



EYEWITNESS

SENO GUMIRA AJIDARMA

protest
stories
from
indonesia

Eyewitness

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SENO GUMIRA AJIDARMA

Eyewitness

Stories from East Timor

Translations by
Jan Lingard & John H McGlynn



Jakarta, Indonesia

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Eyewitness

The eyewitness entered. He had no eyes. Unsteadily he made his way through the courtroom, groping the air with his hands. Blood ran from his eye-sockets, blood so red it seemed nothing could be redder than the red of that blood, flowing slowly and continuously from the holes where his eyes had been.

The blood soaked his cheeks, soaked his shirt, soaked his trousers and soaked his shoes. Then it oozed over the floor of the courtroom, mopped clean earlier with disinfectant and the smell still lingered. The courtroom was in an uproar, the spectators' cries revealing their emotion. The journalists, responding as always to sensational events with great excitement, enthusiastically began photographing the eyewitness from all angles, even from upside down, making the atmosphere still warmer with the blinking of their camera flashes.

“Outrageous!”

“Insane!”

“Sadistic!”

His Honor the Judge quickly sized up the situation and pounded his gavel. With the remnants of his authority he attempted to restore order.

“Silence ladies and gentleman! Be quiet! Anyone who disturbs the proceedings of this court will be removed from the courtroom.”

The spectators quieted down. They too were anxious to find out as soon as possible what had really happened.

“Eyewitness.”

“Yes sir.”

“Where are your eyes?”

“Someone took them sir.”

“Took them?”

“Yes sir.”

“Do you mean you had an operation?”

“No sir, they were scooped out with a spoon.”

“What? Scooped out with a spoon? Why?”

“I don’t know why sir but they said they were going to make *tengkleng* soup with them.

“Make soup? That’s outrageous! Who said that?”

“The people who took my eyes, sir.”

“I know that, you idiot! I mean who did it?”

“They didn’t tell me their names.”

“Didn’t you ask them, stupid?”

“No sir.”

“Listen carefully you fool, I mean, what did they look like? Before they were scooped out with a spoon, allegedly to make *tengkleng* or maybe goat soup, your eyes were still in your head weren’t they?”

“Yes sir.”

“So you saw what they looked like, didn’t you?”

“Yes sir.”

“Why don’t you tell the court what you saw with your eyes that have now probably been eaten by those *tengkleng* fanciers.”

The eyewitness was silent a moment. All the visitors in the courtroom held their breath.

“There were several of them sir.”

“How many?”

“Five sir.”

“What did they look like?”

“I didn’t get a chance to look closely. After all, they did it so quickly.”

“Do you still remember what they were wearing perhaps?”

“I’m sure they were wearing uniforms sir.”

The courtroom erupted again, like the buzzing of a thousand bees.

The judge pounded his gavel and the buzzing stopped.

“Do you mean army uniforms?”

“No sir.”

“Police?”

“No, it wasn’t police.”

“Civil security men perhaps?”

“You know what I mean sir, they were all in black, like in the movies.”

“Were their faces covered?”

“Yes, only their eyes were showing.”

“Ahaa, I’ve got it! They were ninjas weren’t they?”

“That’s it sir, they were ninjas! That’s who scooped out my eyes with a spoon!”

Once again the spectators became rowdy and chattered to each other as though they were in a coffee stall and once again His Honor the Judge had to pound his gavel so everyone would be quiet. Blood still trickled slowly but continuously from the black eye-sockets of the eyewitness, who was standing like a statue in the courtroom. The blood ran over the floor that had just been mopped with disinfectant. It filled the courtroom and then overflowed out through the door and down the steps to the yard. But nobody saw it.

“Eyewitness.”

“Yes sir.”

“Tell me, why didn’t you call for help when your eyes were scooped out?”

“There were five of them sir.”

“Couldn’t you have screamed out or thrown something that was handy? Surely you could’ve done something so your neighbors would hear and help you. Isn’t your house in a slum alley where you can hear the people next door even if they’re only whispering? Why did you keep quiet?”

“Well you see... because it happened in a dream sir.”

Everyone burst out laughing and again the judge pounded his gavel angrily.

“Silence! This is a courtroom, not a circus!”

The courtroom was stifling. People were sweating profusely but they didn’t want to budge. The blood in the yard flowed out to the car park. The judge continued his question.

“You said just now it happened in a dream. Do you mean it was so fast it was like a dream?”

“No sir, it wasn’t like a dream, it really was a dream, and that’s why I was quiet when they went to spoon out my eyes.”

“Are you serious? Don’t play games with me. Remember you have to swear this under oath later.”

“I’m deadly serious sir. I didn’t call out because I thought it was just a dream. I even laughed when they said they wanted to use my eyes to make *tengkleng*.”

“So according to you, the entire eye-scooping episode only happened in a dream.”

“Not just according to me sir, it really did happen in a dream.”

“You could, of course, be crazy!

“No, I can prove it sir. A lot of people can testify that I slept all night and nobody disturbed me.”

“So it definitely happened in a dream, did it?”

“Yes sir.”

“But when you woke up your eyes were gone?”

“That’s right sir. That’s what I can’t understand. It happened in a dream but when I woke up it turned out to be true.”

The judge shook his head, quite perplexed.

“Ridiculous,” he mumbled.

The flowing blood had reached the main road.

Could an eyewitness without any eyes still be a witness? Of course he could, thought His Honor the Judge. His memory wasn’t carried off with his eyes, now was it?

“Eyewitness.”

“Yes sir.”

“Can you still testify?”

“I’m ready sir. That’s the reason I came to this court first instead of going to the eye doctor.”

“Do you still remember everything that happened, even though you’ve no longer got any eyes?”

“I do sir.”

“Do you still remember how the massacre occurred?”

“Yes sir.”

“Do you still remember how they fired wildly and people toppled like felled banana palms?”

“Yes sir.”

“Do you still remember how blood flowed, and people moaned and those who were still half alive were stabbed to death?”

“I do sir.”

“Remember it all well, because although there were many eyewitnesses, not one of them is prepared to testify in court except you.”

“Yes sir.”

“Once again, are you still willing to testify?”

“I am sir.”

“Why?”

“For the sake of justice and truth sir.”

There was pandemonium in the courtroom. Everyone applauded, including the Prosecutor and Defense lawyer. Many people cheered, and a few of them even started chanting slogans.

His Honor immediately rapped his magic gavel.

“Shh! Don’t you campaign here!” he said firmly. “Today’s hearing is adjourned and will resume tomorrow to hear the testimony of the eyewitness who no longer has any eyes.”

With his remaining energy he once again pounded the gavel, but it broke. Everyone laughed. The journalists, who were forced to write about minor news items because they weren’t free to report major stories, quickly took photographs. Click-click-click-click! His Honor the Judge was captured for posterity holding his broken gavel.

On the way home His Honor said to his driver, “Imagine a person having to lose his eyes for the sake of justice and truth. Shouldn’t I, as a servant of the law, make an even greater sacrifice?”

The driver wanted to reply with something that would dispel his guilty feelings, such as, “Justice is not blind”, but the judge had fallen asleep in the annoying traffic jam.

The blood still flowed slowly but surely along the highway until the city was flooded. It wet every corner of the city, even creeping over multi-storied buildings, until there wasn’t one place that was free of the blood. But miraculously, not one person saw it.

When it was night the eyewitness who no longer had any eyes said his prayers before he went to bed. He prayed that life in this world would be just fine, that everything would run smoothly and everyone would be happy.

In his sleep he had another dream. Five men in ninja uniforms tore out his tongue, this time using pincers.

Ears

“Tell me a story about cruelty,” Alina said to the storyteller. So the storyteller told a tale about ears.

One fine day Dewi received some mail from her boyfriend who was stationed on the battlefield. It was a brown envelope. When Dewi opened it she saw a severed human ear: big, beautiful and still wet with blood. There was a note from her boyfriend in the envelope:

Dewi, I’m sending you this ear as a souvenir from the battlefield. It’s the ear of someone who was suspected of being an enemy spy. We normally cut off the ears of people like this as a warning of the risks they face if they incite rebellion. Please accept this ear, it’s just for you. I’m sending it from far away because I miss you. Every time you look at it think of me. I’m so lonely. Cutting off ears is the only amusement there is here.

Dewi immediately hung the ear, suspended on a piece of nylon string, in the front parlor. When the wind blew in through the windows and doors, the ear would sway gently.

Visitors who came always asked, “Whose ear’s that?”

And Dewi always replied, “Oh, it belonged to someone suspected of being an enemy spy. My boyfriend sent it from the battlefield as a keepsake.”

Sometimes when Dewi was missing her boyfriend she’d look at the ear when she was all alone late at night. It still hadn’t stopped bleeding. It was still wet, so wet that sometimes blood dripped on the floor. There were times when Dewi felt it was still alive and moving as though it could still hear the voices around it.

“It’s because it’s a spy’s ear,” thought Dewi. “It wants to keep on listening.”

Every morning, after she got up, Dewi mopped the floor of the parlor which was red from the blood that dripped from the ear. There wasn’t much, but on the gleaming white marble floor red drops of blood were a nuisance.

“Just put a bucket underneath,” her mother advised. “Why bother mopping up enemy blood every day?”

“It doesn’t matter, I like doing it,” said Dewi.

As she mopped the floor Dewi liked to look at the ear, which seemed to be moving. It was like an antenna that could pick up any messages that happened to be floating in the air.

Maybe the ear’s owner once heard something he wasn’t supposed to know, Dewi thought.

But he could still hear, couldn’t he?

Dewi wrote a letter to her boyfriend:

The ear you sent me arrived safely. Up till now it’s still bleeding. I think a keepsake from the war zone is something extraordinary. I hung it in the parlor and my visitors admire it. I am very touched that you still think of me in the turmoil of the battlefield. You must be worn out fighting every day and shooting the enemy dead. It’s lucky you can still amuse yourself cutting off suspects’ ears. I can’t imagine what you’d do if you didn’t have this activity. You’d certainly be very lonely. My darling, my love, I thank God that you get the chance to chop off ears. If not you would suffer a great deal. Please believe that I am very proud of you and I was very happy to receive what you sent.

PS: But even if people’s ears are cut off, can’t they still hear?

After that, nearly every day Dewi received ears from her boyfriend, sometimes one, sometimes two and once a basketful containing more than fifty. She hung the ears everywhere. In the parlor they festooned the crystal light, the doors and windows, they

were stuck on the walls, even fixed on either side of the house number, the letter box and the sign displaying the family name. When the ears kept coming, Dewi made them into key rings, decorations for handbags, brooches and earrings. Her ears sported earrings made of ears!

“There’s an awful lot of ears around here,” said one of her university friends.

“My boyfriend sent them from the battlefield,” Dewi answered proudly.

“He must be very busy cutting them off. Hell! There are so many of them.”

“I’ve still got plenty if you’d like some.”

“Yes, I’d love some.”

Although the ears were still dripping blood, her friend wanted a basketful of them. Actually there were too many in Dewi’s house, but she didn’t want to throw away the results of her boyfriend’s hard work on the battlefield. Her mother had the idea of drying them in the sun and then frying them. Who knows, they might taste nice and they could be sold. So many ears were sent they were like a flowing current, so that Dewi thought that everyone her boyfriend met on the battlefield must be a suspected spy.

She wrote another letter:

The ears that you’ve chopped off suspected spies have all arrived safely. Thank you very much. I’ve hung them all around in places where people can see them. Every time my visitors ask me where they came from, I say from my boyfriend on the battlefield, who cuts them from the heads of suspected spies. They’re all proud of you my love. It must be hard work cutting off so many people’s ears every day. I suppose that’s the reason you haven’t had time to write and reply to my last letter. But I was pleased to receive the ears. I’m just worried that the job of cutting them off no longer comforts your lonely heart. Pray to God that, body and soul, you will stay safe.

PS: I'm still rather surprised at why so many people are under suspicion and I still keep asking, how do you stop people from hearing voices even if their ears are cut off?

Far away on the battlefield Dewi's boyfriend was busy slaughtering people. All the soldiers were busy because everyone was resisting. Everyone was an enemy and everyone was under suspicion. Rebellions flared up in every corner. The rebels whispered the spirit of struggle even into the ears of babies still in the womb.

From a bunker he wrote a letter:

Sorry, Dewi, that it's taken so long for me to reply to your letter. I'd better tell you how busy we've been fighting the voices that incite rebellion. If the enemy attack, all we have to do is shoot them. But the voices float about soundlessly in the air, so we never know exactly who might have heard them. It's as though anyone could suddenly change and turn into a rebel. We'll never know who are friends and who are enemies, so we're forced to kill them all.

You asked something we've been asking about for a long time: how do you stop people whose ears have been cut off from hearing voices? We don't know Dewi, especially if the voices are silent. So we agreed just to cut off the heads of anyone under suspicion. It can't be helped. It's from those heads that I cut the ears that I send you. You can imagine how busy we are. We don't only cut off the ears, we have to cut off the heads. too. That's the reason Dewi, I didn't have time to answer your letter. I hope you understand.

PS: Would you like me to send you some earless heads as souvenirs of the battlefield? I'll send one first as a sample, because if I send all the heads I've cut off I'm afraid you won't have enough room to sit and write to me.

"The end," said the storyteller, finishing the tale.

"What a cruel man Dewi's boyfriend was," Alina said to the storyteller.

To which storyteller replied, "But many people thought he was a hero."

Manuel

“I was five years old at the time of the invasion. I heard the thundering of explosions coming from the harbor and saw smoke rising from behind the rooftops. In front of the houses I saw people running around all over the place in panic.

“The warships have opened fire,” I heard someone shouting as he fled. I’ll never forget the atmosphere as long as I live, because ever since then the peace of our lives has been snatched away from us. I don’t know any more when true peace will return to our town.”

He was very dark-skinned and his curly hair was unkempt and reddish looking. Maybe, like me, he was lonely. However, I was here on business. As soon as he came in earlier, he sat down beside me and ordered a glass of beer from the barman. Before long he’d started rattling on.

“I was still watching the billowing black smoke when Mother came out of the house carrying my baby brother. She grabbed my hand and hurried along after the growing crowds of people who were all streaming in the same direction. Later I would know that we were all fleeing. In the sky I saw planes spewing out paratroops, while the sound of firing still came from the harbor. People were walking along carrying whatever they could. Many only had the clothes they stood up in.”

It was getting late in the bar. A guitarist was playing Django Reinhardt. I looked at Manuel—that’s how he introduced himself—and he didn’t seem to be drunk.

“You haven’t had too much to drink have you?”

“Do I look drunk?”

“No.”

“So, I haven’t had too much to drink.”

He swallowed some more of his beer then continued his story.

“By the time we got out of town it was dusk. I remember the color of the sky. It was dark and reddish. It seemed to be plunging our previously happy lives into the pitch blackness of night which was lit up intermittently with the flashes of rockets that were being sent to kill us. That trip was agony for me. Yet later I realized how impossible it would have been then to imagine the kind of suffering that was in store for us. Along the road fighter planes hunted us in the dark. We, a party of thousands of refugees, were in total confusion like terrified ants.”

His glass was empty and so was mine. We ordered a jug.

