that in Indonesia the military is not just a defence force, but plays a very active role in politics, and will sometimes choose to ignore directions given to it by the civilian government. The army supported and directed the anti-independence militias who terrorized the Timorese population throughout 1999. Despite a violent campaign of intimidation, the Timorese voted four-to-one for independence in the UN ballot of August 30, 1999. This result triggered a



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two-week bloodbath by the militias against Timorese civilians that was broadcast nightly on international television, forcing Habibie to admit foreign peacekeepers into the territory in September 1999.

The brutality of the Indonesian invasion and occupation is powerfully conveyed by a series of interviews with José's mother, Natalina Ramos Horta. She is a former guerilla fighter and three of her children were killed by Indonesian forces. Awareness of the brutality East Timor has suffered is reinforced by scenes showing the anti-independence militias' violence. It is graphic and shocking, although not unsuitable for secondary students to watch.

During the film we see José at the United Nations, moving amongst the delegates, pressing East Timor's case. His life seems an endless round of hotels, aeroplanes, airports and taxis; we see him in New York, South Korea and Europe seeking support from all quarters. The damage to his private life is revealed: loneliness, infidelity, marital breakdown, low-paid jobs to support his work in the early days.

A major step forward in the independence struggle was the 1998 agreement of all Timorese political groups to unite under one organization, the National Council of Timorese Resistance. This is shown in the film at a convention in Portugal, where Xanana Gusmão, still imprisoned in Indonesia, is elected President of this coalition, with José as Vice President. However, there is still division within their ranks and this is revealed when the camera records negotiations at a subsequent UN sponsored

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meeting in Austria between the independence coalition and the leaders of those Timorese who want to remain with Indonesia. José is not prepared to compromise; he can see Indonesia's influence on the world stage has been weakened and that US support for the Timorese cause is growing. He exasperates his coalition colleagues by terminating negotiations without first consulting them.

Australia's ambiguous role in East Timor's recent history emerges during the film. Australia was the first country to accept the legitimacy of the Indonesian claim to East Timor, despite the murder of six Australian-based journalists by the Indonesian army during the covert skirmishes that preceded the invasion. However, it also provided a refuge for many Timorese and a secure base from which they could organize their operations.



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Australia changed policy in 1999 to support an independence vote, but failed to reveal intelligence in its possession which showed that the Indonesian army would use the violent militia to undermine the election result. The duplicity of Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, is demonstrated in film clips from his various press conferences. At a time when the vicious army-backed militias' violence was unchecked, he promised that Indonesian security forces would ensure a peaceful referendum, and later an orderly transition to independence. Even after the Indonesian army and its militia had torched much of Dili before finally ceding control to UN peacekeepers, Alatas continued to deny that they were the cause of the problem.

The film is not always serious. We see José relaxing, laughing, his excitement about meeting Xanana Gusmão for the first time in twenty-three years and his joy at being able to register to vote in the referendum. However, his joy on the night of the referendum is short lived as the militias retaliate with more violence, looting and burning.



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José then has the task of lobbying intensely for an international peacekeeping force. An APEC meeting in New Zealand provides the opportunity for a meeting with US President Bill Clinton, and the chance to shore up essential US support for the UN peacekeeping force.

There are several Indonesian regions that want independence from Indonesia, but East Timor is the only one to obtain it so far. The film shows that one of the major factors accounting for this was José Ramos Horta's energy, selflessness, skillful diplomacy and intelligent use of the media. This is a portrait of a passionate, dedicated and headstrong man. As José is the focus of the film, *The Diplomat* does not have time to evaluate fully the influence of other factors – for example, the diplomatic role played by Portugal, the leadership of Xanana Gusmão and Catholic Bishop Carlos Belo, the significance of Indonesia's economic crisis, the role of the Catholic Church and the media, Australia's role in the saga, and the US's motivation and the leverage they were able to use to persuade Indonesia to accept the peacekeepers.

The film doesn't examine the Indonesian perspective on the conflict. For Indonesia, a precedent had been set in 1962 when Indian troops marched into and took the Portuguese colony of Goa, which is on the Indian mainland. Having acquired East Timor, the Indonesians could not relinquish it easily for fear of the stimulus this would give to independence movements in other Indonesian regions. And what was the motivation of the Indonesian military, and the full extent of their influence in these affairs?

Nevertheless, and despite these inevitable gaps, the film achieves its purpose very well, and is an excellent starting point for exploring all these other issues.

VIDEO RESPONSE QUESTIONS

- *For how long was East Timor a Portuguese colony?*
- *What happened at the Santa Cruz cemetery? Was it important to the independence cause that this was filmed on video?*
- *José's mother appears throughout the film. What were her experiences in East Timor? How does she feel about the Indonesian government and military?*
- *What was José trying to achieve by basing himself in New York?*
- *José was a 'roving ambassador' for East Timor. What does this mean? Why did he travel to South Korea?*
- *How did his work as an ambassador affect his private life?*
- *What was the purpose of all the Timorese political groups meeting in Portugal?*
- *Who is Xanana Gusmão?*
- *Which groups met at the UN sponsored meeting in Austria? Why did José not want to agree to a compromise at this meeting?*
- *The Indonesian economy was in turmoil from late 1997 onwards. What effect did this have on the Indonesian leadership? How did it make Indonesia more vulnerable to the opinion of the outside world?*

• Why did the militias oppose the referendum on independence? What tactics did they use? Did the Indonesian army try to stop them?

