

EAST TIMOR BIRTH OF A NATION

ISSUE 29 AUSTRALIAN SCREEN EDUCATION



INTRODUCTION

AST TIMOR - BIRTH OF A NATION looks at how a country is born, literally from the ashes, and how the East Timorese people are working to build a future. Each program in this two-part series tells the powerful personal story of a remarkably resilient individual. In examining their experiences, the series explores the complex issues and difficult decisions that are involved in reconciling the past and creating a new and independent nation. Director/producer Luigi Acquisto went to East Timor only weeks after the killing and destruction that followed the 1999 election in which the East Timorese people voted overwhelmingly for independence.





to the country. However, he says, "It soon became clear that this programme should be about something much more decent. It should be about the East Timorese themselves and their efforts to rebuild their nation."

CURRICULUM LINKS

These films will have interest and relevance for teachers and students from middle to senior secondary and at tertiary level. Curriculum links include Asian

PREVIOUS PG L-R: Francisco 'Lu Olo' Guterres (photo: Valeriu Campan); Rosa Martins and her son Nazarello (photo: Andrew Sully). ABOVE: Lu Olo playing guitar (photo: Luigi Acquisto). Old man with Fretilin flag (photo: Luigi Acquisto); LEFT: Children in front of ruins (photo: Luigi Acquisto)

Studies, Studies of Society and Environment, History, International Studies, Politics, Religious Studies, Geography, English and Media Studies.

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

Here are some key words and terms that students need to be familiar with before watching the films.

KEY WORDS

Occupation, Resistance, Genocide, Refugee, Animist, Autonomy, Democracy, Independence, Self-Determination, Referendum, Presidential Political System, Militia, Guerillas, Constituent Assembly, Reconciliation.

TERMS

FRETILIN - the Revolutionary East Timorese Independence Party

ASDT - the pro-independence Association of Timorese Social Democrats (which became Fretilin)

FALINTIL - the military arm of Fretilin UDT - the Timorese Democratic Union

VIVA TIMOR LORO SA'E! – Long Live East Timor!

OVERVIEW

The first film, *Rosa's Story*, takes us into the life of Rosa Martins, a 27year-old widow. She has six children, the three youngest living with her in a dirt-floored shack—with no electricity, toilet or running water—in the hills on the outskirts of Dili. Her three eldest children live in church-run orphanages in other towns. The core story is about her trip to visit the three eldest children,



two of whom she hasn't seen for 18 months, in their orphanages in Los Palos and Venilale.

Rosa's journey unfolds as Xanana Gusmão, the hero of the East Timorese Resistance and favourite to become the first elected President of the new, independent East Timor, sets out on a leg of his national civic education tour. Gusmão attempts to lay the groundwork for a peaceful transition to full independence by speaking about the importance of reconciliation and democracy. This first film gives us an opportunity to see

CLOCKWISE TOP RIGHT: Children on mountain side (photo: Andrew Sully); Filming Lu Olo at Dili Fretilin rally (photo: Stella Zammataro); Luigi Acquisto filming CNRT Conference (photo: Andrew Sully); Fretilin flag (photo: Valeriu Campan); Lu Olo and Andrew Sully (photo: Valeriu Campan); Fretilin Central Committee releasing doves (photo: Valeriu Campan)













how these two characters contribute to the rebuilding of East Timor.

The second film, *Lu Olo's Story*, is an intimate examination of Francisco "Lu Olo" Guterres' transition from soldier to politician, using the lead up to the election for a constituent assembly as a backdrop. Lu Olo joined Fretilin, the revolutionary East Timorese Independence Party, as a 17-year-old in 1975, in order to defend his country against what he saw as the Indonesian invasion. He fought in the mountains for 24

years, during which time he never set foot in a village or a town. He hid in isolated farmhouses or mountain camps. Through the years he rose to the rank of Falintil army commander. He also acted as the political commissioner for Fretilin, which to some degree prepared him for his future role as a politician.

Nation building is never easy and it takes the combined efforts of all citizens, from the revered to the humble, to achieve success. The two films of *East Timor: Birth of a Nation* give us

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 way that simultaneously inspires us and

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 exposes the enormity of their task.