“You’re not making this up are you?”

“Do I look like a writer?”

“No.”

“So, I’m not making it up.”

A jug of foaming beer arrived. Manuel went to the toilet. I lit a cigarette but put it out quickly. According to the government, smoking is dangerous for the health. Isn’t the government always right?

As soon as Manuel got back he lit up too, and I reminded him.

“According to the government, smoking’s bad for your health.”

Manuel smiled. “And of course your government’s always right,” he said.

I wanted to ask him something but he went on with his story.

“I don’t know how many times I fell over, was trodden on, dragged along, before I felt mother lose her grip on me. Sometime later I was told that at that moment she’d been shot and had died instantly. My baby brother crawled around among the running feet and they say someone picked him up and saved him. To this day

we've never seen each other again. I cried and screamed out for my mother but no one took any notice. I saw bodies sprawled along the roadside and I ran, weeping, over people who were dead and half dead. Sometimes I slipped in pools of blood."

I interrupted him.

"It's just like a movie."

"Life is like a movie, mate."

I looked at Manuel's eyes, and they were certainly not like those of someone bragging. He didn't speak heatedly but coldly, as though the experiences of his life were nothing like a movie.

"As it turned out, the bombing went on for three months. Our fear and terror eventually disappeared completely, perhaps because they had reached their furthest limits. Thousands of our people were killed, and lay sprawled in the jungle without graves. We children got to learn the movements of the air raids. We never ran and hid in the dummy runs, but we rushed to the shelters in the follow-up attacks. At night we went up to the top of the hill and waited for the firing of the cannons from the ships, feeling as though we were waiting for a fireworks display."

"Where's your father?"

"They say he was killed by his own friends."

"Was he a traitor?"

"They say the killers were the traitors."

Manuel stared off into space. I was trying to guess what was in his mind. Was he trying to gain my sympathy?

"I lived in the bush till I was seventeen. During that time I witnessed how life goes on in the shadow of death. Weddings, births and funerals, all took place with the feeling that a fatal attack could come at any time. Our numbers were decreasing. Our older brothers and sisters who were putting up armed resistance in the mountains urged us to surrender, so that no more victims fell. They said we must survive, so the struggle could go on.

"All the way home we crossed a sea of scattered bones. Every now and then a skull would come rolling out from somewhere. We knew they were the bones of our people who hadn't been buried. We gazed at all this with feelings that only we could feel. We were people who could no longer feel loss, because loss had become the currency of our lives. We had no more tears to weep for our loss, because even our tears of blood had dried up in a loss that only served to ignite the spirit of our resistance.

"Among the young people who came down the mountain, many were orphans who, when they were still babies, had crawled around among sprawling, blood-covered corpses, the bodies of their fathers and mothers and uncles and aunts. No one had helped these babies crawling around and crying with no one to look after them, because the constant bombing had deadened the spirits of those who still lived. It was as though there was no distance between life and death. Some of the babies died and some lived and became refugees with the rest of us. Can you imagine what sort of adults they'll be in the future?"

The jug was empty. It started to feel as if the world were floating. Manuel ordered another one.

"You'll get drunk if you're not careful."

"Not as drunk as my life, friend."

Django Reinhardt had stopped a long time ago and now someone was singing "Misty".

"When I got back to our town, everything had changed. We could eat, we could drink, but we weren't our own masters. Our peaceful town was now full of foreign troops, with lots of spies everywhere and always suspicious of us. We went to school but weren't allowed to think our own way. We didn't speak our own language or study our own history and it was impossible for us to express our own ideas and aspirations because every time that happened, someone would always be arrested, tortured and thrown into jail without trial.

“It was even difficult for us to hold our traditional social activities because any time a large number of people gathered together it was considered to be a conspiracy. People fell under suspicion just on anyone’s whim, and very cruel interrogations went on. Shouting and threats and beatings weren’t enough. My grandmother, would you believe, my own grandmother, who was seventy-four years old, had skin sliced from her cheeks and was ordered to eat it raw so they could ask her what it tasted like.”

I started to feel sick in the stomach.

“So what was her answer?”

“That it was like human flesh.”

I went to the toilet. Bloody hell. This Manuel had made me bring up all the sirloin steak I’d eaten earlier. The bastard!

“How old are you Manuel?”

“Nearly twenty-one. Why?”

I thought he was thirty. Can suffering age a person? But I didn’t have the impression that Manuel was suffering. He was a determined man, and a determined rebel is a dangerous one, as far as my knowledge as an intelligence officer goes. What a pity he’d been indiscreet on this particular night. Maybe it was because, like me, he was lonely. But you see, the fight goes on even when you’re on your own.

“Sorry Manuel, you’re under arrest.”

Maria

For one year Maria had been waiting for Antonio, but to this day he hadn’t come home. For a year, at dusk, she’d left the front gate and the door and windows of the house open for quite a long time, because maybe she’d see him coming in the distance and she would run and embrace him. But nobody appeared at the gate. Nobody ran and put his arms around her calling “Mama”.

How she missed him, stubborn Antonio, cheerful Antonio. It seemed he was as stubborn as his elder brother Ricardo, who’d disappeared a long time ago. There’d been no news at all of him. Maria had already lost Gregorio, her brave husband. It was said that his body was blown to pieces and became bits of scattered flesh. She’d lost Ricardo, her hot-headed elder son, who swore to avenge his father’s death. It was rumored that he’d become a cruel machine of war. It was said he never let an enemy soldier die without terrible pain. Ricardo had become a torturer.

The death of Gregorio broke her heart, the departure of Ricardo killed her spirit, and the loss of Antonio disturbed the workings of her mind. Antonio, who was only interested in playing the guitar and dancing, her handsome, younger son with his long, curly hair, his gentle voice, his loving eyes, finally his heart too caught fire. For a long time Maria had been telling him how heartbroken she was at the loss of Gregorio and how grief-stricken she was to hear that Ricardo had become a bloodthirsty murderer. She’d told him

that now he was the only reason for her to go on living. But oh Antonio, Antonio so young, why did he also feel the need to teach his mother the meaning of independence?

For one year, for a year Maria let herself think that one day Antonio would turn up. She knew she would see her younger son there with his hair golden in the dusk and ruffled by the sea breeze. For one year, for a year Maria had let herself hope anxiously that she'd see him standing there one day. She knew she would embrace her younger son who was strong and handsome like his father. She would ask him to come for a walk along the beach that was yellow and blue, and to tell everything slowly, like a young man expressing his feelings to his sweetheart, although it was to his mother. Ah, how Maria missed him.

She wanted to remind him of the sound of waves, the voice of the wind, the whispering of the falling leaves when she and Gregorio used to sing to him, when he was still a baby and they took him to the beach while Ricardo, then a toddler, ran around dodging the waves.

"It's been a year Maria, that's long enough..." said Evangelista.

But her younger sister understood how hard it was to free Maria from thoughts of Antonio.

"He's still alive," Maria had said a year ago, "No one's found his body."

Of course no one's found his body, thought Evangelista, they took them away on trucks.

"They took them away on trucks, and didn't distinguish between who was dead and who was half dead," someone told Evangelista.

Was Antonio among those dead or half dead? But many people did not return.

"They didn't find him Evangelista. I'm sure he ran away into the jungle and joined up with Ricardo. He's sure to come back. I know he will."

Maria is unfortunate, thought Evangelista, but she's not the only one who's lost someone. There wasn't a family that hadn't lost someone. Some were killed and some were missing.

"I believe he's still alive, Evangelista, I know my Antonio will come back."

It was one year, a year since the incident happened. Maria wanted to forget it forever. She even felt it was impossible to remember it anymore, because her desire to believe it had never happened was so strong. She always wanted everything to be calm and quiet and peaceful as it had been when Gregorio was still alive and Ricardo was still with her and Antonio had not yet disappeared without trace. At least like it was when Antonio was still there, like it was before that incident a year earlier had happened.

"I also lost my children Maria, three of them."

"I lost my husband too Maria."

"I lost my whole family."

"Now I'm all alone in the world Maria. You've got Evangelista."

For one year, for a year Maria had been praying that Antonio would be returned to her. Every time she shut the gate, the front door and the windows when night came, she believed that she could still hope. She knew she would serve a glass of cold beer to her beloved son, and prepare the cleanest of clothes for him and ask him to tell her everything. Of course she wouldn't ask him to tell about the blood and tears. Sad stories like that were no longer interesting because they'd become part of everyday life. Maria didn't want to hear any more about feelings of being oppressed, despised and humiliated. Those feelings had for too long only given rise to resistance, nothing but resistance, year in year out, which was always paid for with pain and lives. Oh, how great was the price that had to be paid so that they could walk with heads held high. Maria did not want to hear all that.

For one year, for a year since that incident, Maria had sat there, watching the light that glowed every dusk, feeling that at any minute Antonio would appear as usual, as he used to before people started talking about sovereignty and ideals. Maria wanted to hear Antonio telling stories about anything, just something light, like stories about his women. Of course, of course Maria knew that her handsome Antonio always had girls swarming around him—Rosa, Conchita, Sonia.

Yes, it had been a year, but only one year for Maria. There were even more women called Maria, who for years and years had been opening gates and doors and windows and waiting for their sons. There were many too who'd lost hope in believing that someday their sons would appear and they never opened their doors any more. Many of those who no longer opened their doors, never went outside again. Indeed there were many who buried themselves in sorrow and nothing could bring them back to life again—neither resistance nor rebellion. There were Marias who opened their doors and waited, there were Marias who shut their doors and were awaited, and God knows when they would return.

The door was still open. Outside Maria saw soldiers lining up. For years they'd lined up like that and passed by her house, but Maria never got used to the sight of them. She still always saw them as something foreign. The sound of their steps was fading away in the distance when she heard someone opening the gate.

It was dark. It seemed that Maria had been day-dreaming too long with the result that the gate hadn't been closed even though it was night time. She heard the sound of footsteps crunching on gravel and suddenly a figure stood before her.

The figure knelt down and put its arms around her.

"Mama! I've come back Mama!"

But Maria didn't react. She just sighed.

"Antonio?"

"Yes, it's me Antonio, your Antonio! Don't you know me?"

A youth was kneeling before her but Maria didn't recognize him.

His head was covered in bumps like a denuded forest, and his hair was jaggedly cut. His left eye was shut and the right, although it was still open, was squinting half-closed. His face had scars all over it including a diagonal one running from right to left and another from left to right. He had no ears. His nose looked as though it had shifted from its original position. His mouth was twisted and his front teeth were missing. His shirt was faded, he had no sandals on and it looked as though all his toenails and fingernails had been pulled out. He was very thin and dried up. Only from his half-closed eye could be seen a sign of flickering life—the rest of him was a wreck.

"You aren't Antonio!"

"I am. I'm your Antonio!"

The wreck of a man shook his mother.

"You're not. My Antonio is very handsome, like an angel. You're not him."

"They beat me up Mama! They beat me every day because I wouldn't confess. I never did anything so I had nothing to confess, but they still beat me. They smashed my body Mama. My friends don't know me anymore, my mouth is so damaged that my voice has changed, but I am your Antonio! Please believe me."

"You're not, you're some other Antonio."

Then Evangelista arrived.

"Evangelista, tell her that I'm Antonio, her son!"

But Evangelista didn't know him either.

"Who are you? Who is he Maria?"

"Evangelista! You don't know me either. Look at me, I am Antonio! They've wrecked my body but they couldn't destroy my spirit. They beat me every day because I wouldn't confess, but

that only made me stronger by the day. Of course I'm not the old Antonio, Evangelista! But I'm still Antonio your nephew, Antonio the son of Gregorio and Maria, Antonio the brother of Ricardo."

Evangelista stood behind Maria and put her arms around her. They both looked at the man as though he were a creature from another planet.

Almost in unison they both said, "You are not Antonio. Go away."

The man who called himself Antonio fell silent a moment, his squinting eye looked sad. His dreams over the past three hundred and sixty five nights were wiped out in one second.

"For one year, for a year I've longed for this meeting." He took a deep breath. "Mama, Evangelista, I'll go, although I've got nowhere to go except here. Maybe the time for us to feel happy hasn't come yet. Apparently this earth is no longer our home. You don't know me but believe me there is no other Antonio who's your family, apart from me. Goodbye. Take good care of her Evangelista in the name of your love for her."

Maria and Evangelista still said nothing then they both sighed and said almost as one, "You aren't Antonio. Go away."

The battered figure walked away. The crunching sound of the gravel and the closing of the gate were heard, and a strong wind blew.

"Shut all the windows Evangelista, or that madman might decide to come in," Maria said with empty eyes.

"Don't worry Maria, I'm here with you."

Evangelista closed the windows. As she drew the curtain she looked at the darkness—she could still see the man wiping his squinting, half-closed eye. He walked with dragging steps, getting further away and disappearing into the gloom.

Faintly the sound of the marching of the ranks of soldiers could still be heard.

Salvador

As Salvador's corpse was dragged along the dusty road in the dry, barren town, fierce gusts of wind whipped up sand from the wasteland. People in the street clamped their straw hats down to protect their eyes and women wrapped their scarves tightly around their heads to keep the sand out of their hair. When they bowed their heads because of the gusty, sand-laden wind, they saw Salvador's corpse being dragged along by a horse.

Heads down, their eyes followed the corpse as it was slowly dragged along, and they said nothing. Astride the horse dragging the corpse sat a soldier, body and head erect, as he was wearing a helmet that protected his face from the swirling sand. Behind the corpse, also on horseback, came a town crier carrying a gong, and following him was a mounted military escort, all in step. When they arrived at the crossroads of the barren town they stopped and the town crier struck his gong.

"Hear this! Hear this! This is the corpse of Salvador, a chicken thief! He was sentenced to execution by shooting, and his corpse is to be hung at the town gates as a warning to those who dare to resist!"

The wind was still blowing strongly, almost drowning out the sound of the town crier's shouts. With slow steps the people followed the corpse as it was dragged to the town gates. They stood by while the soldiers hung the corpse from the archway over the gates, a relic of the colonial past.

They watched the soldiers hammer a large peg over the gateway. They saw a noose being tied to it and looked on in silence when

Salvador's corpse was strung up. They noticed that a large sign saying "CHICKEN THIEF" had been hung around his neck. But the strong wind blew the sign over the wrong way so all that was visible was a sheet of blank paper flapping around and occasionally covering Salvador's bowed face.

The soldiers also noticed how nobody could read the sign, but apparently they weren't all that concerned. They were just there ready to stop anyone who came to look at the corpse from getting too close. Although the force of the wind whipping up the sand from the wasteland was increasing, growing numbers of people approached the gates to see Salvador's corpse hanging there and swaying because the wind was blowing so fiercely. They held onto their hats and clutched their scarves tightly and looked at him with unfathomable expressions on their faces.

Salvador's bearded face was covered with grey sand. There was still blood on his thick lips and sand crusted on the wounds on his face. Many of the people who came had never ever seen him face to face. They only knew what he looked like from illicit leaflets, forever exhorting rebellion, that they kept getting from God knows where. These leaflets always seemed to materialize suddenly in their homes, slipped under the door. The people also knew Salvador's face from posters that were distributed to every corner of the town. There was a picture of him on these posters with the words:

Wanted
SALVADOR
Chicken Thief
Dead or Alive
Reward US\$5,000

"Now they've caught him," whispered someone to his neighbor. The person spoken to didn't answer, didn't even turn his head, but just looked more sharply at Salvador's face, and then at the soldiers.

