



FILM AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL INTEREST PROGRAM

The Diplomat

The Diplomat follows East Timor's freedom fighter and Nobel Peace Prize winner José Ramos Horta in the final tumultuous year of his campaign to secure independence for his country.

The former Portuguese colony was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. Exiled soon after, José Ramos Horta exchanged his gun for the suit and tie of a diplomat. He spent 24 years as a roving ambassador, fighting to ensure the world did not forget East Timor's desire for freedom. His is a life driven not by personal political ambition but by the debt of blood he owes to fellow Timorese who have died in the conflict, including two brothers and a sister.

The Diplomat takes up Ramos Horta's story in the final dramatic stages of his long journey - the fall of Indonesia's President Suharto, the referendum to determine East Timor's future, the overwhelming vote for independence, the devastating carnage that ensued, the intervention of United Nations peacekeepers, and Ramos Horta's final triumphant return to his homeland.

José Ramos Horta allowed the filmmakers extraordinary access to his public and personal life. The film reveals his strengths and weaknesses, his moments of doubt and frustration, his anger and disappointment, his elation and triumph, his charm and his dry humour. Ramos Horta emerges as a tenacious and beguiling character whose role as a diplomat and peacemaker was crucial to achieving independence for his country.

The Diplomat

A Film Australia National Interest program

In association with Emerald Films

Produced in association with

SBS Independent

Developed with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission

Developed with the assistance of the NSW Film and Television Office

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SALLY BROWNING

Co-Producer

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Editor

RAY THOMAS

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TOM ZUBRYCKI

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Andrew Ladley,
Colin Stewart, Isabel Calado

The people of East Timor, especially in Díli, Aileu, Liquiça, Manatuto, Lospalos, Atauro, and the Timorese community in
exile, particularly in Sydney, Melbourne and Lisbon.

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Director's Notes

Tom Zubrycki

We began filming in April 1998 at the first ever Timorese National Convention in Lisbon, Portugal and ended 20 months later on Horta's jubilant return to Timor after 24 years in exile.

Originally the time-scale for the project was 12 months following Jose´ around the world observing his uphill battle trying to win support for East Timor on the world stage. The film was going to be a very personal 'fly on the wall' profile of Horta's erratic and lonely life as a diplomat pushing an issue that the world had once again closed its eyes to. This all quickly changed into being a film about the birth of a nation with Horta as the key protagonist.

The decision to start filming the Convention was fortuitous. The event, bringing together East Timorese from right across the diaspora, had great historical significance. For the first time in 23 years the pro-independence forces buried their differences and formed a united front: the National Council of Timorese Resistance. But even as the Convention was drawing to a close reports were coming in of students rioting in the streets of Jakarta. Events quickly took over and within a month Suharto had resigned. Suddenly Jose´ was celebrating the passing of a dictator and victory was in sight. But there were many hurdles still to be overcome before that moment arrived. I knew at that point that I had the makings of a potentially great film, following history in the making. Here we were right 'in the box seat' of a classic unfolding human drama.

One of the problems I had as director was deciding when to film, given that events were changing not only by the week but by the day. Horta was not in Sydney very often. He had made his base in Lisbon, from which he was making frequent trips to the UN and Geneva. We kept in touch with him through the East Timor solidarity network via the internet as well as the exiled leadership, many of whom were based in Sydney. We also relied heavily on news from Jose´'s mother, Natalina, a feisty woman in her late 60s who was a major driving force behind her son, an insight that is revealed by Jose´ himself in the final scene in the film.

Natalina remains severely traumatised by the invasion of 1975. She lost three children in the fighting and the massacres that followed. Like the majority of the population she fled to the mountains to the safety of Falintil guerilla strongholds where she remained for four years before finally being captured.

The more I saw of Natalina the more I became convinced she herself had to become a major character in the film, not only because of her own personal story, but also to balance the film emotionally. Whilst Jose´ would often step into his media persona and hold himself back emotionally, there was no restraining Natalina. She would tell us straight how she felt and why, often with tears in her eyes. What was consistent was her deep and unremitting hatred towards the Indonesian military. She remained consistently cynical

about the Indonesians' true intentions. Even on the morning of the referendum while Jose' talked about having reached the summit of a very large mountain, Natalina warned us not to be complacent. Four days later she was proved right. The militias and Indonesian army had razed Dili and much of East Timor to the ground.