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 Freti BEFORE WATCHING:

 BACKGROUND READING, ACTIVITIES

AND QUESTIONS

Work through this section to develop your understanding of the history of East Timor and its people.

a poignant glimpse at the contribution

of people engaged in this process in a

Timor is a tiny island of the Malay Archipelago about 500 kilometres northwest of Australia. Prior to 1975 it had been under Portuguese colonial rule for 460 years.

According to Amnesty International, since the Indonesian military invaded in 1975, the Indonesian occupation of East Timor has cost more than 200,000 lives. (The Indonesian government put the number at 100,000).

In April 1975 East Timor saw the opportunity to become an independent nation after left-leaning generals overthrew the

TOP TO BOTTOM: Rosa Martins with son Peregrino; Rosa Martins (photo: Valeriu Campan)



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Portuguese dictator, Marcelo Caetano. The new government of Portugal moved quickly toward giving independence to its remaining colonies.

In anticipation of independence, two major political parties quickly emerged in East Timor: The Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) and The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin). The UDT wanted independence, but it also wanted to maintain some links with Portugal. Fretilin, like so many independence organizations in the 1960s and '70s, was influenced by a revolutionary communist ideology. In January 1975, the two parties formed a coalition in order to prepare for an independent nation.

Indonesia, East Timor's powerful neighbour, "had other plans. Directed by military leaders who were determined to control East Timor, Indonesian agents sabotaged the region's peaceful progress toward independence. In May 1975, Indonesian operatives persuaded the UDT to withdraw from the coalition. In August, convinced that any independent East Timorese regime which included the leftist Fretilin would not be permitted by its Indonesian neighbours, the UDT seized power."

What ensued was a short but bloody civil war, with Fretilin eventually prevailing. About 2,500 UDT supporters fled to Indonesian West Timor.

Claiming that intervention was necessary to restore peace and security in East Timor, Indonesia invaded on 7 De-



cember 1975. East Timor was annexed and remained a province of Indonesia for the next 24 years.

*During the initial military offensive, a large percentage of East Timor's 600,000 inhabitants—along with Fretilin's armed wing, known as Falintil—fled into the rugged mountains in the eastern half of the island. As the war dragged on, starvation and carpet bombing eventually forced most of the surviving population to settle in camps and towns controlled by the Indonesian military (ABRI). Military attack,

CLOCKWISE TOP RIGHT: Rosa and son Peregrino at Dili Fretilin rally (photo: Stella Zammataro); Valeriu Campan filming Rosa Martins and son Peregrino (photo: Stella Zammataro); Rosa Martins and her children (photo: Valeriu Campan); Rosa with Nazarello and Peregrino (photo: Luigi Acquisto); Girl at orphanage in candlelight (photo: Valeriu Campan); Jose, Joao and Nazarello Martins













executions, starvation after crops were destroyed or abandoned, forced migration, and disease claimed an estimated 100,000 lives in the first year of occupation alone."

The offensive against Falintil and the population in general continued unabated through all those years. Numerous strategies were employed by the Indonesian military and the militia it created. These included "forced migration, rape and forced sterilisation, forced military service, torture, murder and harassment. One in four East Timorese is thought to have lost his or her life in the struggle."

In 1996, political circumstances finally began to work for, rather than against, the East Timorese. With pressure on Indonesia mounting from both inside and out, on 21 May, President Suharto resigned, handing the reigns of power to his vice president, B.J. Habibie.

The political climate in East Timor changed quickly and dramatically. 'With Habibie fighting for his political life, and the country racked by an



ongoing political and economic crisis, the new administration began indicat-

ing that East Timor was a problem it

was ready to solve.' In January 1999, Habibie said that if the East Timorese rejected his autonomy proposal then independence could be an option for the province. Xanana Gusmão simply said, 'Better late than never,' and called for cease-fire negotiations to begin. On 5 May, Indonesia and Portugal formally agreed to allow the UN to conduct a referendum on Indonesia's autonomy proposal. The agreement included a commitment from Indonesia that, should autonomy be rejected, East Timor would be

TOP TO BOTTOM: Xanana Gusmão with wife Kirsty Sword Gusmão and son Alexandre (photo: Luigi Acquisto); Lu Olo on the day after the election (photo: Stella Zammataro); Lu Olo with Fretilin flag in the background (photo: Andrew Sully)

'separated' from Indonesia.