The guards were alert, but also quite relaxed, because they could be seen chewing gum non-stop. They were able to chew gum calmly because their helmets protected them from the sand-laden wind from the wasteland. That sand had originated from huge rocks in some place in the past. History had swept the isolated and barren town with blood, and although the blood spilled on the parched earth dried up quickly, no one forgot it.

"It's been a long time," someone else said to the person beside him.

"Yes, it has," was the reply. "My child had just been born at the time and now she's in her teens. Is that how hard it is to catch a chicken thief?"

"I'm not talking about Salvador."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm talking about the brutality."

From the wasteland came a long whistling sound and the wind turned into a terrifying sandstorm. All the people in their straw hats and scarves scattered and the soldiers took shelter under the strong arched roof over the gates. The gates used to be part of the colonial power's fort that had protected them from attacks by the natives for hundreds of years. Now it had fallen into scattered ruins, because no matter how strong it maybe, a fort is quite useless in a war without battles. All that remained were the gates, a place where the soldiers hung the corpses of chicken thieves, a legacy of history that symbolized how colonization still keeps recurring.

The grey sky had darkened. The sandstorm rocked the lanterns and extinguished the lights so the town was even darker in the thick, black embrace of the night. In the houses, which were all very sparsely furnished, people slowly ate their evening meal. They dipped dry bread into their tasteless soup and put it in their mouths, without speaking. In every house the people chewed their

dinner without speaking, so that the whole town was plunged into silence. Only now and then came the sound of a rifle being cocked. After dinner the townspeople all came outside and formed a long procession on the road leading to the church. The sandstorm was still sweeping the town with a shrill, whistling sound, but the people, perhaps because they were grieving, just kept walking in the dark to the church, with dragging steps and bowed heads.

Salvador's corpse continued to sway. His curly hair was full of dust and sand. The blood which earlier had been dripping from the bullet wound in his left breast, wetting the shirt of his camouflage greens, was now completely dry. The soldiers opened their army rations with their commando knives and one of them looked at Salvador's corpse as he chewed.

"Why didn't he give himself up a long time ago?" he said. "He could've still had a good life. There was no need for him to be shot dead."

"Hey, watch it," said another soldier, "you're starting to make him sound like a hero."

"I didn't say he was a hero, I only said he chose to be a chicken thief instead of having a nice life."

"That's enough! Shut up if you still want to get fed. Don't let the ideas in your brain run wild."

"So, are you saying I'm not allowed to think?"

The soldier who'd been asked the question was just about to reply when from the church, through the hum of the wind which was still sweeping the town with sand, came the faint sound of a requiem, sung by choir and soloists, rising to the heavens.

*Lord, grant them eternal rest
And shine Thy everlasting light upon them
The righteous will be remembered forever
They need fear no ill.*

The soldier was on the verge of speaking when the next minute there was an explosion and he suddenly choked, vomiting food mixed with blood.

It was late when the wind stopped. Candles still burned on the church altar, but everyone had gone home. They had returned home and gone to sleep with the very slim hope that the future would be better. Suffering, you see, often provides its own perspective on pleasure. The moon came out, illuminating the wasteland and wooden roofs and the sandy boardwalk.

Towards dawn a wanderer riding a donkey arrived at the town gates. He saw the corpses of soldiers sprawled on the ground, beside them their helmets that had rolled off, and he saw the body of their commanding officer hanging from the gateway. Around the corpse's neck hung a sign that said CHICKEN THIEF.

On the walls of the gateway he read words written in blood that was still wet and trickling to the ground.

*I took the body of Salvador
our brave leader
I, Carlos Santana
Now lead the struggle.*

The wanderer turned his donkey around and headed away from the town, not going in after all.

He said to his donkey, "Let's be off, brother, I don't want to get involved."

The donkey nodded his head in agreement.

The Rosary

“Come on, Fernando, tell me,” the doctor said as he viewed the X-ray results, “how did these rosary beads end up in your stomach for twenty months?”

The man called Fernando just bowed his head in silence. His large nose flared and his big eyes glanced left and right. His dark-skinned hands ran nervously through his curly hair.

“Tell me the truth, Fernando. I’m your doctor. How can I possibly cure you if you won’t be honest with me about the origin of your illness? Tell me about it, Fernando, tell me how these rosary beads managed to get into your stomach.”

Fernando still hung his head. His mouth trembled. All the images of the experiences he went through twenty months previously flashed vividly in his mind but his tongue was still. His hands trembled as he tried to control his emotions, his chest pounded, poisoned by anger, but great fear made him bow his head. He closed his eyes and saw only darkness. He felt angry with himself that fear could torture him that way.

The young doctor, who’d just graduated from university and perhaps felt he could only strike opportunity in a remote territory, was still rattling on. He couldn’t understand why a strong young man like Fernando found it so hard to talk, especially about his own illness.

“Did you swallow the beads because you thought they were like some kind of pills that could make you better?”

Fernando looked at him from the corners of his eyes. He had a terrible pain in the stomach but the pain in his heart was worse,

the pain of someone who’d been humiliated, insulted and abused. He felt like telling the doctor to swallow his own stethoscope. His mouth opened.

“Come on tell me quickly, there are other patients waiting!”

But the mouth had only opened, no sound came out. Fernando’s thick lips made him look stupid.

“For God’s sake Fernando, talk! Say something!”

Fernando sniffed loudly, and tried hard to speak. The doctor waved his hands about as though trying to fish the words out of his mouth.

“A bayonet!” Fernando suddenly cried.

“What?”

“A bayonet!”

Then he passed out.

In the hospital, watching Fernando having an infusion, the young doctor tried to connect the word “bayonet” which Fernando had said, with the presence of the rosary beads in his stomach. He remembered the time Fernando had first come to him. He had seemed to materialize in his surgery out of the night, speaking like an actor in a play.

“My stomach hurts, please help me. But I can’t afford to pay you.”

The young doctor, who was still a bachelor, hadn’t really come to that remote territory to make his fortune. He came because he wanted to escape the rot of the big city. He came because he wanted to treat people who came to him because they were really sick, not just because medical check-ups were the fashion, as they were in big cities. So he didn’t take much notice of the words, “I can’t afford to pay you.” But the way Fernando said “my stomach hurts” pulled him up with a start. In the man’s eyes the doctor saw deep pain.

“Help me,” Fernando had repeated. His tone of voice really made the doctor understand for the first time what it meant to be a person in need of help, and how he would feel himself if no one in the world would help him.

He looked at the X-rays of Fernando’s stomach. The rosary lay coiled like a sleeping snake. The doctor shook his head.

“A bayonet...” he repeated Fernando’s words. He knew what a bayonet was, a long blade attached to the end of a rifle. A soldier would use one in close range combat, if he’d run out of bullets or had no time to shoot. The doctor often saw lines of soldiers racing around in training, carrying bayonets. They often ran around the town stripped to the waist and chanting. Privately the doctor was amazed that anyone would want to take on a job that could put his life at risk.

What was the connection between a bayonet and a rosary? There couldn’t be one. Fernando was the only one who could explain if there was, but he was now lying there unconscious with tubes in his nose and mouth. His forehead was covered with cold sweat, heaven only knew what was in his mind.

In fact pictures were flashing vividly in Fernando’s head, pictures that no one could possibly forget even if he wanted to. Screams still rang in his ears, and he could still see people toppling like felled banana palms. Then he saw the bullets and the blood and the terrified faces. Yet the thing that always jerked him awake was the abuse, humiliating shouts that could only be uttered by men who felt that they had absolute power over the lives of those they abused. Fernando was consumed by hatred when he remembered. He could never wipe it all away, but at the same time he was grateful, as it was this hatred that had given him the will to live.

Soldiers weren’t the only ones with the courage to die. Anyone had the courage to die to defend his life. Especially a life of independence and self respect.

“A bayonet,” Fernando whispered. The doctor moved closer. Fernando’s eyes opened.

“A bayonet,” he repeated.

Then he passed out again.

The moon was shining brightly over the hospital. If only moonlight could cure the sick, the doctor thought. He was very frightened that Fernando wouldn’t regain consciousness. He would die with the rosary beads in his stomach and die with the mystery which the doctor would never solve. He would never be able to fathom out how the word, bayonet, would answer his questions.

When the X-ray was developed, at first he didn’t know that those round objects were rosary beads. He thought they were peas. But of course peas would be digested and that would be the end of them. The objects in the stomach were definitely something indigestible. Maybe they were marbles. But they were too small for marbles, and anyway, why would Fernando want to swallow marbles? They’re definitely some sort of very hard seed, the doctor thought. Yet if they were, why ever did Fernando swallow them? Finally he asked Fernando.

“They’re rosary beads doctor.”

“When did you swallow them?”

“Almost twenty months ago.”

“How did you come to swallow them?”

Here the questions ended. Fernando was never capable of explaining how the rosary beads had managed to be in his stomach.

If not Fernando, maybe there was someone else who could explain. But who was Fernando? The doctor remembered how he’d just appeared out of the night. It was so hard to know anybody in this town. People could appear and vanish, just like that, into the night. There were many people he’d met who’d suddenly vanished and no one could explain where they’d gone.

Did Fernando have a family? Maybe. At least a mother had given birth to him. But of course this was no guarantee that there was anyone who could answer the doctor's questions about the rosary. In that town there were too many people who'd lost members of their family. There were a lot of people alone in the world and many also who'd completely vanished.

Up till now the doctor couldn't understand how a town could be constructed out of mystery. There were too many nameless graves, too many punishments without charges, too many trials without courts, too much blood flowing like water, blood from eyes that had been put out, from ears that had been cut off, from wounds caused by blows with rifle butts.

Now he wanted to know whether Fernando had a family but he felt he'd get a horrifying answer such as:

"His father disappeared when their house was raided one night."

"His older brother died in jail with his face battered to a bloody pulp."

"His young brother fled into the jungle."

"His mother was shot dead."

The doctor was deep in thought. Fernando was still in a coma.

The rosary in Fernando's stomach was still on his mind when the doctor walked home past the cemetery. A dark-skinned nurse had suggested he do this.

"Think about the rosary while you're there," the nurse had said as she changed Fernando's tubes.

So now the doctor was walking past the cemetery. The moon was so bright that the wall, the asphalt path and the leaves shone with a silvery light. For him the nurse's words were very mysterious. He felt more and more that he didn't understand the town and felt increasingly alienated.

"Think about the rosary when you're at the cemetery, and think why Fernando spoke about a bayonet," the nurse had said.

The doctor did try to think hard, for he wanted to know the answer. Actually the rosary could be removed easily with an operation, but that wasn't what was worrying him. He was really anxious to know how Fernando could swallow rosary beads, things that were tasteless, not salty or sweet or bitter. He desperately wanted to know why Fernando had said the word "bayonet" and why a nurse had urged him to go home via the cemetery.

Meanwhile, in his coma, Fernando travelled to the past, when a soldier had forced him to swallow the rosary beads in a cemetery, at the point of a blood smeared bayonet.

Independence is a cursed dream," the soldier had said as he pressed his bayonet to Fernando's cheek. Bodies lay sprawled all around him. The doctor had actually forgotten that this incident had ever happened.

Electricity

Over fifteen hundred years ago the ancient Greeks discovered that if a certain kind of yellow stone was rubbed briskly and vigorously it was able to attract small dust particles and lint. From here originated the word electron, meaning “amber”, which is now known as electricity.

In the seventeenth century, a German experimental pioneer, Otto von Guericke, wanted to find a way to observe what was later called electrostatics. He did this by making a globe of sulfur, which was rotated on a shaft as he rubbed it with his hands. When it was rubbed in that way, the ball was able to attract small scraps of paper, lint and several other materials. To his surprise, Von Guericke discovered that linen threads attracted to the ball were repelled once they touched the sulfur. This was an electrostatic generator, simple but original, and constituted the first fast electrical current.

In 1786, Luigi Galvani, a professor of anatomy at the University of Bologna, noticed that sparks being thrown from a nearby electrical machine caused a contraction of the leg of a frog that he was dissecting with a scalpel. This chance discovery led him to several experiments, including one in which he observed that if he touched the leg muscle of a frog with a tin rod and one of its nerves with a copper rod, a contraction of the muscle occurred and the two metals made contact. Although Galvani incorrectly called his discovery “animal electricity”, it opened the door to several other discoveries.

Still in the eighteenth century, an English experimenter, Dr William Watson, set up an unusual human chain. A man cranked a wheel whose friction with the hand of a woman generated an electrical charge. This in turn was transferred to a boy’s leg then flowed to a girl who was standing on an insulated tub of dry tar. Now this girl’s hands were able to attract some bran on a table. The experiment was successful. It seemed electricity could pass through the human body.

In 1993, electricity was used to give Januario electric shocks.

“Aaaaarrggghhhh!”

The sound of his screams rent the night, bursting out from the interrogation room each time the two clamps bit into his armpits, like a crab.

“Aaaaarrggghhhhh!”

Januario was truly a prisoner in the formula $R=E/I$, where he was hit repeatedly by an electric current of 110 volts. Apparently electricity has other uses besides lighting, Januario thought. It packs a bigger punch than a heavyweight boxer.

“Tell me quickly! Who told you to ask for political asylum?”

“Long live.... Arrrgghhh!”

Januario never got to finish that sentence, because each time he started it, a guard turned the potentiometer in front of him and a terrible jolt of electricity ripped through his body, flinging him and his chair to the floor.

“You’re a stubborn man! Why won’t you confess? You people want to be independent but you can’t be if you won’t cooperate! Hurry up and tell me, who was it?”

Januario said nothing. He remained sprawled on the floor. He had no shirt on and was just wearing a pair of blood-spattered jeans. No shoes. No sandals. His forehead was beaded with sweat and his lips were swollen and split from blows with rubber and iron truncheons.

“Long li... Aaarrgghhh!”

“Was it that American?”

“Aaarrgghhh!”

“An Australian?”

“Aaarrgghhh!”

“A Dutchman?”

“Aaarrgghhh!”

“A student?”

“Aaaaarrgghhh!”

Januario convulsed with pain. With each question, he was given an electric shock that made his body thrash about like a fish in a basket.

Then the clock struck twelve. Moonlight shone brightly through the bars.

“Wakijan!”

“Yes sir!”

“Clear up here and tell someone to go and rustle up some fried rice! None of us have had anything to eat for a while!”

“Yes sir!”

“Are the food stalls in the market still open?”

“They’re shut Captain.”

“So why do you keep saying ‘yes sir’ all the time?”

“Yes sir!”

“You bloody idiot! That’s enough! Go and cook up some instant noodles!”

The three men left the room. Before he went Wakijan pulled out the electric plug, released the clamps from Januario’s armpits, and put out the light. Januario was left alone, sprawled on the cold floor. He could faintly hear the screech of a night bird.

