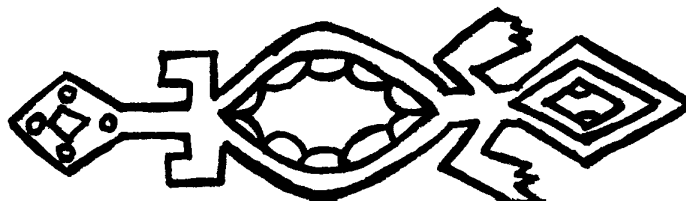


# CHILDREN OF THE CROCODILE

A documentary portrait of two young Timorese-Australians that tells a universal story - about ideals, identity and culture as keys to survival.

## PRESS KIT



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## SYNOPSIS

*"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)*



*Children of the Crocodile* explores cultural identity, resistance and survival, through the intimate story of two young Timorese-Australian women. Cidalia Pires and Elizabeth Exposto were babies when their families fled East Timor in 1975 and came to Australia. Now in their mid-twenties, they've devoted their lives to the Timorese struggle - Cidalia through theatre performance and Elizabeth through her work in human rights.

Home movies, photos, and personal accounts show their families' escape, growing up Timorese in Melbourne, and why they care so deeply about their homeland. We discover Cid's passion for music and dance, Elizabeth's devotion to justice, and the strength of their community and culture.

Cid and Elizabeth live through two amazing years - from the joy of voting for freedom in August 1999, to rage at the destruction that follows, and into a time of renewed commitment and hope.

East Timor's independence fulfils their lifetime dream, but it also brings hard choices. Should they go back to their country? How can they contribute? Where do their futures lie?

Convinced that East Timor needs its people "now more than ever," Elizabeth buys a one-way ticket to Dili. Cidalia's choice is more complex, but it also takes her on a short trip to Timor, to record traditional songs and dances. We share the joys and sorrows of their return, as they reunite with family and travel through their beautiful but shattered land. *Children of the Crocodile* tells a story which is personal yet universal - about ideals, identity, and the strength of a culture which has given birth to the world's newest nation.



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## **FESTIVALS**

Inside Out Toronto Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival- *Audience Award*

New York Asian American International Film Festival

Newport Beach Film Festival

Women of Color Film Festival, CA

Cinema Paradise Film Festival

AUSFEST, Digital Video Festival

Paris Lesbian Film Festival

Immaginaria Lesbian Film Festival, Italy

Pan -African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO)

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**Tetum, Portuguese and English with English subtitles**

**Australia      ·      52 Min.      ·      Video**

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## CREW LIST AND CREDITS

Very special thanks to Elizabeth Exposto, Cidalia Pires, and their families,  
and to all the people who gave their generous support.

Written & Directed by  
**Marsha Emerman**

Producers  
**John Moore and Marsha Emerman**

Editor  
**Bill Murphy**

Cinematography  
**Sue Roberts**  
**Peter Zakharov**

Sound Recordist  
**Bob Phelps**

Script Editor  
**Nicky Tyndale-Biscoe**

Second Unit - East Timor  
**Fabio Cavadini**, Camera  
**Mandy King**, Sound

Produced in association with



SBS Independent

Produced with the assistance of Film Victoria



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## BIOGRAPHIES

### **Marsha Emerman, Writer/Director/Co-Producer**

Marsha has worked in documentary for more than twenty years as a filmmaker, writer, teacher, and programmer. Trained in the USA, she studied filmmaking at San Francisco City College, earned an MA in Documentary Media Studies at San Francisco State, and worked on such award-winning films as *The Day After Trinity*, *Dark Circle* and the *Fall of the I-Hotel*.

Since migrating to Australia in 1989, Marsha has continued to make programs with peace, women's rights, and humanitarian themes. Working with the International Women's Development Agency, she wrote and directed *Lihok Pilipina: Women on the Move*, about a micro-credit program in the Philippines. She was researcher for *The Sleep of Reason*, a film about the nuclear nightmare and *Conspiracy*, an expose of the Hilton bombing incident. She also teaches documentary at the VCA School of Film & TV and does volunteer work with human rights and community groups.

### **John Moore, Producer**

John has been producing social issue documentaries for over ten years on a wide range of topics. Programs include the AFI Award winning *Guns & Roses* about the causes of domestic murder. *Barefoot Student Army* documented the struggle for democracy in Burma. The multi award winning *Black Man's Houses* is the story of Tasmanian Aborigines incarcerated on Flinders Island and *Harold* is about the life and times of the Aboriginal singer Harold Blair. In 1998 John spent a year with *The Astonishing Ashtons* as their circus toured across Australia. Recently John returned to directing and made *Thomson of Arnhem Land* for Film Australia and the ABC. Thomson was screened at festivals around the world, won an AFI award for best editing and the \$15,000 NSW Premiers History Prize. John is currently producing *In the Realm of the Hackers* for Film Australia.