This announcement led to outbreaks of violence across East Timor, perpetrated by militia organizations supported by the Indonesian army. Their strategy was obviously to intimidate the East Timorese into accepting the autonomy proposal. Many thousands of people died or 'disappeared' during this time.

Despite the violence, which twice precipitated a delay in the voting date, the process continued. Approximately 450,000 voters were registered, nearly all of those eligible. On 30 August 1999, the East Timorese people voted overwhelmingly for independence. This was followed by a wave of murder and destruction that some have described as the worst withdrawal by any colonizing power of the 20th century. It is with this backdrop that *East Timor - Birth of a Nation* was made.

ACTIVITIES

Find out more about:

- Timor's location and geographical features. Locate the following places: Balibo, Dili, Los Palos, Liquicia, Oecusse, Venilale
- The Portuguese influence on East Timorese culture
- the diversity of cultures in East Timor (4 languages other than English are spoken in the films: Portuguese, Tetum, Italian and Makase)
- the specifics of the bloody civil war involving UDT and Fretilin
- the roles, attitudes and policies of successive Australian governments



from 1975 to the present

the United Nations and INTERFET
 Read and discuss the following extract from an article in the Sunday Times:

Timor Set For Xanana Republic With the peace and goodwill that have characterized the embrace of democracy in East Timor since the end of Indonesian rule, voters turned out yesterday to elect their first president, Jose Alexandre 'Xanana' Gusmão—with only the margin of victory in doubt when polls closed.

In a gesture underlining the amicable nature of the two-candidate race, Mr Gusmão and his rival,

CLOCKWISE TOP RIGHT: Xanana Gusmão; Luigi Acquisto filming Nazarello and Jose in the rain amongst the ruins (photo: Valeriu Campan); Xavier do Amaral (photo: Valeriu Campan); Xanana relaxes for a moment (photo: Valeriu Campan); Series producer Stella Zammataro with Xanana Gusmão, son Alexandre and Kirsty Sword Gusmão (photo: Valeriu Campan)







Francisco Xavier do Amaral, who was East Timor's president for nine days in 1975 before Indonesia's invasion, came arm in arm to a Dili school, voted together and then embraced ...

Mr Gusmão will be an important guiding influence. He is expected to focus on reconciling a society still scarred by Indonesian rule and its aftermath ...

East Timor faces the challenge of accepting many ex-members of the Indonesian loyalist militia who joined in the destruction of the territory after that vote (as well as repatriating an estimated 60,000 refugees from Indonesian West Timor).

- Xanana Gusmão appears to be a reluctant politician. He has been quoted as saying he would rather be a pumpkin farmer than president. As well as being a political leader, he is an artist, a poet and a photographer. Xanana also spent many years fighting in the mountains and seven years in jail. Read Gusmão's short but moving autobiography, *To Resist is to Win*, in order to understand how a boy from a small regional town eventually becomes the president of his country.
- Any representation of a historical event is affected by the perspective of its creator. Look at *A Dirty Little War* and *Bitter Flowers, Sweet Flowers* (see further reading) in order to cover some alternate points of view. What do these works have in common? How do their perspectives differ?

ROSA'S STORY

Reast Timor in 1974, the year before Indonesia invaded. Her father, a Fretilin delegate, was killed by Indonesian soldiers in 1978. Her mother died of starvation. Of eight siblings, only Rosa and her younger brother survived the occupation.

Rosa, a widow, was alone and pregnant when militia violence escalated in September 1999. She fled with her three sons to the United Nations compound in Dili and was later evacuated to Australia, where her youngest boy was born. Her two daughters, however, were still in East Timor. In desperation, she had sent them to an orphanage years earlier and, during the violence, they fled to the mountains with the nuns. When Rosa returned to Dili eight months later, she was relieved to discover her girls were still alive but devastated to find that she had lost her few possessions.

Rosa now lives with her three smallest children on a hill overlooking the capital, in a shack she has built from donated wood and tin sheeting. She earns a little money running a stall at a local high school but with so few resources she has been forced to send her eldest son to another orphanage. After 18 months, she has finally saved enough for the bus fare to visit the two distant institutions, where she and all her children will come together for the first time.