When he was a child he once got an electric shock. He’d forgotten what it felt like, because his past life didn’t leave him with

any memories of pain and suffering. He remembered nights when there were dance parties, and men’s gatherings and nights when they drank *aquardenti*, where laughter and sounds of merriment could be heard, freely and openly, without fear of getting into trouble.

“Januario!”

“Yes?”

“There’s a letter for you!”

“Where from?”

“Lisbon!”

Of course he remembered that moment, the time he took himself off to a quiet spot and lay down on the cold floor and read those lines, the gentle words of a mother, so full of love and affection, and so thick with longing.

My dearest Januario...

There’s nothing more honest than the love of a mother, nothing more tender than a mother’s loving caress. Januario always longed for his mother’s letters from far away, but one day they suddenly stopped coming and he never received any more. At the time he’d already made his preparations to leave.

Uncle Eusebio has guaranteed your father that you’ll be accepted into the Porto Football Club junior team. If you train hard and your game improves you’ll get a place in the senior team, or transfer to the Benfica club and your salary will be more than enough to live on. Uncle Eusebio convinced me that you’ve got what it takes to join them. He was very impressed with your playing when he came to our town looking for talented players. According to Uncle Eusebio it’s only potentially top players who can, at fifteen years of age, take the ball past three or four players, without it once touching the ground, then score a goal. At first your Papa didn’t approve of your becoming a soccer player, but

Uncle Eusebio managed to convince him that in Europe the future is very bright for talented soccer players like yourself.

How are those cheeky friends of yours, Alfredo, Cornelio and Alfonso? Tell their parents that your Papa's business is doing quite well and my weaving is starting to sell. As soon as you finish your studies at Tech, you must come over here immediately. I'll send you the boat fare. Your brother Manuel and your sister Yosefa send you hugs and kisses. We miss you. Study hard so you can soon be with us. By the way, there's just been a coup here but nobody died and life goes on as usual.

Hugs and kisses from Mama.

But so much had happened since then. Now, eighteen years later, Januario had long given up his dream of being the most expensive soccer player in the world. At the age of thirty-three, he'd been through too much to go on attaching any importance to his own dreams.

Alfredo had been killed a long time ago. He was seventeen when the foreign soldiers sprayed him with bullets from the back. A year later Comelio was killed by shrapnel from a bomb, when fighter planes attacked the refugee and guerrilla camps in the bush. That left him and Alfonso active in the clandestine movement in the town. But Alfonso had gone when he was thirty years old. He was shot dead when he took part in a demonstration in front of a cemetery and held up a banner that proclaimed what was in their hearts.

Januario was very lonely without his friends because, apart from those three, he was never sure who were friends and who were enemies.

"Januario!"

"Esterlina?"

"Yes, it's me, Esterlina, your woman."

"Where did you disappear to, Esterlina? I've been looking for you for two years."

"Januario! They raped me! They stripped me naked and burned me with clove cigarettes! They made me lie on the floor and they trampled on my back with their army boots. My ears rang from blows with rubber truncheons. There was so much pain, Januario! They put the leg of a table on my big toes and then stood on the table. I couldn't stand it! They wanted to know where you were hiding, Januario! But how could I tell them when you always kept your activities a secret from me? They didn't believe me Januario! I was your girlfriend, your sweetheart, they thought I'd be sure to know! They gave me electric shocks, Januario! They raped me! Eight men raped me one after the other! The pain was terrible! I couldn't endure it! When they finished raping me they gave me more electric shocks and when that was over they raped me again! I couldn't take any more. Especially when that vile Domingos had his turn. He whispered in my ear and admitted that he really hated you. Wasn't he a member of your movement Januario? May God curse him! It's all over for me Januario. They sank my body in the harbor with a few other corpses. We'll never see each other again Januario... remember, remember me, in the name of our love and the strugg..."

"Esterlina! Esterlina! Wait Esterima!"

SPLASH!

"Get up!"

The light was on. Januario saw Wakijan holding a bucket.

"Wakijan!"

"Sir!"

"We will continue the interrogation!"

"Yes sir."

"Do it!"

Wakijan plugged in the potentiometer again and adjusted it. Januario heard the men who'd just eaten belching. One of them grabbed him by his hair and yanked his head back.

"We'll try again. Tell us who told you to ask for asylum."

At that moment Januario saw Domingos's face through the window. But when the 110 volt current jolted his body he couldn't think any further.

He screamed in agony.

Nevertheless, he just had time to remember that he was actually very punctual paying his electricity bill every month.

Two months later, in a room in the United Nations building in New York, a diplomat from a country that had never had a war, or experienced a rebellion or a coup, was sitting with his feet up on his desk, reading a report.

"The first thing they do to a prisoner is to beat him and give him blows to the stomach and chest; he is blindfolded and electric shocks are given; they hit him on the back with iron rods; they step on his feet with their boots; they give electric shocks; they burn his body with cigarettes, including his genitals...")*

That's as far as the diplomat got. The coffee he was drinking suddenly tasted very bitter.

Why do I have to go through this report now? he thought. I'll read it later, when I get home from my two weeks' holiday in Bali.

The History Lesson

When it was time for the history lesson, the school teacher Alfonso took his sixth grade pupils to that historic place. The cold November wind gusted, making leaves fall and swirl into the cemetery.

"Children, we're going to study history," he said.

The children looked at the teacher with their big, round eyes. Alfonso looked back at them sharply. It's strange, he thought, every time they come to this place they're quiet, but they're really naughty kids. In class they're always chasing each other and jumping over desks.

This was the second time Alfonso had brought his pupils to the cemetery. The wind gusted and the falling leaves swirled. What is history, Alfonso thought, what should we understand from the past? He looked at his innocent pupils, with their curly hair, dark skin, big white teeth and large eyes. On this occasion their hands and feet were still, their mouths were open and their eyes were waiting. There was another gust of wind, this time carrying the smell of gunfire.

Alfonso hadn't forgotten the incident. How could he? At the time of the shooting they were divided into two rows, front and back. Their commanding officer fired once into the air, shouting "Front row down, back row fire!" After the rear row fired, the front row attacked and thrust their bayonets at the crowd. Alfonso hadn't forgotten. He'd only been able to run about blindly, because people were going down like flies, sprawled everywhere.

*) Amnesty International Index: ASA 21/15/93.

“Mr Alfonso!”

“Yes.”

“Why are we studying history outside the classroom?”

Alfonso looked at the child. He liked the way his pupils asked questions. All the teachers at their school always taught their pupils to have the courage to ask questions persistently. They’d taught them not to believe easily what they were taught.

Now the child was asking why the history lesson had to be taught outside the classroom. In Alfonso’s mind there was an answer, but what came out of his mouth was different.

“Because not everything can be taught inside the classroom, Francesco.”

“Sir,” another pupil stood up.

“Yes!”

“What sort of history lessons have to be taught outside the classroom?”

Alfonso took a breath. All the questions were honest ones. But how difficult an honest question could be. Actually he already had an answer in his mind but again what came out of his mouth was something else.

“Naturally, it’s the history lessons that can’t be taught inside the classroom, Florencio!”

“But what sort of history can’t be studied inside the classroom, Sir?”

The leaves were still falling, yellowy falling leaves swirling around in the cemetery complex. Falling leaves always reminded Alfonso of that incident, when all the people who were left and didn’t have time to run away were told to take off their shirts and were beaten with pieces of wood.

“Now say your prayers. Your time’s come and you’re all going to die.”

Alfonso lay face down and pretended to be dead. He saw a friend beside him, who was still alive, get stabbed in the head with a knife.

“History isn’t just a record of dates and names Florencio. There’s history remaining in the grass, or hidden in the wind or tossing behind the waves. History, Florencio, creeps around outside the classroom, and now you all have to study it.”

The children fell silent. They’d studied many things. During their six years at school they’d learnt to read, add up and connect cause and effect. They’d learnt how to speak, how to utilize language and how to take advantage of it. For six years, yes six years, their firm-jawed, sharp-eyed teachers, some of whom didn’t have any ears, had educated them with one method, to ensure they mastered language, because with that they could understand many things, including history.

Alfonso had learnt for very many years that their hopes rested on the children, but he realized that those hopes could only become reality if the children could understand history. He also knew only too well that only with a certain way of speaking, which was mutually intelligible, could their history be fully understood.

The fact was that it wasn’t all that easy to teach an understanding of the meaning of spraying bullets. Bullets that had flown in all directions for seven minutes, scattered everywhere and struck bodies and the air. Then there’d been silence, followed by the sound of moaning. Alfonso the teacher had long thought about it, how to tell the children all about it without making it too terrifying for them. Without telling them about the blood that reddened the asphalt, without telling how his own head was kicked, how his shirt was ripped off to tie his hands and how his head was struck with a rifle butt until it was bleeding, while the friend next to him was beaten with a piece of wood that had nails in the end of it. Alfonso

had long searched for a way to teach that sort of history without getting angry.

“Kill them all!”

He heard that shout, although he couldn't hear shooting any more. He only knew that he was thrown onto a truck. Drifting between consciousness and unconsciousness he'd felt piles of bodies, some half dead, some half alive.

“Mr Alfonso!”

“Yes!”

“Tell us the history you mean.”

The wind blew again carrying the putrid smell of blood. The sound of the wind often reminded Alfonso of a procession at night. A long procession accompanying a coffin with a thousand candles glowing. It reminded him how sadness could become an ever lengthening wound.

“We're only mourning the death of Sebastian,” he remembered those words, “we're only mourning and scattering flowers.”

Some were mourning and some were doing more than that and were waving flags and carrying posters. Oh Ventura, oh Clementino, should a person love freedom more than life, more than reality?

“Sir!”

“Yes!”

“It's late.”

“The history period's almost over.”

“Tell us about it quickly.”

Children, what should children know? Should they know why their older brothers disappeared without a trace, why their families are incomplete, why their fathers are buried God knows where? Should they know why the nights are so silent, and army patrols are everywhere and their mothers' eyes are so often terrified?

Alfonso was thinking of how to give that history lesson as well as possible, while the sun rose higher and higher.

The children waited, sitting with their chins in written in the history books their hands, their eyes never leaving the teacher. Then he told the story.

“One day, eighteen years ago...”

The wind blew, whipping up the waves of history. The children were all spellbound. They were swept away to a world where dust swirled everywhere, and bullets sprayed in all directions and blood spurted and tears flowed but mouths were clenched with rage. A world where mothers lost children and children lost-parents, where women were abused and raped, where a young man cried “Long live...” and was silenced with blood flowing from his ears, which were then cut off. Piles of corpses and soldiers having their photos taken together in front of them. Sometimes they'd get one of the bullet-riddled bodies and prop it up as though it were still alive. They'd stick a hat on its head and a cigarette in its mouth and then have their photo taken with it, laughing as they did so. I

The November wind still whipped around, now very strongly, so that more and more leaves were scattered in the cemetery, making a rustling sound against the walls. The sky quickly grew overcast, as though sheltering hundreds of spirits that wandered around, full of resentment. Alfonso was still talking. He told the story calmly but fully. The children listened open-mouthed and history flowed into their souls.

To tell you the truth, they'd all heard Alfonso's story before, in fact they'd even learnt it by heart. But now they understood that it was history which was not written in the history books.

The Mystery of the Town of Ningi (or The Invisible Christmas)

That Christmas Eve the church bells pealed, resounding to every corner of the town of Ningi. I heard the echo of a choir singing “Holy Night”, and in the sky I saw the stars shining brightly. Human life is so fleeting—but shouldn’t we always believe that there is something of enduring value in this life?

On Christmas Eve, in the town of Ningi, I walked along the empty street thinking about the meaning of “fleeting” and “enduring”. I would never have thought about such things if I hadn’t come to Ningi. You see, I’m just a simple census collector. My life is dry and boring. I only associate with figures. My work is limited to counting how many family members there are in a house. So I count people from house to house, until I’ve collected the total population of a town, year by year.

At a certain time in my life as a census collector I was assigned to the town of Ningi, a town I had no idea would wake me up from my sleepy life that had gone on for so long. You see, counting people over and over again, in town after town, is really very simple, and incredibly monotonous. From one town to another I just saw humans producing descendants. Year after year they produced descendants and used up all their land and ended up quarrelling with each other.

In Ningi I found something entirely different. In Ningi, from year to year the population was decreasing. It was very strange. At

a time when the world was frowning with worry because of the frightening, rapid growth in population, the population of Ningi was shrinking. When I dug out the archives, the records for 1974 showed a total population of 668,771. But when I counted again in 1978 it seemed the population had shrunk to 329,271 people. Where had the other 359,500 gone to? ¹⁾ It was very peculiar. But in fact it wasn’t the matter of that decrease that made me feel strange.

I’d better tell you how my sleepy life as a census collector was woken up.

The first time I entered a house in Ningi I found something mysterious. I counted everyone in the house. There were seven occupants.

“So, there are seven of you altogether, are there lady?”

“There’s really eight of us.”

“I see. One of you died, is that right?”

“No, he’s not dead. He was actually killed, but he’s not dead yet.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s here, with us.”

“Where?”

She pointed to the dinner table. I looked in the direction she was pointing. I saw that there was rice on a plate, and prawn chips and tempe. I saw a spoon and fork moving by themselves, as though someone was holding them, and putting the food into his mouth. I gaped.

“Who is it?”

“That’s Adelino, our brother who was arrested, interrogated and beaten to death. But he’s still here. See for yourself.”

1) The figures in this short story come from GJ Aditjondro *Prospects for Development of East Timor After the Capture of Xanana Gusmao*, Hayam Waruk No. 1 Th V111/1993 pp 62-67.

I saw a prawn chip floating through the air by itself, heard a crunching sound, and then it disappeared. Maybe Adelino had swallowed it.

“So you see, there’s really eight of us.”

I left that house in a daze. With my own eyes I’d seen water being poured, a glass being lifted, the water being drunk and disappearing, as if someone really had drunk it.

I’m only a census collector, a minor official, a problem like that was far too weighty for my brain. I hurried into another house, trying to forget the incident in the previous one. But the fact was, it seemed Ningi was a very mysterious town. In every house I entered there were always those invisible beings. Again and again I saw spoons and forks moving by themselves to pick up food, glasses emptying into invisible mouths and heard the sound of people splashing about as they bathed, but the people doing it, who were really dead, were invisible. I could only see the water dipper going up and down with nobody holding it. It was astonishing.

So, you could say that the population of that town consisted of visible people and invisible people. Whenever I walked along the roads there, I’d see pairs of thongs walking along by themselves, or a motor bike starting up suddenly and taking off, or a car speeding by with no driver. In the market you could hear the hustle and bustle of visible people and invisible people. It seemed the people of Ningi were used to living with invisible people, even though they apparently never spoke.

The Ningi people always referred to the invisible ones as “our brothers and sisters”, with cold expressions on their faces. They didn’t seem to be too sad that their brothers and sisters were invisible. Maybe they were, but they’d got used to it. To be precise, they were so used to being sad that they didn’t look as though they were sad at all. The faces of the visible people were very bitter, and

the expression in their eyes was full of suffering—nevertheless they never gave the impression that they were sad.