Sometimes I did the shooting myself, while at other times I worked with a cinematographer while I recorded sound. The choice to go it alone with Horta 50 per cent of the time was not made for budget reasons alone, but to enable me to strike up a relationship with him which would produce unique insights into the mind of a very complex man.

My relationship with Horta grew over time, but it was not an easy process. My very first trip with him was to Korea and Norway. What he was doing there was not especially significant to the story, but what was important for me was to get the sense of being on the road with him. Being around him solidly for two weeks, piling on and off planes and in and out of taxis was as uncomfortable for him as it was for me. We skated around each other. I had the feeling that I was being rejected and that making the film was going to be a lot harder than I'd imagined.

Horta is very media savvy. He is used to doing interviews, turning on and turning off at will. He's good at masking his true feelings and telling you what he thinks is appropriate for you to know at any given time. My strategy changed. I decided it was better to get off Jose''s tail and instead select events that were significant to the unfolding story of Timor, and then observe him at work. We didn't have to wait too long for such occasions to happen. In July 1998, President Habibie offered the territory 'limited autonomy'. This was immediately rejected by the resistance leadership as being, at best, a transitional arrangement. Horta and the other exiles stood firmly by their position: East Timor had to be given the right to choose its own future! A few months later, a meeting in an Austrian castle with pro-Indonesian Timorese presented a perfect place to press home their point. It ended a shambles, and we were very fortunate to be there to witness the often unobvious power plays. It was a side of Jose' I'd never seen before.

Horta is unpredictable - I never expected him to suddenly walk out of the Austrian conference the way he did. Nor did I expect him to take a soft line on armed peacekeepers by supporting the cautious and conservative strategy pursued by Australian foreign minister Alexander Downer. Both moves placed him at odds with many of his colleagues. Horta clearly misread the seriousness of the situation on the ground in Timor. He soon changed his mind as the situation worsened and the militia started to make their presence felt. The botched dialogue with the pro-Indonesian Timorese really highlighted Jose''s ambivalence about working within the confines of an organisation. He seemed to me much more in command when he didn't have to refer decisions to others.

The Great Ponsonby Bed and Breakfast in downtown Auckland was where I found Jose' at his most stressed and fatigued. He was probably at his lowest point ever in the 23 years of fighting for his country. It was early September

1999. The referendum had returned a 75 per cent vote in favour of independence, mayhem had broken out - the army and militias displacing two thirds of the population to Indonesian West Timor. Jose´ certainly had no time to worry about me tailing him with my camera. There were more important things to do – like pumping the media and staying in constant contact with the Falintil guerilla commander in the mountains and with East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao in Jakarta. Filming at close quarters over three days produced the most intimate moments in the film.

It was not always possible, however, to be at the right spot at the right time. I was unable to be at the Security Council in New York where the major breakthroughs were announced. Library footage and extensive use of SBS's own coverage of Timor were able to be woven into the finished film to cover these gaps in the story. In many ways it didn't matter that I was absent at these places. What was more important to me was to be wherever Jose´ was, after all he was the film's central character and it would have been a mistake to stray too much away from him or his views.

Over a period of 20 months, 200 hours of videotape were shot using three different formats, four cinematographers and two sound recordists, and an editor for 20 weeks. It was a daunting challenge to synthesise so much material and not lose sight of the main goal.

Producer's Notes

Sally Browning

All films begin long before cameras are turned towards the main character. Late in 1996 the idea was first presented to me: an exciting opportunity to highlight the Timorese issue with direct connections to José through journalist Wilson da Silva who became my co-producer.

At first the financing of the film seemed to move very quickly. By mid 1997, SBS Independent had committed a presale and our search for a director led to Tom Zubrycki whose dedication to the film was impeccable.

In November 1997 I found myself in Amsterdam at a documentary forum pitching the project to a gladiator ring of commissioning editors who mostly brushed the project aside with comments like 'Who cares about East Timor? Hasn't there already been a film about this?' Despite this, a Norwegian broadcaster put up his hand to be involved and the ball began rolling again. Further efforts to secure international sales fell flat and with the first shoot date looming, it seemed an impossible task.