• Before the referendum the Indonesian government set up a conference in Jakarta attended by all Timorese factions, including the militia, and Xanana Gusmão. Why did José say this was just a 'media event'? Was it likely that such a conference would achieve anything?

• What was the result of the independence referendum? How did the militias respond to this result?

• How did the Indonesian government react to accusations that they were not trying to stop the militias?

• After the referendum, why did José travel to New York, and then the APEC Conference in New Zealand?

• Why did José telephone Cardinal Jamie Sin of the Philippines and ask him to call for a War Crimes Tribunal?

• How important was the US President's support?

• Throughout the film, we see José speaking with the media. Why did he devote so much time to this?

• Why was it necessary to send the peacekeeping force and what did the Indonesian army do before they left East

Timor? Why did the Indonesian government consent to the peacekeepers being sent?

• After the Indonesian army had initially withdrawn, what did José suggest should be the approach taken in dealing with the Indonesians?

FURTHER READING

An Internet search will produce numerous sites about East Timor.

Some useful ones are:

www.easttimor.com

www.timor.com/

www.uc.pt/Timor/parties.html

www.un.org/peace/etimor/etimor.htm

www.abc.net.au/news/topic/east-timor

www.members.pcug.org.au/~wildwood/01juncaa.htm

A search of back copies of *The Australian* newspaper will produce many excellent articles. The following are just some examples:

H. W. Arndt, 'Remembering the Past to Secure the Future', *The Australian*, 23 April 1999, Review, p.8.

José Ramos Horta, 'East Timor Must Take Some Blame', *The Australian*, 20 September 2000, p.10.



Patrick Walters, 'Cohen Reads the Riot Act to Military Chief', *The Australian*, 1 October 1999, p.8.

OTHER REFERENCES

James Dunn, *Timor: A People Betrayed*, ABC Books, Sydney 1998.

Mark Aarons and Robert Domm, *East Timor: A Western Made Tragedy*, Left Book Club, Sydney, 1992.

José Ramos Horta, *Funu: The Unfinished Saga of East Timor*, Red Sea Press, Trenton NJ, 1987.

Jill Joliffe, *East Timor: Nationalism and Colonialism*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1978.

B. Nicol, *Timor: The Stillborn Nation*, Visa, Camberwell, 1978.

The SBS World Guide, 8th edition, Hardie Grant Publishing, South Yarra, 2000.

J. G. Taylor, *Indonesia's Forgotten War: The Hidden History of East Timor*, Pluto Press, Leichhardt NSW, 1981.

FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- Why did the Western world, and in particular the USA, not object strongly to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor?
- Would Indonesia have been able to invade East Timor if this had not occurred during the Cold War? How would world opinion react to such an invasion if it took place now?
- What was the state of the Indonesian economy at the time that President Habibie decided to allow the Timorese to vote for independence? Why was Indonesia so vulnerable to world pressure in 1999 that it was unable to resist the United Nations request to send a peacekeeping force?
- Does the film present the Indonesian point of view on East Timor? Why were many of the political forces in Indonesia (in particular, the army) reluctant to relinquish control of Indonesia? What effect did they fear this might have on other regions in Indonesia? Why did the Indonesian army ensure that there was peace on the day of the referendum, but then allow it to be undermined again immediately afterwards?
- Why did Australia quickly acknowledge as lawful the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, even though the United Nations and the rest of the world did not accept it? Was Australia justified in adopting this position? Why is Australia so careful in its dealings with Indonesia?
- Why did the Australian government press for, and volunteer to lead, a force to restore peace in East Timor and contain the militia rampage which followed the 1999 independence vote? What effect has this had on the relationship between Australia and Indonesia?
- Why did the US agree in principle to support a peacekeeping force? What pressure was the US able to bring to bear on Indonesia?

The Diplomat is a Film Australia National Interest Program in association with Emerald Films. Produced in association with SBS Independent.

Director/Co-writer Tom Zubrycki

Producer Sally Browning

Writer/Co-Producer Wilson da Silva

Executive Producers Stefan Moore, Megan McMurchy

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PHOTOGRAPH CAPTIONS

Photos by ANASTASIA VRACHNOS

1. José Ramos Horta at a community meeting in Dili, East Timor, in December 1999.
2. Falintil pro-independence guerillas, who have been fighting Indonesia's occupation of East Timor over the past 24 years, display their weapons at a checkpoint on the way to the Waimori camp in the hills of East Timor, 19 August 1999.
3. A pro-Indonesia member of Aitarak ('Thorn') militia, wearing the red and white colours of the Indonesian flag, runs with gun and cigarette in hand (cigarettes are used to help fire their homemade weapons) after shooting at pro-independence supporters during clashes in Dili, East Timor, 26 August 1999. Timorese, 78% of whom voted decisively for independence from Indonesia in a landmark ballot, became the target of reprisals from the losing pro-Indonesia militias. East Timor militia members roaming the territory shooting and burning houses at will.
4. A Falintil pro-independence guerilla stands guard at Waimori camp in the hills of East Timor, 19 August 1999,

while two priests arrive to perform mass and give communion to the Falintil soldiers on their 24th anniversary of resistance against Indonesia's occupation of East Timor.