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## **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 the 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 together 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 kind 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 Timor.

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



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## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

### BEGINNINGS

Before migrating to Australia in 1989, I knew nothing about East Timor. I'd been active in peace and solidarity groups, but had no idea that the people of a tiny island on the other side of the globe were enduring a brutal occupation.

In Melbourne, I began to learn about East Timor, teaching English to asylum seekers and attending events put on by the local Timorese community. There was always singing, dancing, and a warm welcome for non-Timorese who came to express support. In the early months of 1999, pre-referendum violence in East Timor captured the headlines. Although my mother and grandparents emigrated to America in the 1920s before the rise of fascism in Europe, there was much in the stories from East Timor that struck a familiar and frightening chord.

I started to volunteer with the East Timor Human Rights Centre and met Elizabeth Exposto, her cousin Cidalia Pires, and other young Timorese friends. We discussed the upcoming election - How did they feel about voting? What outcome did they expect? If the result was independence, would they go back to East Timor?

The idea of making a film arose when a friend mentioned SBS TV's *Hybrid Lives*, a new documentary series about 2nd and 3rd generation migrants. Having worked in documentary for over twenty years in diverse roles, I was eager for a chance to direct, so I wrote and submitted a short proposal.

Meanwhile events moved so swiftly that we had to start filming immediately. August 30th, 1999 was a pivotal moment for the people of East Timor. It was also the catalyst for a two and a half year filmmaking journey.

### CONNECTIONS

*Children of the Crocodile* combined my passion for documentary filmmaking 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 four hundred years of Portuguese colonization and twenty-five years of Indonesian occupation. Elizabeth Lim Gomes, a Timorese writer living in Melbourne, described the role of culture as a "powerful, yet gentle weapon of resistance."

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 human lives.



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## CHALLENGES

My goal was to make a documentary that had an emotional impact on an audience and also broadened their view of the world. Editor Bill Murphy and I tried to achieve this by incorporating archival and news footage, along with personal observation, interviews, home movies, and stills.



Finding the right balance between the personal and political, the small and 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 people who were part of their lives.

There were instances when this worked beautifully - as in Elizabeth's story about the Asian studies teacher who dismissed East Timor as "a minor conflict" and her mother Eugenia's reflection on the way that Australia ignored its wartime debt to the Timorese. On the other hand, 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.

Likewise, when the film moves from Australia to East Timor, it offers glimpses of the land and culture and the ongoing hardship of the people, but doesn't fully explore the thorny political issues of rebuilding a country where the infrastructure was almost completely destroyed.

I hope those in the audience who are not familiar with 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.



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## THE PRODUCTION STORY

In July 1999, Marsha Emerman submitted a proposal to SBS Independent for a documentary about "the birth of a new East Timorese nation, seen through the eyes of young East Timorese in Australia - *Children of the Crocodile*"

Four young East Timorese had been chosen to participate in the film. All were in their twenties and from families who fled East Timor in 1975. Elizabeth and Cidalia had grown up in Australia, while Emanuel and Fatima lived in Portugal before migrating to Australia.

With the referendum in East Timor fast approaching, the production team (producer Lisa Horler, sound recordist Bob Phelps and Marsha) hired gear and started filming. They taped initial interviews exploring family histories, feelings about the ballot and hopes for the future. Marsha remembers: "It was a time of anticipation and emotion which made the interviews particularly potent."

In East Timor, Indonesian soldiers and militia were waging a vicious campaign of intimidation to prevent the August 30th, 1999 ballot from going ahead. The whole population was being terrorised, with independence supporters and youth as primary targets.

Timorese in Melbourne were concerned, but still optimistic. It seemed to young activists like Elizabeth that independence was finally within reach.

With camerawoman Sue Roberts, the team began to film events in the Timorese community. Marsha was also seeking permission from the UN and Australian Electoral Commission to film polling places on the day of the ballot.

"A few days before the election permission came, but so did word that our SBS application was unsuccessful. It was disappointing, but by then we were hooked on following the story."

On August 30th nearly the entire population of East Timor, along with thousands of Timorese in the diaspora, turned out to vote. Five days later the results were announced - 78.5% for independence! At the park where an exuberant celebration was underway, the crew went straight into action, chasing a motorcade and recording the singing, dancing, and shouting.