I didn’t know what had happened in the past in Ningi. In that town there weren’t any historical records. The history books that I saw in the library were more like fairy tales. How could the people of Ningi get to know themselves? History doesn’t get wiped out, but historical records can be destroyed. As a census collector I only found figures from the past, but what could figures tell you?

According to my experience as a census collector, if the rate of population growth in Ningi was normal, that is nine per cent per annum based on data from 1970-1973, then in 1980 the population should have been 667,100. It turned out that when I counted from house to house the total was only 555,350 people. I was very surprised. There was no epidemic, no war, no large-scale exodus, but where had those 111,750 human beings disappeared to? ²⁾ In one village at the edge of town, which had once had a population of 9,607, 5,021 of the population had gone missing—was it they who’d become the invisible beings, the wandering spirits?

Of course I heard whispers that at night masked gangs prowled around, who forced their way into houses and carried the occupants away. According to those whispers, the people who were abducted didn’t always come back. Those who did were invisible and couldn’t speak. Strangely, the people they lived with weren’t too surprised. Apparently they believed that if people didn’t die from natural causes, for example if they were murdered, their souls wouldn’t depart. Although I’m just a simple census collector, in my free time I take the opportunity to read anthropological studies about my

2) This figure of 111,750 is a correction. Aditjondro wrote it 112,000.

work environment. From these I found out that these Ningi people believe that, as spirits, those dead souls are sacred, but they can still roam around close to living people.

After some years of living in the town of Ningi, I became used to the invisible people, although I could never completely understand their meaning. For a census collector like me, whose task is just counting, counting and more counting, the most important thing is reporting growth figures. So I also have to record that from year to year the population of Ningi decreased, and on the other hand the number of invisible people increased. Therefore, if it's really counted correctly, the population of Ningi was actually increasing, it's just that so many of them were invisible—halfway between existing and not existing.

When I returned to the very first house I'd visited and went inside, there was only one occupant remaining. The other seven were nowhere to be seen. When she had a meal at the table she appeared to be alone, but on either side of her spoons and forks clattered as they made contact with plates. Many objects were flying around and thongs were walking about by themselves in that house. That's what went on in every corner of Ningi.

From year to year the population continued to dwindle. I knew that one day it would disappear completely and be replaced by newcomers. On the road I often passed or collided with invisible people. They were anywhere at any time. Whenever I passed the cemetery, I heard the voices of invisible people moaning and groaning. Sometimes I also passed invisible people who kept dripping blood. Of course all I saw were drops of blood coming from God knows where, accompanied by the sound of groans.

On the footpaths, on the soccer field, at the market and beside the beach I often came upon dripping blood moving around by itself. It was the blood of invisible people whose lives were

deliberately terminated. Yet it seemed they couldn't die, they were still there, existing and moving like ordinary people. As a good census collector, I also recorded the growth in the number of invisible people from house to house. In many of the houses I visited, they were the only occupants. Glasses and brooms moved, and television sets turned on, all by themselves. My God, if there's a good comedy show, how do they laugh? These invisible people can't make tiny sound except to groan and moan and lament.

So far, I've been living in Ningi for fifteen years and my life is really lonely. By day I work counting people, and at night I don't dare leave the house because there are gangs of masked men like ninjas. Actually, the theory is, they won't come into my house because I'm only an outsider. During all this time those gangs of masked men have only entered the homes of the local Ningi people. That's the way it all happened, until now the population of Ningi has disappeared completely.

On Christmas Eve, I was the only person to be seen in the town. The church bells pealed, resounding throughout the town. I heard the echo of a choir singing "Holy Night", and in the sky I saw stars shining brightly. I celebrated Christmas with the invisible people. Maybe I should write a poem about all this. Maybe I'll call it "The Invisible Christmas". Actually I'm just a simple census collector, but I'm allowed to ponder the meaning of life which is both fleeting and enduring, aren't I?

Clandestine

The thing was that around that time I'd been feeling as though I had enemies. I felt under attack—but I didn't know who my enemies were. One by one I examined every name registered on the face of the earth but there wasn't even one person who had any reason to be hostile towards me. And yet, why were my hands tied, my feet in stocks and why was my neck chained? I was like a disembodied spirit, wandering about like a ghost, worried by thoughts that could not be written down. Were my thoughts so dangerous that my pen had been deprived of ink, my computer unplugged, and there wasn't one sheet of paper available for me in the whole world?

I racked my brains and thought, so that's it, my enemy is the system. My way of thinking is forbidden and heretical. Philistines! Who do they think they are, telling other people how to think?

I thought, the system has to be fought with the system. So I accepted the offer of the rebels' spies. One day, I removed the cover of an access hole, went down into the dark sewer tunnel, and joined up with the people who live underground.

"Welcome," said someone who put a garland of smelly flowers around my neck, "you're our latest recruit."

"I've come for freedom of thought," I said, "take me to your leader."

The man guided me through a long, dark tunnel. At first, from the surface, sunlight filtered through the cracks in the dry drains, through which I could still hear footsteps and the rumbling of cars

and the sound of people spitting. How close those people up there are, I thought, and they don't know what's threatening their necks.

"We've been building all this for many years," my guide said without being prompted. "When the moment comes, we're going to tear down everything that's been built up above, and we'll come out and replace it with a new system that is better, more correct and stronger."

I didn't reply, because my eyes were still getting used to the dark. Off in the distance I could see dim electric lights illuminating the tunnel. I felt the wall, which was vibrating. I heard the faint throbbing of heavy machinery from some large project.

Gradually the deafening sound increased. My guide held out a safety helmet with a light on the front of it. Along the way I saw many people coming down from above through access holes. We were formed into a long line, all pressing forward in one direction, the direction from which the deafening noise of the machinery was coming.

In the gloom I saw the guide shouting something at me but I didn't hear him. I put my mouth up close to his ear.

"Your leader! I want to meet your leader!"

He signaled me to follow him. The tunnel gradually widened out, like a giant cave. The further it went, the more branches and confusing twists and turns there were, like a labyrinth. The longer I walked, the more people I came across. This was a world without sun, a world of eternal night.

I had entered a subterranean city. According to my guide, people had lived there for three generations. I saw people printing leaflets, people making speeches to crowds in various places, people eating in roadside stalls. They were all wearing safety helmets with lights because, although this world was bathed in electric light, the tunnels leading to the places where they each lived, cells in the walls of the cave, were always dark and gloomy.

So many tunnels, so many people, I had no idea that all this was under my city. People in uniform came and went with tense expressions on their faces. Sometimes they had bleeding prisoners with them. My guide pressed his mouth to my ear.

“We commit acts of terrorism, abduct people from above through the open drains, and treat them as slaves here. That’s why you often hear stories of people disappearing when they fall into open drains. In fact it’s us abducting them. Warn your family and friends not to stand near drains.”

“How could I do that?”

“Why, you can phone from here.”

He pointed to a public phone in the wall of the cave.

“Does it take coins or a card?”

“It’s free. All you have to do is dial.”

Whenever they want to, they can emerge anywhere at all, kill someone, throw hand-grenades, or plant bombs, then disappear again. How fragile was the power up above. I saw a terrifying future, a future full of disaster, vengeance and brutality.

I signaled to my guide that I wanted to meet his leader, but his eyes gave no sign that he’d understood. Or maybe he was pretending not to understand. I still kept following him till we reached the source of the deafening noise.

“This is the way we’re going to destroy the system,” he said.

This was a big project. I soon saw that people were working day and night, building a huge well under the city above us, so big it was as big as the city itself. When the right moment came, explosives would destroy the foundations of the city, the large buildings, the pivots of state life, flatten the city and make it vanish into the dark, hot earth, as hot as the blazing crater of a volcano. It really was a system to destroy a system. A giant well built with equipment which had become increasingly sophisticated over the past hundred years, it was dozens of kilometers deep. The city

would disintegrate, and disappear as though it had never existed. Not even archeologists might ever find it again.

Millions of people were drilling away underground. Of course for me this was a new way of waging war. Who were friends and who were enemies? Most of the grandmothers and grandfathers of those who were engaged in hostilities had died. Their leaders were worshipped as idols. Now remained their children and grandchildren living with just one idea: break down the city to its roots. I held my breath. How could a way of thinking create enmity that could last for seven generations. Ideas, thoughts, how could they be so restrictive?

A terrifying image came into my mind. An explosion that made the city collapse. I saw people who were walking along the footpath flying and falling into the giant well screaming, I saw people who were working in their offices, driving cars, drinking in bars, phoning someone or other, floating to the giant well that was so deep it appeared to be bottomless. My God, just look at that terrifying scene. Multi-storied buildings sinking, tilting over and finally collapsing and floating down like cardboard. God knows what the panic inside them would be like. Toll roads buckling, huge statues shattering like china, luxury houses smashed to pieces and all of them floating, floating, floating, and falling into the abyss that never was. The enemy completely destroyed and nothing at all left but the sound of the screams. My God, what sort of revenge could give birth to such a disaster?

“Let them know what it feels like,” I heard my guide continue, “let them know, they’re not the only ones who can slaughter unarmed people just when they feel like it!”

Was it revenge?

“That’s right my friend, but we’re not avenging their victims. We’re exacting revenge for their arrogance. It’s their arrogance in

considering that they and only they are right—that's what's an affront to humanity. That's what must be wiped out."

My guide had thrust out a drill when once more I asked about the leader. I wanted to cross-examine him thoroughly straightaway, to determine whether the system they offered was really better, so I wouldn't just go along blindly becoming an idol worshipper.

Once again my guide thrust the drill at me.

"This is our leader," he said. "This is our ideology." I still didn't understand, but I took the drill anyway.

"Resistance," he said again passionately, "our ideology is resistance. We don't care about winning or losing, we just keep resisting."

"Yes, but..."

"Our ideology does not condone questions. It can't be otherwise, our ideology is always right, perfect and faultless. Only by fanatical and militant adherence to it can we destroy our enemies. Don't keep asking questions. Do something. Prove your resistance with actions."

The noise of the drilling was more deafening when he left. I was still holding my drill, among a thousand people passing to and fro. I felt very alien. I saw people who had no faces. Their faces had become one with the dirt. These were the faces of the believers, the followers, the ranks of resistance who fought with faith—blind faith.

Suddenly I saw a big billboard along the wall of the cave with a picture of their leader. Vaguely I recognized him. It was my guide! I smiled. To hell with him. I looked around me, searching for a way out. I didn't need any accomplices, I didn't need to join up with anyone. In fact I didn't need a system of resistance either, even if it was the most sophisticated in the world.

I started drilling, looking for a way to the surface. I kept away the people who wanted to make a city vanish. Everything was just

dark, dark, dark. So I drilled for days, for weeks, for months, for years, looking for a way up.

My face of course, was covered with dirt. Nobody recognized me. I didn't exist anymore but I didn't care. I knew maybe I'd never get to the surface, but that too wasn't all that important. I kept on drilling, and crawling and drilling, completely happy. I didn't need to destroy a city, I only needed to free my mind—from the perfect ideology.

Blood is Red, General

A retired general was reflecting on his brilliant past. He stretched himself out on a deckchair beside the blue swimming pool, water still dripping from his well-built body. He reached for a glass of fruit punch from the umbrella-shaded table, gulped it down, put on a pair of sunglasses, and lay back in the blazing sun.

“Now I don’t have to worry about getting shot,” he said to himself.

Indeed, there was no reason for him to worry. He was in his own home, a large, spacious house with high walls, in a luxury housing complex, not a place where just anyone could get in and out easily. At nearly every turn there were gates, complete with security guards. Yet even if there were a ninja who could get over the walk topped with barbed wire and broken glass, the general, who had the instincts of a true soldier, would be ready to shoot him down. For him, an accurate shot from a range of fifty meters was no great problem.

He’d been in the papers once for shooting a robber. He shot him in the leg.

All I do is shoot a robber in the leg and it makes the news, he thought at the time, what if they knew what goes on when we’re in combat?

But now they were going to find out how he fought on the battlefield because, just like his colleagues, he was writing his memoirs, a book of reminiscences about his life’s struggles.

“Life’s a struggle,” he once said to a journalist, “and for a true soldier it’s a struggle between life and death.”

“Many of the men who served under you now have government posts, while you don’t. Does this annoy you?”

“Why should it? That’s the way of the world. Why on earth should I be envious?”

“Are your children in business?”

“None of them joined the army. They’re all in the private sector. Well, they’ve got small businesses. After all, I can’t do much to help them along since I’ve retired.”

“Couldn’t you get your former people who are now officials to do something for them?”

“Ah, I’d feel uncomfortable. It would be a different matter if they offered, but if not I’d be too embarrassed. Maybe it’s common practice around here, but I wouldn’t do it. Well yes, there are one or two who help out, but only in a limited way. That’s how people are, some of them forget, despite the fact that at one time they begged to join me. Now they’ve made it they only think of their own clique. That’s the sort they are.”

“When you were still in office I suppose there were plenty of spoils for the taking?”

“Not spoils. I’d call it ‘give and take’. You couldn’t call it graft. If I’d been charging a percentage, then it would have been graft and I’d have been doing wrong. But in the case of a gift, well that was up to the giver, it was just luck. I swear to God I never put the squeeze on anyone. But if someone gave me golf clubs, well, I accepted them. That’s the plain truth. You just can’t avoid these sorts of things if you’re an official. To be honest, that’s how officials get rich. The wages are low but it’s the tips that pay well.”

“Did you get a lot of tips at the time?”

“Well, to tell you the truth, yes, I did. Now I’ve got a house and car and they were both tips. I’m not ashamed. Someone came

along and said, "Here's a car for you, sir. Thanks for giving me that project." I just accepted it. I wasn't embarrassed.

The general had dried off. He picked up an *International Herald Tribune* and read it quickly, feeling as though he was chewing on a piece of cheese. He was a field man. He, wasn't interested in politics and was ill-suited to administrative work.

"A soldier is put to the test in the field," he declared, "not behind a desk."

In fact he'd spent his life on the battlefield. As a teenager he'd fought in the war of independence, before he was finally recruited into the army. Every time there was a rebellion he was sent to crush it. They nearly always sent him because any task assigned to him was invariably done well.

Once, on a destroy mission, his troops were battered by a bazooka. He was hit in the head by shrapnel.

"I nearly died at the time, but I managed to pull through."

He was hospitalized for a year and was very bored. But now the scar on his right temple was like a shining service medal. Not everyone could wear a wound with pride. The retired general was proud of his battle scars. He often thought there was no profession more noble than being a soldier. He based this opinion on his belief that once you became a soldier you were laying your life on the line. This was more than just a profession.

Suddenly the general made a choking sound and flung away the newspaper he was reading.

"It's that story again! There it is again!"

Every time he read that story it always sickened him. What would they know about risking death, he thought, what would they know about how it felt to be surrounded by the enemy on unfamiliar ground and then slaughtered without mercy?

"We sacrificed thousands of lives to capture that territory. Are we supposed to just hand it back now?"

Newspapers and journalists, paper and pen, in his opinion that kind of work couldn't compare to facing flying bullets. He'd been fed up for a long time. Fed up with journalists, fed up with diplomats, fed up with politicians and fed up with university students.