Although Rosa hopes one day to reunite her family, at the moment she is too poor and her home too tiny and derelict. But Rosa is determined to give her children a good education and the opportunities denied her by war and poverty.

This is the story of a proud and intelligent woman who is moving forward, exorcising the past and creating new chances for her family.

THEME:

THE VULNERABILITY OF WOMEN IN WAR

- Watch the film closely. List as many examples of the hardships that Rosa faces as you can. What sacrifices does she make?
- Do some research into women in war. A useful resource for East Timor is the Alola Foundation (see web site references). What similarities can you find between the experiences of Rosa and women in WWII, Bosnia, Afghanistan or Vietnam?
- Use the evidence you gather from your research as a basis for a submission to the leaders of the world, explaining to them the damage war does to women.
- Imagine that you are Rosa. Write a letter to your son or daughter trying

to explain why it was necessary to place him or her in an orphanage. Include the hopes you hold for your child and the family as well as your ideas about what the future holds for East Timor.

 Students may comment about the methods Rosa uses in her attempts to force her son to attend school.
 Rosa makes a moving speech about the importance of her children receiving a good education.
 How do you feel about her methods? Do you believe her actions are justified by her economic and social circumstances?

THEME:

CATHOLICISM AS A FORCE IN EAST TIMOR

Catholicism was brought to the island by the Portuguese colonists and has played a large role in supporting East Timorese independence movements and cultural autonomy. For example, when the language of the Church was changed from Portuguese, Timorese bishops requested permission to use Tetum, rather then Bahasa Indonesian as the language for the ceremonies. Catholicism has a strong following in East Timor. In recent surveys, more than 90% of East Timorese identify themselves as Catholics. However, alongside Catholic practices, many East Timorese still maintain animistic beliefs (see 'Animism - the Other Religion' in the section about Lu Olo's Story). This demonstrates the maintained connection between East Timorese culture and the natural world.

- Research the Catholic Church's role as an institutional support for the independence movement and cultural autonomy. Why do you think Catholicism became such a powerful force in people's lives after the invasion?
- Research and then write a biographical piece about Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, who shared the Nobel Peace prize with José Ramos Horta in 1996.

Rosa's Story is filled with Catholic imagery and rituals. The Catholic Church has often been a great support to the

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oppressed.

- Do some research into Poland and Central and South America. How did the Catholic Church offer support in these areas?
- What support does the Church offer Rosa and her family? What is its influence in her life? Do you think the nuns are fair to Rosa and her children? Why/why not?
- Look at the scene which frames Rosa sitting at the door of her house with the statue of Jesus behind her in the room. What statement is the film-maker making? How are religious images used as a device by the film-maker?

During the film there are several shots of the Cristo Rei (Christ the King) statue, which dominates the skyline over Dili. Based on the famous statue in Rio de Janiero, it was built by the Indonesians as a present to the people of East Timor. In order to reach the statue, you must follow a track which leads you past a series of grottos depicting the Stations of the Cross. There is a plaque at the bottom of Cristo Rei which states that it was built to celebrate Fast Timor becoming a province of Indonesia. The irony of this has not escaped the film-maker, who chooses a visit to the statue by Rosa and her children as one of the final scenes in the film.

 Why do you think this was selected as one of the final scenes? What sort of symbol is Cristo Rei? What does it say about the past? What might it say about the future?

THEME:

TYPES OF NATION BUILDING

Both Rosa and Xanana Gusmão play their parts in the rebuilding of East Timor. Xanana is the statesman; Rosa the humble village woman.

- Look at the roles both have played. Whose role is more important and why?
- Take sides. Construct arguments as to why both their roles are important. You could organize a debate in which one side argues the importance of the contribution of

the unsung heroes, while the other side argues the importance of the key individuals in history

Discuss the contribution that a documentary such as *Rosa's Story* makes to history.

THEME:

AN UNDERSTANDING OF POVERTY

Rosa lives in abject poverty. It takes her 18 months to save enough money to take a bus trip to visit her children. The round trip would cost AU\$20 a ticket. Rosa lives in a shack with a dirt floor and bathes her children under a stormwater pipe when it rains.

- Does Rosa's poverty take her dignity from her? Write a reflective piece focusing on what you think are Rosa's strengths and weaknesses.
- Imagine you are Rosa. Choose one of the more harrowing moments depicted in the film and write a diary entry describing what you are feeling.