Filming continued that night at the Pires family home in Meadow Heights. It was a bittersweet celebration, with the TV news from East Timor showing ominous signs of what lay ahead.



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It became clear that Elizabeth and Cidalia's family connection provided a useful device to tell the story. They were cousins who'd grown up together, but their paths were beginning to diverge. Showreel in hand, Marsha began writing a new treatment. Meanwhile, a grassroots fundraising strategy was adopted. Support for the Timorese and the project brought numerous offers of help - low cost equipment, donated services, and small contributions from unions, community groups and filmmakers. "Without this support the film would never have been made."

Between January and October 2000, the team applied to numerous film funding bodies, public broadcasters and foundations for production funding. All of the applications were unsuccessful.

Despite limited funds, sporadic filming continued. Elizabeth had made up her mind to go to East Timor, but was dubious about letting a film crew follow her. There were reports of tension in Dili between local Timorese and those from the diaspora, and she wanted to draw as little attention to herself as possible.

Elizabeth left for East Timor in May 2000. Not long after, Cidalia decided she would also go for a six week visit to collect songs and other cultural material. They agreed that Marsha and crew could film there in August and September. Suddenly we had a fantastic opportunity to film them both in East Timor at the same time! I immediately went into high gear, trying to raise money and organize the trip."

"The situation in East Timor had improved since the arrival of peacekeepers, but it was still a difficult place to film. Prices were inflated and accommodation scarce, the roads were poor, and malaria and dengue fever were common."

"Our plans went well at first. Show Travel sponsored two tickets to Darwin, filmmakers loaned gear and friends in Timor organized housing. Then, shortly before the crew was due to leave, I got sick - from winter, exhaustion, and stress."

In a last-ditch effort to salvage the situation, Marsha contacted Mandy King and Fabio Cavadini, Sydney filmmakers who were already in East Timor. "They agreed to do three days of filming and sent back fantastic footage, mainly of Cidalia recording traditional songs and dances."

Boosted by the new footage, Marsha wrote another treatment and submitted it to Film Victoria. In October 2000, they agreed to make a script development investment. The amount was small, but it was a major breakthrough.

The next six months was a fruitful period of collaboration. Script editor Nicky Tyndale-Biscoe provided insight and guidance in shaping the story. Bill Murphy (editor of *Exile in Sarajevo* and *Chasing Buddha*) contributed his formidable talent and at the end of just two weeks in the edit room the team had a very impressive half-hour rough cut. Wonderful home movies and photos of Cid and Elizabeth as children enriched the rough cut. Special thanks go to the Pires and Exposto families, who generously searched for and supplied these images.



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The script and rough cut brought further success with funders. SBS offered a pre-sale and Film Victoria provided additional funds for post-production. The only catch was that money was also needed for a trip to East Timor. The team had great footage of Cidalia in Timor, but very little of Elizabeth, who had been living there for over a year. An application for a quick response grant was lodged with the Australian Film Commission, but was turned down. Once again, supporters came to the rescue. With a radio mike donated by Pink Audio, gear loaned by friends, and whatever cash could be scraped together, Marsha and cameraman Peter Zakharov flew to Dili on June 30, 2001.

Marsha remembers, "Dili is less than a two hour flight from Darwin, but it's another world. It was a shock to see the extent of destruction, nearly two years after the August 1999 ballot and the great poverty in which most people lived."

"It was also disturbing to see the contrast - chic cafes, flashy four-wheel drives, well stocked supermarkets, and other comforts available to the military and UN staff. But what struck us most during the weeks in Timor was the spirit, generosity and resilience of the Timorese people."

"From a filmmaking standpoint, everything went remarkably well. Our gear functioned beautifully, the car we rented only broke down once, Elizabeth was very helpful, and we got terrific footage. It was good timing as Elizabeth was travelling to the districts and we were able to go along - to Suai on the south coast, Los Palos in the east, and the enclave of Oecussi inside West Timor."

At the end of July, Marsha returned to Australia and spent the next month logging, transcribing, and getting Tetum and Portuguese dialogue translated. "I wanted to go back to East Timor for the August 30th election, when the Timorese would vote for leaders to write a new Constitution. It was exactly two years from the start of filming and seemed to promise a perfect resolution to the story. Lack of funds made this impossible, but luck was with the project again. Mandy and Fabio were back in Timor and they filmed Elizabeth on that day. The final edit began in September 2001, again with Bill Murphy. Working with Bill was a pleasure and privilege and the film got better every day. I just wish I'd been able to finalise things like release forms, funding contracts and access to archival footage before we got into the edit room."