"What would they know? All they can do is talk. What do they know about the families of soldiers left for dead, about becoming a limbless cripple, or about a thankless struggle that's despised as oppression? It's an insult! We made that region special, we developed it faster than the other regions, and they go and call it colonization! They even say we want to wipe out the entire race! What's going on here?"

The general got up and... splash! He jumped into the pool to try and cool down his anger. He swam up and down like a fish, now and then diving underwater, wanting to drive away all the problems that had disturbed his peace of mind. Yes, the peace of mind of a retired general. He couldn't for the life of him understand why the sacrifice of blood and tears could be wrong. "I'll get it all off my chest in my memoirs," he grumbled to himself. He wanted to let people know that a soldier's life was just struggle, struggle and more struggle. He was still swimming when the sky suddenly grew overcast. Thick clouds gathered and all at once it started to rain, first just a drizzle, but very soon it was like a deluge being poured from the sky. But the general didn't care, he just kept swimming in the rain. He dived under, resurfaced and suddenly understood that of late he often lost his temper because he didn't have enough to do. To be precise, he would never go into battle again and life was so quiet without combat. So he just swam and swam and swam and then sun baked on his deckchair, occasionally taking phone calls from his old comrades-in-arms.

Now he swam along in the downpour, the raindrops reminding him of the whizzing of bullets on the battle field. He was hopelessly

addicted to crisis situations. Only in a state of tension did he feel alive, only in danger did he feel calm. His satisfaction in life was achieved when he defeated the enemy, and history had fortunately dealt him the winner's role. In the rain he swam, in the rain he recalled the thousand and one battles he'd been through. It couldn't be helped—the history of his life was a journey through a sea of blood.

“General! The enemy president's been captured!”

“Who?”

“Ribalta!”

He remembered the captured enemy president. He was so dirty, so disheveled—how could someone like this be the president?

“Someone like this is the president?”

“Hahahaha!”

“Hahahaha!”

“Hahahaha!”

The man didn't meet a pretty fate. The victors immediately had their photos taken with the prisoner, whose body was riddled with holes. They put a hat on the corpse and stuck a cigarette in its mouth, then had their photo taken together like hunters posing with a tiger they'd shot on a hunt.

The general had forgotten how many souls he'd sent flying up to the heavens and, strange to say, it was only now that he realized that he'd also spilt quite a lot of blood— with bullets, dynamite, mortars, grenades and bombs. Unfortunately, it wasn't always soldiers who were the enemy. Some weren't always armed and didn't always seem like rebels, but they were just as dangerous, so they had to be wiped out too.

The general was still swimming in the rain. The water in the swimming pool turned red. At first it was thin like a drink of cordial, but then it thickened up. The general was swimming in a sea of blood. “Blood is red, general” he said to himself.

In the rain, which was getting heavier and heavier, the retired general swam along calmly, feeling very relaxed. Yes, he thought, it was time I retired.

The Flute of Loneliness

When I played the flute in that sad dusk, clouds marched by cleaving time, and the still golden sky was torn asunder, and in that great expanse I saw your thin lips smiling, so cold, so distant, quickly fading in the shadows of birds that flapped their wings and crossed the space, leaving behind a kind of cry, a kind of scream not to be left alone on the eve of the gloomy, black night that mercilessly darkened feelings.

Leaves fell like time tearing dates off a calendar, flew through space, turned yellow among the stars whose light diffuses through centuries, and howled along a road that kept evaporating into a mirage, like a glass of wine that I poured over your body and licked off again, with a thousand dreams sighing like the waves on the shore where your shadow silently walked with slow, dragging steps among the shells shining under the surface.

I played my flute at the edge of the wind that moved the scenery from field to field, from gorge to gorge, from one forest to another that was burning, and the rising smoke darkened the sky and transformed into loud, noisy cities spreading electric light that dazzled every eye that had long glistened with sorrow whose tears fell like rain, flooding drains and canals so that the proas moored there floated away, borne by the current to the past, carrying people who kept waving even though there would be no help inside the long pass age that only twisted and turned with uncertainty.

Mother was telling about the shooting and my missing kinfolk but I could not listen because I was playing my flute with troubled

emotions that moved the reality into myself, so empty that every weeping city echoed without difference, without desire, without dreams, until the memory printed on the plate was sliced up along with the flesh of animals eaten half raw in the name of a civilization as grey as the morning mist that enveloped me in a coldness that emitted whispers like unending moans.

I played my flute wishing that this would all pass quickly, but history crept through every hole in the flute, so that the whistling sand-laden wind drowned its sound behind the roar of the waves lashing against the window of time, through which, in a searchlight beam, I saw bands of refugees with wheelless carts moving along carrying their lives in bundles, murmuring a concert with a musical score written in blood that was still wet and will always be wet and dripping, so its red notes will forever change direction below a layer of ice that never knows the sun.

“Listen, please listen to me,” mother said. “Every night I dream of the screams.”

Screams of pain, screams of grief, oh I heard my mother sobbing night after night, catching her tears in a gums which, each time it filled, was sprinkled on graves that only existed in the imagination, in fairytales that became fact in newspapers used to wrap fish that writhed and were mercilessly gutted with bayonets to make them clean, uncontaminated and unblemished when served piping hot on the tables of power in the shadow puppet stories that toyed with the darkening, lengthening shadows, and my flute lulled the puppet master to sleep and his dreams came and went in the raging storm leading to oblivion.

I sat on a buffalo playing the flute and my mind wandered to a park where you could serenely pick jasmine bowers and slowly inhale their love-scented fragrance, but still the clouds kept moving and took hostage my sensitive feelings, unconditionally, and dragged the scene to when darkness put dusk back into the

storeroom, to be opened some time after the battle in the forest, which they kept chopping down until the blue butterflies, with trembling wings, hid behind the glass in picture frames in the shop windows at a plaza where you once gazed in wonder.

Still I played my flute when my buffalo started walking against time, still chewing its cud of green grass that spread out like a carpet unrolling to the heavens, bringing into view some ballet dancers who leapt when the sky at the end was drawn like a stage curtain, and my buffalo passed through towards another world where perhaps I would find you, restraining sorrow, under a mosquito net that swayed gently in the evening breeze, but how would I find you among so many people on horseback with swords in their belts, who swarmed among the skyscrapers that sprang up like mushrooms making fertile the forest of anxiety.

The wind howled with time in my blood when my buffalo stopped chewing its cud and reminded me how far mother had been left behind in the past of an era which had too long been buried, because she still kept telling everyone the story of the shooting and my lost kinsfolk until she lost her voice, and what remained was her mouth opening and closing and her hands gesturing trying to tell how it happened—the killings and slaughter that took the lives of hundreds of people without explanation—there were only tears of grief and screams of pain scattered by the wind and the long grass growing on the soccer field that is really a graveyard without headstones.

As I played my flute I could still hear mother's story, which had transformed into a song of sadness in every village and in every tent in the distant wastelands that I will not reach for another thousand years, when my buffalo has become a bullet train and my flute is played by computer experts in every sewer, for the bats flying around the lake have brought a message from the ruthless people from a distant planet, although not as far away as you my love, for

whom I have created showers of roses and a flying horse to abduct you in a dream.

Birds flew among the rain drops when the sky darkened, and the sound of a thousand violins that drowned the sound of my flute made the danger signs rust, and the candlelight in the parlor read destiny on the palm of a woman riding on the silvery rolling breakers as she shouted a poem about a world that had lost inner peace, and a child rode a skateboard along a footpath, quiet like a Zen garden without a caretaker, although I did find a pair of rainbow-colored waterfalls splashing quietly like silence.

“Speak about the wounds,” I heard my kinsfolk whisper. “Tell about the wounds that cannot be healed.”

Sitting on my buffalo that dragged its feet in a heaving hall reeking of hospital smells and the flickering of the neon lights on a floating casino, I remembered the wounds and the anxiety, I remembered the screams and the fear, I remembered the vengeance and the pain, until my flute emitted the sound of spraying blood, but I no longer know a civilized and ancient language to put something into words because I've become too used to playing my flute as the only means of revealing signs that have for so long littered the toll road leading to some paradise where the air is polluted by metallic gases and the perfume of men wearing bright red lipstick, whose desires have been recorded in the auction room.

The howling wind blew my bamboo hat away as I still kept playing my flute with the feeling that everything would be all right, but hundreds of soldiers lined up at the river wept, their steel helmets glinting in the golden light, and their rifle barrels forced the sound of prayer out of the village rice barns where our ancestors beat the drums at wedding festivities without food, because from a mirror into which young girls gazed came a song of flags and banners at a play performed in an aquarium that was tossed to the heavens, to the accompaniment of the plucking of a Japanese lute that twanged incessantly and made the dogs howl all night long.

I wanted to stop playing my flute because there were no more notes left in my heart but the flute kept playing like the echoing of dreams of bygone centuries or centuries that will come, like you, who I think are hidden behind the pounding of the waves but are singing alone in my breast, without anyone in any world to hear, because the bitter records have turned the ink back to thoughts that lock the halls of longing and vanish, swallowed by the void.

I placed my flute on a rock on a stretch of white sand by a river bank in a valley on the moon and together with my buffalo I left time behind, hoping that someday you will find the flute in a place without space—who knows when, past or future—and listen to that voice without sound which, according to the books without script, is called loneliness.

Salazar

Salazar, I'm waiting here for you, in an old cafe, near a cheap hotel in a dark alley in Barcelona. I've been waiting for two weeks, but you haven't shown up, even though you said yourself you'd come by train and see me here. You know, don't you, it was too difficult for me to meet you there. I'm not an activist in the movement, I am not a political figure who might stand a chance of getting in to that country—now your country—with out to much trouble. I'm just an ordinary man, a high school graduate who doesn't read much, doesn't understand politics, and only knows how to struggle from day to day to keep surviving. I'm nearly dying of boredom waiting for you Salazar, every day just watching people in the city parks kissing each other. I've got nothing to do here except to meet you, Salvador my brother. "You are still my brother aren't you?"

How long is it since we've seen each other? I keep picturing your face. Our parents only had two sons, Salazar, you and me, but I never know whether you're actually like I imagine, now. Are you still the same as you used to be? You could certainly talk about independence, sinews straining, and frothing at the mouth—something I could never do. But I know you could do a lot of other things too. I know you could talk at great length about the wind and the beach in a dusk so golden you'd think such a dusk could only happen at our beach, the beach of our town, where you can see the silhouettes of fishermen casting their nets when dusk falls. And when the sun sets behind the church, its last golden rays—

almost always gold, changing by the second from yellowy gold to reddish gold to purplish gold—gild the hills along the shore with their light. Do you still remember how beautiful it is Salazar?

Salazar, Salazar, I'm still waiting here for you, in a place that's foreign to me, squeezed between old buildings that I find quite depressing. True, there's a reddish dusk here too, a dusk which as far as I'm concerned always comes late. Its light makes the wings on the statues of angels look as though they're moving. I know this could prompt you to tell a story, probably a fairytale from a strange, distant country, like the ones you always dreamt up when we were children. But it still wouldn't be the same, Salazar. Nothing will ever be the same without you, a man who sang what he was feeling, a youth who said what he was thinking, a human being who spoke clearly and honestly about his attitude to life.

It was all those things that landed you over here in this distant land. You seem so far away now, Salazar, even if people do say the world has changed and shrunk so there's no distance between day and night. But none of that makes me feel close to you. Are you happy in what is now your country Salazar? I can't imagine what it must feel like. I want you to tell me about it, it's so long since we saw each other. We're brothers, why must we be so far apart and become strangers to each other? I wonder can you live without all the things we love but that you've left behind, Salazar?

I've been waiting here for you for two weeks, just waiting for you, until I know by heart the peal of the bell that ring full of authority. It's as though they echoing again the first time they rang, when were raised, sails unfurled and ships set out for an era that was full of adventure, an era that wrote its history in the name of civilization, but which in the end only separated us. I'm only a high school graduate who doesn't read much. To this day I can't understand why history had to separate us and tear our dreams apart, wipe out so many hopes and make our memories bloody.

I'm hoping you'll appear at the end of the alley, so I always sit outside. Then I can run quickly and embrace you and ask how you are, and whether you're well and whether you had a good trip. And I'll ask whether you're too tired to talk freely out in the open, where the wind isn't too strong or cold, and the sun shine warmly, so we can at least try to imagine our own birthplace, which, although hot, has cool breezes, although arid, has pleasant scenery, and although dusty, is our birthplace, our land, our home. Do you feel at home where you are now Salazar? As I sip my coffee which is never as good as the coffee back home, I'm expecting you to wave at the end of the alley, with a cheerful face promising happy news, just as I always imagine you from time long since past. I can no longer tell how long it's been, I can't remember any more, because every memory of our separation is sadness, suffering, unpleasantness and bitterness. Salazar my brother, if we do meet, I hope we don't grieve again over those sad stories, stories which if they were all collected would cause bloody tears to be shed. What's the use of remembering it all again? Maybe we can't forget, but let the grief express itself in the silent world within our own hearts. It's all too painful Salazar, too painful for a human being. Father shot by soldiers, Mother killed by guerrillas—who should we be angry with Salazar? Should we be angry with history?

I don't want to remember how many years you've been living in that country, which is now your country, either. Although people's names there are nearly the same as ours, and we mastered their language, isn't it all very different? To this day I still keep asking how much was what you call independence worth to you, to the extent that you were willing to replace reality with exile. Here I see a world without dust and sweat, with clean houses and fat cows, but is all that enough? That's not our world Salazar, I've always known that, just as I know how fond we were of the mountain goats that we always spoiled, how familiar we were with the heat and dust

that made the late afternoon breeze so pleasant as it swayed the fields of long grass where our ancestors spurred on their horses, resplendent in clothing of most beautiful woven local cloth and metal accessories that jingled through the songs in the traditional dances that were always lively and joyful.

Maybe if you appear at the end of the alley, Salazar, you'll throw down your rucksack and run to embrace me. Maybe—and I should know definitely—you'll ask about our homeland, and what should I tell you? You know, don't you, that I'm not very good at telling stories. I can't even write letters. I can't describe how the eerie blue hills are still there, still hiding something, and in fact many mysterious things still happen in that silent dwelling place of nature. Yes, I've been waiting for you for two weeks Salazar, but frankly I still don't know what I ought to tell you.

I know you don't need me to tell you awful news about our home. But the stories you get don't tell about children who swim all day in the wreckage of rusty landing craft. They don't tell about the men with vacant expressions in their eyes who squat in front of every house, nursing their fighting cocks. They also don't tell about the guerrillas who surrender and come down the mountain but then become the unemployed, who almost every night wash their brains with alcohol in discotheques full of fair-skinned prostitutes who've come from God knows where.

If you appear at the end of the alley, Salazar, shouldering a rucksack like a tourist, and wave at me cheerfully, I'll try not to worry you with bad news. I won't add to your lists of information with routine stories of abductions by night, torturing of prisoners, women given electric shocks, the cutting off of ears, and the hiding of corpses in boxes which are taken in helicopters and dumped in the middle of the ocean. If we do end up meeting Salazar, I'll probably just try and convince you that we can make what's left of our lives better if we want to.