LU OLO'S STORY

FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, Francisco "Lu Olo" Guterres was a guerilla fighter in the East Timorese struggle against Indonesian occupation. He is one of only a handful of Falintil commanders who was never captured by the enemy and the only original member of Fretilin to have survived in East Timor. Now, he has left the military to take up the position of President of Fretilin, the political party that led the resistance.

Lu Olo's wife, a fellow soldier, died during a battle in the early 1980s. His family wants him to find a new partner but Lu Olo is intent on rebuilding his country before he starts rebuilding his life.

For a long time, his family assumed he was dead. It's a similar story for thousands of others who have returned from hiding places in the mountains to find themselves regarded as ghosts in the land of the living.

Lu Olo faces imposing new hurdles as he makes the transition from warrior to politician in the lead-up to East Timor's first national democratic election. It's a process that has ignited some old tensions, particularly with Xavier do Amaral, Fretilin's founding president and now leader of the opposing Social Democratic Party of East Timor.

The campaign trail takes Lu Olo across the country and brings him in contact once more with friends who helped while he was in hiding and relatives who were imprisoned or tortured during the war because of their connection to him. Even now, there are rumours of a kidnap attempt against the Fretilin leader.

Yet the passage to the election is remarkably free of violence. Although Fretilin wins by a comfortable majority, it needs votes from other parties to pass the constitution. Old rivals become allies of sorts as Xavier is elected vice president and Lu Olo becomes president of the Assembly. Together, they will guide the country towards its first presidential elections after which the United Nations will officially hand over power to the parliament and East Timor will finally achieve full independence.

THEME:

WHAT MAKES A LEADER?

- Discuss whether Lu Olo and Xanana Gusmão have the right credentials to become the leaders of their nation. Why/why not?
- Write a comparative piece in which you examine the personal characteristics and leadership qualities of both men as they are presented in Lu Olo's Story.
- Put yourself in Lu Olo's shoes.
 Write about your feelings as you are making the transition from freedom fighter to political leader.
- Research the lives of Nelson Mandela (South Africa) and Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe). In what ways are their life stories similar to those of Xanana and Lu Olo? What has made each the man he is? Are they good leaders? Why/why not?

THEME:

POLITICS IS POLITICS

We are introduced to Lu Olo in the midst of an election campaign in which he is

contesting a seat in the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly is an 88 seat elected body, tasked with writing the Constitution for the new nation of East Timor. (It has subsequently become the first Parliament of East Timor and, unless there is another election, its members will write the laws for East Timor for the next five years.)

- Look closely at the campaigns that are depicted. Why might the film-makers have selected these images? How do the campaigns of Fretilin, ASDT and Xanana compare?
- On at least two occasions, the women involved in the campaign discuss the importance of Lu Olo finding a partner. [And if you're wondering, yes! He is now with a partner.] How does he respond to this? How does this make you feel about him? (This is not unlike the sorts of discussions some people have about political candidates in Australia.) Can you find other examples in the campaign that are similar to elements of Australian political campaigns? In what ways do the campaigns differ?

THEME:

ANIMISM - THE OTHER RELIGION

- · Use the Internet to research Animism in East Timor and its importance today
- Look at the animal sacrifice which is carried out in the ASDT campaign and the numerous traditional welcomes that are offered to Lu Olo and Xanana. Compare these to the Catholic images of Rosa's Story. Which do you think are the most powerful? Why?

EAST TIMOR- BIRTH OF A **NATION - THE SERIES IN** REVIEW

IMAGES OF DESPAIR, IMAGES OF HOPF

Both Rosa's Story and Lu Olo's Story contain images of death, destruction and suffering.

What are some of the cinematic de-

vices used to convey the enormous suffering of the East Timorese people? To what extent do you think they are effective?

- In Rosa's Story there is the incongruous scene of an ice-cream van travelling through the devastated streets of Dili. This is one of many symbols of the rebirth of East Timor. What are some of the other symbols used by the film-makers?
- Do you consider the films to be optimistic or pessimistic? Give as many reasons as possible to support your point of view?
- Use the films as the basis for an essay on East Timor's future as a new nation.