At the eleventh hour Film Australia stepped in, taking on the risky prospect of a film about a subject that had been politically unpopular. Their decision to finance us was rewarded. After a month of filming, it became apparent we had a much bigger film on our hands.

Our efforts to second-guess the unfolding events also paid off, allowing us to hold off finishing the filming until after Jose's triumphant return to his homeland.

His trip back to East Timor was a collaborative effort by the CNRT, the UN and us, as filmmakers. Having taken on producing the film, I then found myself organising the finer details of a UN flight for José and the media guests to accompany him.

There were numerous highs and lows in the making of this film but no high as great as the final moments as the Hercules transport touched down in Dili. Watching José, I know we all felt the indescribable elation of justice being done, a return home for a man who had spent most of his life fighting for a nation the world had largely ignored.

Looking back, it's hard now to reconcile the international indifference of the world's broadcasters with the film we've made.

Biographies

Director: Tom Zubrycki

Tom Zubrycki graduated with a Bachelor of Science from ANU in 1969, and an MA in Sociology from UNSW in 1972. He has worked as a tutor and lecturer, a community worker and a writer. He began making films in 1975 and was awarded the Documentary Fellowship by the Australian Film Commission in 1984 and in 1997 and has published a number of articles on film and video. He produced **The Last Magician** (1993), **Exile in Sarajevo** (1996), **Dr. Jazz** (1998), **Whiteys Like Us** (1999) and **Stolen Generations** (2000). His credits as director include **Waterloo** (1981), **Kemira – Diary of a Strike** (1984) which won an AFI Award for Best Documentary, **Friends and Enemies** (1987), **Marrickville** (1988), **Amongst Equals** (1988), **Strangers in Paradise** (1989), **Lord of the Bush** (1990), **Bran Nue Dae** (1991), **Homelands** (1993), **Billal** (1996), and **The Diplomat** (2000).

Producer: Sally Browning

A former journalist in Australia and the UK, **Sally Browning** has been an independent filmmaker since 1989. She holds a BA (English) and is also a production graduate of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. Prior to the AFTRS she wrote and produced two short films.

Sally has written and directed two major documentaries including the SBS-TV/Channel 4 UK film **Raskols** (winner of the Silver Prize at the 1996 Bombay International Film Festival, and nominated for three AFI awards), and the upcoming ABC-TV film **Staying Out** about two ex-offenders attempting to rebuild their lives after years in prison.

She is also the producer of the highly successful AFC documentary **The Christmas Cake**, winner of a 1997 Dendy Award and three other international prizes and SBS-TV's **Calling Young Hong Kong**, a film about the future of youth culture after the changeover. Her two latest productions are the documentaries, **The Diplomat** (Film Australia/SBS-TV) and **Taking Care of Elvis** (AFC). As well, Sally has written and produced educational films about AIDS and Hepatitis C issues for disadvantaged groups such as prison inmates, including the multi award-winning **Women Heal Women**.

Co-producer/writer: Wilson da Silva

Wilson da Silva is a journalist and film producer. He has worked as an on-air reporter and producer for *Quantum*, the weekly ABC TV science series in Australia for whom he made the award-winning documentary **Passing the Bug: The End of Antibiotics**.

He has worked as a foreign correspondent for the British newswire Reuters, serving on assignment in Toronto, New York, Jakarta and Honolulu as well as Sydney.

He has worked as a journalist on *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper and *The Age* in Melbourne, served as editor of the magazines *21C* and *Science*

Spectra and is a former Sydney correspondent for *New Scientist* magazine. He is currently the managing editor of *Newton*, a new science magazine published by *Australian Geographic*.

Born in Brazil and fluent in Portuguese, his coverage of East Timor for the past nine years has won him a number of journalism awards, including the 1997 Human Rights Award and the 1996 George Munster Award for Freelance Journalism.