I'm still waiting here for you Salazar, in an old cafe, near a cheap hotel in a dark alley in Barcelona. Waiting for you to arrive from Lisbon.

Junior

Twilight had fallen on Los Palos yet seemed not to have to come to Mount Legumau which stood stiffly silent in a wash of golden light. Sister Tania knew of the mountain's duplicitousness; thus she looked at that stone escarpment with a feeling of melancholy.

"Where is that promise of yours?" she asked it silently.

The wind that swept the clouds caused shafts of light to skitter by, and from the top of the mountain itself there seemed to be a road of light leading upward, a toll road connecting earth with heaven. Sister Tania didn't want to believe that it was that road that carried people to heaven, but she knew that this is what many other people believed. And why not, she supposed, if death were viewed as the gateway to the Most Beautiful Land? And even more so if death is seen to be as close to life as the air that one breathes each day.

"Stay here with us, Junior. Now that you've gotten an education, we'll look for work for you, something from which you can live. You'll be able to contribute to your homeland."

"I will give it my soul, Sister Tania. Plus, I want to find my mother."

The twilight seemed so overcast, so very overcast, yet but Sister Tania was still able to see the light that emanated from Junior's eyes. It was the light she had first seen fifteen years ago, when he was a three-year old boy, a scrawny and dirty little thing, with darkened skin and curly black hair turned red from malnutrition.

In all her life, Sister Tania though she had never seen a child as thin as he. Of course, she had often seen images of such children in advertisements in foreign magazines about starvation in Africe—babies with overlarge heads and eyes with no hope, suckling on a withered breast. "Oh my, oh my..." she always used to say when seeing pictures like that. But when she first saw Junior there was nothing she could say at all, except to cradle him in her arms as her heart cried out.

It was the boy's shining eyes she guessed that had given him the strength to survive. But such was the case of the dozens of children from other guerilla families who were handed over to her for protection; they too were able to survive.

The children were given to her both willingly and because that was the only thing that could be done. In some instances, it was because the children's parents could no longer care for them; in other instances, because their parents were dead.

"They've gone to the Most Beautiful Land," Sister Tania always heard the officiant say at burial services in the jungle whenever someone had gone to that place beyond. Death seemed to be for those people some kind of picnic or a road trip to an enjoyable destination.

Thus it was, Sister Tania supposed, the young children who died probably went on to the Most Beautiful Kindergarten. She took a deep breath. Was life on this earth so bad for people that death was seen as pleasurable? Why did life have to be such a nightmare?

It was Junior who always reminded Sister Tania of the meaning of life. Whenever waking, he never called out "Mama!" He always called out "Eta!", the word for "rice" instead. Yes, Sister Tania remembered very clearly his rib bones which protruded like a ladder from his body, his sunken stomach, and the many stories she could see in his large brown eyes. As soon as he was able to speak, he mimicked the sound of airplanes flying overhead.

Sister Tania had been startled to discover that Junior and other children only three or four years old were able to explain in detail the difference between a helicopter and a fighter plane, and could distinguish between an over-flying plane and a bomber ready to launch an attack.

“Sister...?”

“Yes?”

“I’m going to be leaving you.”

Sister Tania said nothing. Junior had become a young man so quickly. His body was like that of a boxer and he could outrun a horse. Was he the same Junior she had wrapped in a clean white sheet the morning she had found him in the crawl space beneath her residence? All those children were like that, or so said Sister Marlene, for in the jungle they had been taught to dig out shelters for themselves beneath large rocks and to remain in refuge there at night.

There had been a time when Sister Tania had eleven colleagues, nuns like herself, taking care of 147 abandoned children. But of course many of these children had not been simply abandoned: sometimes they took in newly-born children of guerilla parents, still red from having just been born. Once it has been Sister Tania’s job to collect children from the jungle camps, but she herself never actually knew how the families managed to live there. Many of the children, she knew, had seen their own parents killed.

“Sister!”

Oh, it was Junior, still standing there. For years this child had lived with her and grown into adolescence, helping out by tending to the pigs, the rabbits, and the vegetable garden. Junior was a quiet soul, very quiet, and Sister Tania knew that he was haunted by nightmares other people could only imagine. But he had survived because of the light in his eyes. Many of the other children who

had come under the nuns’ protection could only look at the world with an empty gaze, one that emanated hardly no sign of a life at all—having already evaporated in the heat of the tropical forest where death from hunger was as frequent as death from gunshot and where bodies were plagued by tuberculosis and afflicted by skin diseases.

“They learn different skills in the jungle,” Sister Marlene said to her. “To scrape their bottoms with rocks, for instance, and to use leaves as tissue when they defecate.”

Even though Sister Tania had learned much about suffering during her time of study, she could not imagine herself ever being able to live like such people, these leaders of the Most Beautiful Land both in heaven and on earth.

“Give me permission to go, Sister Tania!”

“Is that what you want, Junior? Do you really want to go?”

“Yes, Sister.”

“But Junior...”

“Yes...”

“You don’t have to go yet.”

“But there’s not much time left.”

How much time does one have on this earth to feel happy? From year to year, Sister Tania had nursed those children. So heavy was life’s burden that it eroded their dreams. Even by the time they were six or so, they still had the abilities of a three year old. When their education as teenagers was complete, their actual level was still that of primary school graduates. There were exceptions, of course, like Junior, but even he, now that he was older and able, still wanted to go to the Most Beautiful Land. What kind of dream was that, Sister Tania wondered.

In the open-back jeep, Sister Tania took Junior along the smooth road that spread out before them between the shining sea and the dazzling savanna. Goats pranced on the hillsides and people along

the road played guitar while singing songs of praise as if to escort Junior to a decision that would not be revocable.

“Don’t forget us, Junior.”

“I won’t, Sister.”

“And never give up on the power of love.”

“I won’t, Sister.”

Along the way to their destination, Sister Tania and Junior sometimes saw soldiers, young men not much older than Junior. Dressed in their underwear, with camouflage printed t-shirts, towels on their shoulders, and rifles in their hands, they were going to bathe, it seems. Their fresh and lively faces depressed Sister Tania. Would Junior end up shooting them one day? Or would they shoot Junior?

Sister Tania had long felt a sadness for the fact that so much human history is written with blood.

Twilight had long descended on Los Palos. Finally, darkness blanketed the entire area. Sister looked at the dark and looming mountain in the distance. They had stopped at a trestle bridge over a dry riverbed absent of water and filled only with stones and sand.

The river had its source the mountains but the river had no water.

“Life will be difficult for you, Junior.”

“Life has always been difficult for me, Sister.”

Sister Tania resisted saying anything. A week earlier, her niece, a singer who enjoyed a modicum of fame in Jakarta, had come to Bacau with a photographer to take photographs of her in her hometown. Her niece was the same age as Junior. But what a difference there was. Her niece was exotic perfume, studded jeans, and flaming red lipstick. When Sister Tania introduced Junior to her, he could only stand with his mouth hanging open, as if having just seen an angel descended from heaven.

“She might be pretty but that’s no reason for wanting to go to the Most Beautiful Land,” Sister Tania chuckled to herself but was reluctant to voice such a remark to Junior.

“Your niece, Sister... What’s her name?”

“It’s Ari. Why?”

“That’s a pretty name, like an angel’s. Are all girls from Jakarta like angels?”

“You should see for yourself, Junior. You could come with me to Jakarta. I could take you to see the sites and the shopping malls.”

But twilight was gone and now that it was truly and insistently dark, Sister Tania felt embarrassed to continue her daydreaming. There Junior was, standing beside her, next to the jeep, waiting for her to give him permission to go. Sister Tania peered sharply into the darkness. Junior would have to wait a little while longer; there was something she had to give to him.

Sister Tania turned back to the jeep, reached into the glove compartment, and removed a small package from inside.

“This is yours, Junior,” she said, handing it to him. “I waited until you had grown to give it to you.”

Junior opened the package quickly.

Because of the darkness, Sister Tania shined her flashlight on the object: a shirt embroidered with a message:

My dearest child, I gave you the name Junior because you are a junior for us. Your father’s name was junior, because he, too, was the junior of his own father. Your father died in the struggle when you were still in my womb. I am your mother. If we never meet on this earth, I pray that we will meet in heaven. If you are able to live long enough, Junior, name your own child Junior so that there is always a junior in our struggle.

In the glow of the flashlight, Sister Tania was able to see the flash in Junior’s eyes again.

“It’s time for me to go, Sister.”

Sister Tania gave Junior a hug. Kissed both his cheeks. They parted, saying nothing.

Sister Tania watched as Junior disappeared into the darkness of the field of elephant grass. Before going, she looked again at Mount Legumau, still mysterious and silent.

“Where is your promise,” she whispered to the mountain.

The Head on Da Silva’s Fence

Dear God.... The head was impaled on Da Silva’s fence. Facing the door to his house, eyes wide open, as if ready to stare down anyone who came out from inside. Above the village was a clear full moon, a truly beautiful night. Trumpet shaped pisonia flowers, which only bloomed at night, opened widely as if in welcome.

The wind from the coast blew listlessly yet fast enough to make the leaves in the trees in front of the house rub against each other to produce a crackling sound, or maybe that of a whisper or hiss, a telltale sign that that are some things which can never be condoned. Cruelty. Cruelty. When would all this end?

In the window of the neighbor’s house, two pairs of eyes peered out from behind the curtain. Voices could be heard, speaking slowly in undertone.

“What is that they put on top of the fence?”

“It looks like.... It looks like a head.”

“Yes, it does look like a head.”

“Whose?”

“Can’t tell for sure from here, but I think I know. Look at the ribbon.”

“Let’s see.”

Two shadows emerged from the neighbor’s house. With the lights inside the house already dimmed, their movement would not have been visible from outside but the two figures apparently felt the need to move through the house stealthily, before finally opening the door slowly.

“Careful that is doesn’t creak.”

The door opened without a sound. But a moment later was closed again. And inside the house, one could hear the sound of a body drop to the floor behind the door.

“Shhh.... Don’t make a sound.”

Yet there was the sound of heavy breathing. And in the dark, the only thing visible was a pair of fright-filled eyes.

“I don’t believe it...”

“I don’t either.”

“It’s Rosalina!”

“My God. Rosalina!”

Now two pairs of fright-filled eyes stared through the darkness.

“Rosalina.... Why did they kill Rosalina?”

“Why did they cut off her head?”

“And stick on the fence in front of her father’s house?”

A cluster of clouds closed over the moon, instantly turning the night pitch black.

“Should we remove it?”

“How? Why?”

“Poor Da Silva.”

“What do you mean?”

“What will happen when he sees it? Rosalina was his only daughter.”

A heaving sigh.

“What? Are you afraid?”

“It’s past curfew.”

“Yes, I know.”

“I don’t want to end up like Pereira—stomped on in the back of a truck and having my head split open with a rifle butt.”

Another deep sigh. The night now seemed so silent and still. The only sound, the whispering wind, as if bearing bad news from a distant land. Eyes again appeared from behind the door, which

was now slightly ajar, maybe just an inch but not much more. And not even two pairs of eyes this time, just the eyes on the one side of the faces that pressed themselves against the slit in the door.

The clouds that covered the moon moved aside somewhat, and a silvery light filled the sky and washed down and over the head impaled on Da Silva’s fence.

Its eyes were open, as if saying something. (While it’s easy to understand the meaning of a look in the eyes of a living person, how is one to ascertain the meaning of a look in the eyes of a dead person?) Were those eyes emanating a message from this world or that of the dead? Were they able to speak of what had happened to their owner?

“That look in her eyes.... It’s like she recognizes me.”

The sound of a truck was heard.

“Shhh.... They’re coming this way.”

The door quickly closed. From inside the back of the truck came the ray of a flashlight shining for a moment on the head on Da Silva’s fence. But then the truck passed and the night was still once more.

Smoke from the truck’s tailpipe was still visible when the door to the neighbor’s house opened again. Yet again, two pairs of eyes stared at the head on Da Silva’s fence.

Hair which had earlier covered the head’s forehead had been brushed back by the wind. The hair, long, loose, and wavy, with a reddish tint, dangled in the night. The end of the ribbon braided into the hair fluttered in the wind.

The spikes on the top of the fence were not especially sharp yet the head was perfectly upright as if having been implanted on the spikes with great force so that it could not be easily removed. Blood still oozed from the jagged base of the neck where it had been roughly hacked, trickling down the fence poles, and dripping onto the ground. Ants had discovered the stream and begun to

climb the fence towards its source. Momentarily, a green padi bug alighted on the nose of the head, but then took off in flight again. A poisonous tree toad hopped onto the crown of the head and pissed on the head before hopping off and disappearing.

The door was shut again. Stifled crying could be heard.

“Shhh.... Stop. You must be strong.”

“But why Rosalina? Why did it have to be Rosalina?”

“Shhh.... You’re not the only one who feels the pain. All of us have been trod on our entire lives. Imagine what Da Silva feels.”

“For what Da Silva’s done, he might deserve the consequences, but not Rosalina. She didn’t know anything...”

Momentarily, the crying grew louder but then was stifled again. In the dark, the body of the person crying heaved as if unable to withstand the waves of sadness erupting from her chest.

The other person moved about, looking for a tissue.

“Here!”

Then came the sound of clearing a snot-filled nose. And thereafter, the sound of a fence-gate opening.

“Shhh!”

The two people again peered through the crack in the door.

“It’s Da Silva!”

The man named Da Silva was on foot. With a folder in the one hand, he looked neither right nor left and walked straight to the door of the house. At first, he rapped on the door. No answer. He rapped again, as if his rap were a code. Still no answer, he twisted the doorknob and found that the door was unlocked. He quickly entered and closed the door behind him.

The night was very silent. The two pairs of ears that were listening next door could hear Da Silva’s cries.

“Rosalina! Rosalina! Where are you? Why didn’t you lock the door?”

The two people were shocked.

“He doesn’t know yet!”

“He didn’t see!”

The moon was covered by clouds again. The wind died. The eyes of the head implanted on the fence still stared in the direction of the house, as if looking at the person who had called out her name. Might she be able to hear? Did her ears prick up with the sound of her name?

The sound of a thunder clap. A flash of lightning. And then it began to rain, very hard. A sudden wind drove the rain, causing it to pound on window panes and pull at tree branches. Very soon, the earth was wet and the head on the fence was drenched. Rain matted the hair, washed the face, and dripped from the half open mouth. The eyes remained open. Every time lightning illuminated the scene, it was as if the flash had come from the eyes of the head, as if the head were wanting to speak.

Most of the ants that covered the fence posts fled down the posts along with the blood that had become uncongealed and was flowing faster with the rain. The more tenacious ones raced upwards. Some clung to the flap of skin at the neck’s base. Others ran into the ears of the head to wait out the rain there. Other slipped inside the hair. Even some of those that had been washed to the ground turned and fought their way back towards the head, trying to reach it as best they could.

Inside the house, Da Silva laid down his weary body on the bed. He didn’t first take off his clothes. He didn’t remove his shoes. He shut his eyes and listened to the clatter of the rain and the crying of the wind.

Falling asleep, Da Silva began to dream. He saw his late wife walking towards him calmly in the rain. She was dressed in a finely woven traditional cloth, the same one she had worn at their wedding, but she was drenched with rain. She came towards him

slowly but with a light step. She waved at him and then turned to go.