5. José Ramos Horta, deep in thought, aboard a United Nations plane headed for East Timor on 2 December 1999. It is almost 24 years to the day since he was exiled from his homeland following the Indonesian invasion in 1975.

6. Indonesia's President B.J. Habibie bites his lip during an interview at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta 2 October 1999. Mr Habibie was heavily criticized for his handling of the East Timor crisis and for failing to act quickly and effectively to stem the violence and atrocities in East Timor.

7. Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), Britain's Ian Martin, answers reporters' questions during a press conference in Dili, East Timor. The United Nations, which had promised the Timorese people it would not abandon East Timor, was forced to evacuate its personnel during rampages by pro-Indonesia militias following the territory's vote for independence. UN personnel later returned to the ravaged territory to help Timorese begin their rebuilding process.

8. Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas defends his country's position on the East Timor crisis during an interview at the Foreign Ministry on 8 September 1999. Indonesia, which had been tasked with maintaining security in the former Portuguese colony, came under intense international criticism for its handling of East Timor, where the situation deteriorated into complete lawlessness. Pro-Indonesian militias, who suffered an overwhelming loss in the territory's August 30th referendum on independence, rampaged through East Timor burning homes and killing Timorese, allegedly with the co-operation of Indonesian police and military.

9. Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo, stashes his robe after performing Sunday mass and communion for his flock at his residence in Dili, East Timor, September 5, 1999. Days after this picture was taken, Bishop Belo was forced to flee his residence when marauding militias attacked him and the hundreds of refugees sheltering in his home. The bishop was evacuated to Darwin and only returned to East Timor in November, after the territory came under the control of peacekeeping forces.

10. Jailed rebel leader, Xanana Gusmão, takes a moment to think during an interview at his detention house in Jakarta, 10 August 1999. Gusmão, who had been serving a 20 year jail sentence, is the leader of East Timor's pro-independence resistance. The Indonesian government released Gusmão from prison on September 7, following East Timor's historic vote for independence.

11. Timorese residents of the village of Memo arrive in a truck, mourning the death of two of their family members who were killed by pro-Indonesia militia in an attack on the village, East

Timor, 29 August 1999. Twenty-four homes were burned and several people killed in the attack, which occurred on the eve of East Timor's historic vote for independence.

12. Timorese cheer and flash victory signs flanked by Australian peacekeepers, who have secured the area, as they watch additional peacekeeping forces disembark in the port of Dili, East Timor, 21 September 1999. The streets of Dili – which were deserted following the city's destruction by rampaging militias angered at a pro-independence victory in the territory's August 30 ballot – have started to come to life with the arrival of peacekeepers.

13. José Ramos Horta.

14. A Timorese woman dressed in traditional costume in the village of Hatukessi bangs on a drum during a performance of traditional dances for the benefit of UNAMET (United Nations Mission to East Timor) on what was supposed to have been the last day of registration, 4 August 1999. Registration, which netted over 450,000 Timorese voters, was a tremendous success according to UNAMET, but was only half the battle. Creating an environment free of intimidation, where Timorese feel free to vote in the 30 August ballot, proved difficult as pro-integration militias stepped up their violent tactics as the ballot drew near.

15. An old Timorese woman fingers her rosary in the church of Liquiça, East Timor, during Sunday mass on 27 June, 1999. The church of Liquiça was the site of a massacre by pro-Indonesia militias in April where up to 50 people were killed. Some 90% of the population is Catholic, making the church one of the pillars of Timorese society and an outspoken voice against human rights abuses in the territory.

16. A Timorese man holds his voter registration card as he waits in line to vote at a polling center in Odo Mau Atas, near Maliana, East Timor, 30 August 1999. An overwhelming 98.6% of East Timor's registered voters turned out to vote in the territory's historic referendum on independence. While polling day was relatively peaceful, three killings of UNAMET personnel and increased militia violence marred the post-election counting of the ballot.

17. Nobel Peace laureate and Vice President of the Timorese resistance, José Ramos Horta, looks out from a balcony at crowds gathered for a celebration at the office of the CNRT (National Council of Timorese Resistance) in Dili, 2 December 1999 – his first full day in Dili after 24 years in exile. Timorese gathered at the CNRT to help raise the Timorese flag and listen to their resistance leader, Xanana Gusmão, speak.

18. Nobel Peace laureate, José Ramos Horta, accompanied by two peacekeepers, waves to well-wishers as he strolls through Dili, East Timor following his triumphant return to East Timor from 24 years of exile on 2 December 1999.