Editor: Ray Thomas

Ray Thomas has edited documentaries, drama, commercials, music film and video clips since 1968, working with ABC Television, the South Australian Film Corporation, BBC Television and 60 Minutes. Since 1982 he has worked on a number of award-winning documentaries, including Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson's **Joe Leahy's Neighbours** (1988) **Black Harvest** (1991) and **Rats in the Ranks** (1996). Other credits include **Little Brother, Little Sister** (1997); **Under the Hammer** (1997); **The Gamblers** (1998), **Islands of the Vampire Birds** (1998). He has just completed the series **Risky Business** with Susan Lambert. Ray has worked with Tom Zubrycki on several projects including **Amongst Equals** (1988), **Lord of the Bush** (1990), **Homelands** (1993), **Billal** (1996) and now, **The Diplomat**.

The Diplomat Awards

- **Winner – Golden Maile Award**
Hawaii International Film Festival 2000
- **Winner - Best Documentary and Best Direction in a Documentary**
Australian Film Institute Awards 2000
- **Winner – Television Category and Overall Winner**
AUSTCARE Media Awards 2000
- **Finalist**
United Nations Association of Australia – Media Peace Awards 2000
- **Most Popular Documentary**
Sydney Film Festival 2000
- **Best Documentary – Audience Vote**
Melbourne International Film Festival 2000
- **No. 2 – Audience Top Ten Documentaries**
Brisbane International Film Festival 2000
- **Finalist**
New York Festivals: Television Programming and Promotions

Festival Screenings

- Amnesty International Film Festival, 2000, Canada
- Amnesty International Film Festival, 2001, The Netherlands
- Berlin Film Festival, International Forum of New Cinema, Germany, 2001
- Brisbane International Film Festival, 2000, Australia
- Cork Film Festival, 2000, Ireland
- Durban International Film Festival, 2000, South Africa
- FIPA 2001, France
- Hawaii International Film Festival, 2000, USA
- Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, 2001, USA
- London Film Festival, 2000, UK
- Melbourne International Film Festival, 2000, Australia
- Santa Barbara Film Festival, 2001, USA
- Singapore International Film Festival, 2001, Singapore
- Sydney Film Festival, 2000, Australia
- Vancouver International Film Festival, 2000, Canada

The Diplomat

THE CRITICS RAVE ...

- "The Diplomat is an important and timely work."
Paul Yi, Chief of International Business Department, Korean Film Commission, Nov 2000
- "From the time I saw The Diplomat ...I knew that it was a fine piece of filmmaking."
Chuck Boller, Executive Director, Hawaii International Film Festival, 20/11/2000
- " ... a filmic coup of the first order ..."
Sian Powell, *The Weekend Australian Review*, 10/6/2000
- "A fascinating historical document ... an engaging profile of a complex character"
Sacha Molitorisz, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12/6/2000
- "... one of those special film festival moments: a standing ovation for Jose Ramos Horta ..."
Garry Maddox, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15/6/2000
- " ... Ramos Horta is an ideal subject for a portrait from Film Australia that for sheer drama is as powerful as any Hollywood action block-buster."
Dougal MacDonald, *The Canberra Times*, 19/6/2000
- "... a gripping documentary that will be much in demand by TV programmers the world over, and which should also earn festival exposure in the coming months."
David Stratton, *Variety*, 19-25/6/2000
- "The success stories of the festival were probably the documentaries. Etched indelibly in the minds of festival goers was *The Diplomat*, which received a standing ovation."
Oscar Hillerstrom, *Sydney Tribe*, 28/6/2000
- "... a rousing portrait of the darkly twinkling sly idealist Jose Ramos Horta..."
Bob Ellis, *Encore*, 6/7/2000
- "*The Diplomat* is clearly one of the most important documentaries to come out of Australia in years."
Jackson Pellow, *IF Magazine*, August 2000
- "an inspiring account of one man's dogged crusade in the face of international indifference."
Vicky Roach, *The Daily Telegraph*, 17/8/2000
- "A touching and revealing portrait"
Paul Byrnes, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Metro*, 18/8/2000
- "A fascinating historical document..."
Sacha Molitorisz, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Metro*, 18/8/2000
- "an engrossing, powerful document of a subject, a process and an extraordinary political turn of events"
Philippa Hawker, 7/9/2000
- "...an astonishingly accomplished piece of work..."
Doug Anderson, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20/11/2000