THEME:

ETHICS AND DOCUMENTARY FILM-MAKING

Producer/director Luigi Acquisto savs:

Rosa's Story raised certain ethical questions which, as a film-maker, I tried to address in the process of making the series. It was clear that, given her [Rosa's] poverty, she should benefit from the production in a significant way. It would be outright exploitative if only we as producers, and Film Australia, benefited from the success of the series. Rosa was paid a fee, which she decided to use to build a new house. ... The house was comparatively inexpensive by Australian standards, but extravagant by local standards. To avoid tension and jealousy in Rosa's immediate community, we employed a local project manager and a number of neighbourhood men to build the house. What I thought would be a straightforward task turned into a greater challenge than making the documentary series. Obstacles included an early wet season, unsympathetic neighbours blocking access to roads and water, and contractors revising their quotes during construction. The house was finally completed the day before we left East Timor ...

We left East Timor in mid-September 2001. Rosa's house was finished and she held a small party to celebrate. The new house has two bedrooms, a living area and a kitchen. Her eldest son. João. has subsequently returned [from the orphan-

age in Los Palos] to live with the family and is now attending school in Dili. The two girls still live in the orphanage [in Venilale], but now come home during the long European-style summer break.

- Does your opinion of the film change knowing that Rosa was paid? Why/why not?
- Lu Olo was not paid for his part in the documentary. Why do you think he agreed to be involved? Write an imaginative piece, taking the role of Lu Olo and explaining why you chose to participate in the film.

REFERENCES

Jeffrey Benner, Dossier: East Timor-A Relatively Painless Primer on the History of the Conflict in East Timor, available at: www.motherjones.com/ east_timor/dossier/

All quotes and factual information are drawn from this source, unless otherwise specified.

Don Greenlees, 'Timor Set For Xanana Republic', Sunday Times, 15 April 2002.

FURTHER READING

Books, Melbourne, 1998.

Win: The Autobiography of Xanana Gusmão, (ed.) Sarah Niner, (trans) Jose Luis Perestrelo Botelheiro & Ana Noronha, Aurora Books/David Lovell Publishing, 2000.

story of the Balibo Five, Scribe Publications, Melbourne 2001.

an eyewitness account of East Timor's decent into hell, 1997-2000, Random House, Australia, 2001.

RICHARD TANTER, Mark Selden and Stephen R. Shalom, Bitter Flowers, Sweet Flowers: East Timor, Indonesia and the World Community, Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

VIDEO RESOURCES

TOM ZUBRYCKI, The Diplomat, 1999, 81 mins.

Follows East Timor freedom fighter and Nobel Peace Prize winner José Ramos Horta in the final tumultuous year of his 24-year campaign to secure independence for his country. An excellent

LIBBY GLEESON, Refuge, Penguin

XANANA GUSMÃO, To Resist is to

JILL JOLLIFFE, Cover Up: the inside

JOHN MARTINKUS, A Dirty Little War:

resource for middle and secondary students, and tertiary students of politics, international studies, Asian studies or Asian history.

A Film Australia National Interest Program in association with Emerald Films. Produced in association with SBS.

AMANDA KING and FABIO CAVADINI, *Starting From Zero*, 2001, 52 mins.

Tells the story of three East Timorese returning to their shattered homeland after 24 years in exile.

Developed and financed in association with the Australian Film Commission. Produced with the assistance of the NSW Film and Television Office. Produced in association with SBS Independent. With the assistance of the Search Foundation.

WEB SITES

THE ALOLA FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN SURVIVORS:

http://www.alolafoundation.org/ BACK DOOR Newsletter on East Timor:

http://www.pcug.org.au/~wildwood/ Index.htm

JON GREENAWAY, BEING XANANA GUSMÃO, available at:

www.xananagusmao.com/ jon2est.html MOTHER JONES

http://www.motherjones.com/ politics/1999/09/moving-slowly-easttimor

ABC

www.abc.net.au/etimor

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DIRECTORS: Luigi Acquisto (Rosa's Story)/Luigi Acquisto, Andrew Sully (Lu Olo's Story) WRITER: Luigi Acquisto NARRATOR: Cate Blanchett DURATION: 2 x 55 min YEAR OF PRODUCTION: 2001 Study guide © NFSA and ATOM 2002

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