"Bill kept asking for weeks how I wanted the film to end. I didn't want something neat or sentimental, but kept evading an answer. Perhaps deep down I didn't want the film to end at all!"

When the edit was nearly finished, Marsha invited Cidalia and Elizabeth to come have a look. "I wanted them to be happy with it, so of course I was quite nervous. Much to my joy, they liked it." Cid even said, "I hope it will move other people as much as it moved me."



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## BACKGROUND - EAST TIMOR

*Children of the Crocodile* tells the story of Elizabeth Exposto and Cidalia Pires, two young Timorese women who were born just before Indonesia invaded and occupied their country in 1975. It's a personal story, set in the context of key events and social forces which have shaped the lives of all Timorese, whether they remained in East Timor or fled to other countries.

- Over 20,000 East Timorese live in Australia and thousands of others are scattered around the world, especially in Portugal and its former colonies. Most of these people arrived in Australia as refugees (including the Exposto and Pires families).
- Although East Timor was ruled by Portugal for over 400 years, much Timorese indigenous culture remained intact. There were numerous unsuccessful revolts against colonial rule but opinions differ on the extent of repression. Nonetheless, Portuguese influences were absorbed and there was some intermarriage. Portuguese is still spoken by those educated before 1975 and will be the official language of the new nation.
- In 1915, the Dutch and Portuguese colonial administrations signed a treaty dividing the island of Timor in half, with the Portuguese in the East and the Dutch in the west (except for the enclave of Oecusse which the Portuguese retained). When Indonesia obtained independence from the Dutch after WWII, West Timor became one of its provinces.
- During World War II, over 60,000 Timorese were killed by the Japanese, in reprisal for their assistance to Australian soldiers. The Australians, whose presence brought on the brutal occupation, dropped leaflets as they departed saying, "Friends, we will never forget you."
- In 1974, Portuguese decolonization gave rise to new political parties in Timor. The two major parties UDT and Fretilin, both favoured independence, but Indonesian infiltration caused UDT to stage a coup in August 1975 which provided a pretext for the subsequent invasion.
- On December 7, 1975, Indonesia invaded East Timor. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and successive Australian governments supported and recognized Indonesian rule, which was never recognized by the United Nations or any other country.
- During 25 years of Indonesian occupation an estimated 200,000 East Timorese people (1/3 of the population) were killed or died from starvation and war related disease.



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- The USA, Britain, Canada, Australia and other Western countries supplied Indonesia with the weapons, military training, and economic support needed to sustain their occupation of East Timor.
- On December 11, 1989, the Australian and Indonesian governments signed the Timor Gap Treaty to jointly exploit oil in the Timor Sea.
- The atrocities in East Timor were well hidden from world view until November 11, 1991, when Max Stahl's footage of the massacre in Dili's Santa Cruz Cemetery was screened on TV worldwide. Indonesian soldiers opened fire on people attending a funeral service and an estimated 200 were killed, with many more wounded.
- Further world attention was drawn to East Timor when Jose Ramos Horta, Timor's representative to the UN, and Bishop Belo, head of the Timorese Catholic Church, jointly received the Nobel Peace Prize on October 1, 1996.
- The resignation of Indonesian President Suharto on May 21, 1998 and his replacement by former vice-president B.J. Habibie paved the way for a referendum on August 30, 1999 to determine East Timor's future - whether to accept an offer of "limited autonomy" and remain part of Indonesia, or reject that offer and become independent. Despite a brutal campaign of terror and intimidation by Indonesian military and militia, nearly the entire population of East Timor and those in the diaspora turned out to vote, with 78.5% rejecting autonomy in favour of full independence.
- A rampage of killing, burning, destruction and forced deportations followed the announcement of the ballot results on September 4th. People living in areas of East Timor near the border with Indonesian West Timor experienced some of the worst violence and an estimated 150,000 East Timorese were forced to cross into West Timor and held in paramilitary camps. Many have not yet returned.

For additional background information on East Timor, many excellent films are available, including: *Shadow Over East Timor* (AFI Distribution), *Buried Alive and Bitter Paradise* (Gil Scrine Films, Australia), *Death of a Nation* (Central Independent Television, UK), *Scenes from an Occupation* and *Punitive Damage* (Ronin Films), and *The Diplomat* and *Starting from Zero* (Film Australia).

Myriad books and articles can also be obtained by mail order from the Australia East Timor Association. A free resource list is available. PO Box 93, Fitzroy Vic 3065, Australia, Tel: 61-3-9416 2960, E-mail: [aetamel@aetamel.org](mailto:aetamel@aetamel.org)



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