“Maria!” Da Silva called out.

Maria kept on walking away.

Between flashes of lightning, Da Silva could see bullet holes in his wife’s back, from which blood gushed.

From the darkness into which Maria had disappeared, their three sons now emerged. Da Silva smiled in his sleep. How happy they looked to be carrying rifles and wearing a necklace of bullets. They were laughing as they waved their hands in the falling rain.

“Rui!”

“Eusebio!”

“Manuel!”

But then their bodies suddenly broke apart and fall in pieces on the ground.

Da Silva woke with a start. How very much he wanted to forget how much he had lost and sacrificed in the struggle for freedom.

Outside it was still raining. Falling hard. A frightening sound.

Where had Rosalina gone, Da Silva wondered. Was she still next door, at the neighbors?

“I hope she’s now with Alfonso, that collaborator!” he grumbled to himself.

Next door, Alfonso was crying for Rosalina, though his cries were covered by the sound of the rain.

“Stop, Alfonso, we will avenge Rosalina’s death.”

“How are we going to do that? Even those still in arms are coming down from the mountains to surrender. We can’t do anything.”

“There is always a way to get back. Always.”

“But none of that will bring Rosalina back.”

In the dark house, the only sound was that of heavy breathing and stifled crying, a forlorn attempt to suppress the feeling of

overwhelming sadness. But sadness was a luxury for which there was no time. And now that the rain had let up, the air was filled with mist.

The two people who were swallowed in sadness suddenly became conscious again when hearing the sound of a truck.

“They’ve stopped.”

Alfonso looked outside as well.

Several soldiers jumped down from the back of the truck. They were dressed in dark uniforms. Their talk was audible.

“Do you think he’s home?”

“He’s home. He just didn’t see is all. The head is still there.”

One of them poked the head with the tip of his rifle causing the head to change position.

“Make him see it.”

Stifled laughter.

“Let the fucker die. Let him know how it feels!”

“The rest of you get back on the truck.”

All but one of the soldiers got back on the truck. The one still on the ground, bowed down searching for something with his flashlight.

“Is he in there?”

“He’s in there alright!”

The soldier on the ground picked up a rock and then threw it at the door of Da Silva’s house. There was a loud bang as it hit hard. But there was no immediate reaction from within the house. The soldier jumped on the truck, and the truck raced off with a roar.

In the house next door, the two people who were peering out heard the sound of laughter from soldiers in the military truck.

Da Silva also heard the sound of their laughter as he dragged his feet toward the door. Even the mist had vanished. Drops of water dripped from the ends of banana leaves. And Da Silva opened the door.

A Tree Outside the Village

There were many things that Adelino still remembered about Uncle Alfonso and one thing had to do with that tree. “That tree is an eyewitness to our village’s history,” Uncle Alfonso often said.

The tree stood tall and erect, just outside the village, off to the side of the road. As it was the only one like it around, it had become a kind of signpost for the village which was otherwise surrounded by fields of corn and grass and dry and stony hills. From whatever angle you viewed the village—from the corn fields or from the hills around—the tree was a constant fixture in the scene. The tree was an old one; no one really knew how old but when the oldest person in the village was born the tree had already been there.

“When you see a big tree, standing tall, with its limbs and branches reaching for the sky, it means that you’ve reached the village,” people from the neighboring village would say when giving directions.

Indeed, the tree was an inseparable part of village life. Parties were held beneath it. Tables and chairs would be carted there, along with guitars and beverages, in preparation for a lively and festive dance party. The tree’s foliage was so thick, it created a welcome place of shade that was a luxury in an area that was otherwise so sun-bleached and arid. Young men played guitars, women sang, and children played tag beneath the tree.

“I’ll wait for you beneath the tree....” Such was the common promise of young courting couples. And when a person was waiting

there, with his or her bicycle leaning against the tree’s trunk, passersby on the dusty dirt road with game cocks under their arms, would refrain from asking who the person was waiting for. But when the person for whom the other was waiting arrived, there beneath the tree, the couple would then set off together towards one of grottoes dedicated to Santa Maria in the stony hills.

That tree, that big tall tree, was the place where horsemen would take a rest, all the while fanning themselves with their woven pandanus hats, until suddenly becoming aware.

“It’s nice here beneath this tree.”

And then, instead of just sitting, they would fall back on the soft grass or lean against the trunk of the tree, lowering the brim of their hats over their eyes, and immediately prepare to sleep.

When asleep they would dream. Truly dream. The tree became very important for those that needed to dream. Many people came to the tree in the afternoon when the sun was at its hottest just to enjoy the coolness there, so that they could sleep and dream.

It had been such a long time now that people in the village had been unable to sleep calmly and let themselves wile away their time dreaming at night.

Adelino looked down at the tree from where he was on the hill. He was twelve years old now and liked to go off by himself.

“Don’t go too far, Adelino,” his mother would always say.

“I’m just going to the river.”

“Why are you always going to the river?”

Adelino never answered. He’d just set off and walk away. His mother wouldn’t persist in questioning him either. Adelino didn’t have words to describe how much he loved the river, how he liked to hear the rippling of the water as it hit the stones. The river was so shallow that all the stones that covered the riverbed were visible and Adelino would hopscotch from one stone to another, would daydream by himself on one of the larger stones, dip his

feet into the water, watch how his feet became clean, and felt how the coolness of the river's water was able to cool his heart as well. Adelino didn't know how to explain to his mother that to his ears the rippling of the water seems like whispering in his ears, like words, even though it was not clear what sentences they formed, but Adelino was sure that they were happy.

For a child who was almost always alone, what was more meaningful than to be able to converse with the river, the wind, the leaves, the crickets/grasshoppers, and butterflies? There were no books in the village, not even any paper. There was no electricity. Nothing. Sometimes there wasn't even drinking water to be had. For Adelino, helping himself to the clear river water, was normal. He had never fallen ill because of it.

But today, Adelino hadn't gone to the river. He had gone up into the hills, and from above looked at the tree by the side of the road. It had been a long time since he had approached the tree, even though he very much longed to do so. He knew that everyone in the village was too frightened to approach the tree, even though they wanted to. There had been no commitment made, no single conversation about that tree, but there was now no one who recognized its existence. The tree seemed to have disappeared. It was not the place of pleasure it once had been for the people in the village—as if it weren't there, had never sunk its roots in the soil of this earth.

No longer did people come to sleep and dream in the afternoon, even though it was still difficult to sleep and dream at night. For the past several months, Adelino was constantly woken in the middle of the night by the sound of rapid footsteps, heavy breathing, and gunshots. Sometimes he'd hear a scream, a person crying out in pain, or the voice of someone rapidly whispering an order, mixed with fear. Those sounds were like a passing wave. Silence thereafter.

But leaving behind a tension that was suffocating. From behind the wooden planks of the wall, Adelino gradually was able to make out the meaning of the sounds. He was able to distinguish a crouched movement, bodies hugging the wall, moving from one house to another. Once, he had tried to peek out, but his mother had quickly pulled him back inside and tucked his head beneath her armpit.

From there in her armpit Adelino was still able to hear. Finally, he was able to know/recognize the nature of the sounds.

“Are those the people (*gerombolan*) that Uncle Alfonso is talking about?” he wondered silently, while holding his breath because of the smell of his mother's armpit. From the conversations of Uncle Alfonso and the other men in the village, Adelino had often heard about an armed band of men that hid up in the hills.

They'd come down from the hills to the village when they no longer had food, or would stop a bus on the road near the tree, jump out at it from behind the fields of corn. They would steal the passengers' belongings and then disappear.

But then sometimes it was not the sounds of that band he heard. Other times he'd hear voices that were not crouching yet still very cautious. Voices that were more unified, more uniform, and moved by clear orders. Sometimes he would hear the sound of an instrument giving orders from behind the wooden planks. Like a harsh and crackling sound to his ears.

“Wouldn't it be easy to hear them when they speak like that?” Adelino wondered when knowing that at that same time there were people from the other band near the house as well. Sometimes he'd heard the sound of gunshots very close to the house, and then the sound of the voices moving off, and afterwards the sound of more gunshots, this time in the distance. And then the next morning he would see army trucks outside the village. Some of the soldiers lying beneath the trees. Apparently, even for soldiers, to sleep and to dream was a pleasant thing/luxury.

"I'm damned either way," he once heard Uncle Alfonso say to his mother. "The army think I'm working with the *gerombolan* and the *gerombolan* think I'm working with the army."

"So what's your attitude?"

"For me, the important thing is that the village is safe. There are too many people killing each other."

"But why do so many people seem to be unafraid to die?"

Adelino heard Uncle Alfonso take a deep breath. "That surprises me too, how does belief make a person unafraid to die?"

Adelino never heard Uncle Alfonso grumble or complain, something everyone else in the village did. A son had been kidnapped, a brother beaten, a sister raped or the speaker might have been slapped about or burnt by cigarette butts.

"They think everyone is part of the *gerombolan*," Uncle Alfonso said.

"Did you explain that many people in this village died during the civil war on the opposite side of the *gerombolan*?"

"I did."

"And?"

Once again Adelino heard Uncle Alfonso take a deep breath and then sigh. This time no answer. Adelino looked up to Uncle Alfonso who had taught him how to read the movement of the river, the movement of the clouds as they clustered overhead in the sky, and the way to understand the morning light so that, even though he had never been to school, he didn't feel himself to be stupid.

"Was Papa like Uncle Alfonso, Mama?"

Hearing her son ask a question like that, Dolorosa, Adelino's mother, would pause. She always said that Carlos, Adelino's father, had gone far away and she didn't know when he would be back—even though the truth was that he had been shot and killed in the civil war that Alfonso had mentioned. But she couldn't say that

Carlos liked to slap her and in that respect was very different from Uncle Alfonso.

"Your papa is like the other men in this village, Adelino."

"Then he's not like Uncle Alfonso," Adelino said to himself. And he continued to admire Uncle Alfonso who had showed him how to interpret the movement of the stars in the night sky.

"Adelino!"

"Yes, Mama?"

"Don't go beyond the village gates!"

"Yeah, yeah..."

In fact a fire had broken out in the corn field outside the village in the very middle of the day. The *gerombolan* had attacked an army patrol and killed all of them, stolen their weapons, taken their uniforms, shoes and even their socks so that when they were found the soldiers who had been killed were wearing nothing but their underwear, scattered on the road outside the village.

After that incident there had been a large scale military operation. The *gerombolan* disappeared. At night Adelino could hear doors of houses being kicked in and their inhabitants removed from the house by force. Some of them never came back. Some came back with faces no one recognized for them having been beaten almost to death. Uncle Alfonso was among those who never came back.

All that had happened a long time ago but fear still had a stranglehold on the village. Adelino continued sitting up on the hill, watching the tall tree grow dark in the twilight. Adelino had no place to play anymore. The river he loved had become a frightening place ever since it became a place where corpses were disposed. Even the goats were afraid to go outside the village. It had been in that towering tree one morning a villager had found Uncle Alfonso, dead from hanging, his corpse swinging in the wind.

It was dark when Dolorosa found her way to the mountainside. Tears immediately welled in her eyes when hearing the sound of

Adelino crying as he hid his face behind her legs. Dolorosa had made a promise to herself: she would reveal everything. She would say that Carlos had always tortured her and that Uncle Alfonso was Adelino's real father.

Author's Introduction to the Original Indonesian Edition

On Tuesday January 14, 1992 I had an experience that made the magazine *Jakarta Jakarta* (JJ) assume some importance. Three people, Waskito Trisnoadi, Usep Hermawan, and I, were summoned before the chief executives of the company we worked for, in connection with our managerial positions with JJ: myself and Waskito as Managing Editors and Usep as Internal News Editor. The invitation was conveyed by phone on the Monday, to come the following day at noon.

When we entered the room normally used for meetings, on the fifth floor of a building located five minutes' walk from the editorial staff office of JJ, we were immediately invited to eat a pre-packed lunch. In the room were the senior executives of our company, one that publishes a number of tabloids and magazines, and occasionally some serial comic books. While we were eating, nothing was said about the purpose of the meeting. After lunch the following announcement was made to us: "As a consequence of the reporting of the Dili case, those considered responsible are to be transferred to the tabloid *Citra*."

Frankly, my heart was racing, but I didn't say anything. I only knew that my two colleagues had worked hard and with full dedication. I myself had been involved with JJ since its inception. So clearly this wasn't good news—although, at least for me, it turned out to be fortunate. I just thought mockingly, so this is how it's done. They feed you, then they fire you.

What had we done wrong? What were we being held responsible for?

In JJ no. 282 published November 23-29, 1991, we carried an editorial report, “Dili: Video Sensation”. This report was divided into five sections: Dili, Provocation and Videotape; Demonstration and Arrest; The Commission and Objectivity; The People of Dili Like Dancing; East Timor: Developing an Understanding. Of course, this was JJ’s report on what was known as the November 12 Dili Incident. Because our news report was rather late after the event, we “hung” the story on other material, that is, the broadcast of a video recording of the incident that was shown on foreign TV, and a demonstration by a number of East Timorese in front of the Hotel Indonesia on Tuesday November 1,9 1991.

The story was late but, if I’m not mistaken, at the time JJ was the first to come out with a story that was not the press release version issued by the government. We intended to report the contents of the video: that is, how the incident took place and what the situation was like when recorded by the camera. Clearly we were in a difficult position, because the assumption in Indonesia is that the media should naturally side with the government. On the other hand, as a magazine with an orientation towards current news stories, our job was to get as much information as possible, then publish it, no matter from where the information was obtained. The problem was we had no criteria for measuring what was sensitive and what was not, because the other two news magazines of the time, *Tempo* and *Editor*, weren’t yet out that week. That’s the way the Indonesian press gauges the limits of how far it can go. If the media that have already published a story don’t get a warning, those that follow them dare to go one line further.

In such a situation, I, who managed JJ on a day-today basis, made the following judgment: complete information had to be published, but the safety of the magazine had always to be

guaranteed. I didn’t want to take any risks. So the contents of the video recording were described in detail, but the video itself we called “an instrument of provocation”. Revealing the contents of the video was our job, in order to disseminate information as recorded by the camera, while the term “provocation” was used to clarify JJ’s position, which was not anti-government. We did the same sort of thing in the story about the demonstration of East Timorese students outside the Hotel Indonesia. In the caption for the photo that was used as the cover for the magazine, they were called “certain persons”, meaning it wasn’t certain that they were representing the majority of the East Timorese people. In this way we could publish their statements openly and at the same time we weren’t in the position of opposing the government. The Indonesian press often plays games like this with regard to sensitive news stories. There were also three subsequent reports which were additional “buffers” to guarantee our safety, besides, of course, for the sake of as much objectivity as possible.

There were three matters that could be sensitive for JJ: publishing the demonstration in front of the Hotel Indonesia as the cover, publishing pictures of the Dili Incident from the video, and re-writing the video report in detail.

The kind of detail we were giving can be seen from the following:

The next scene on the video was of the pandemonium when the incident was taking place. But in that scene, filmed from a position inside the cemetery, which was surrounded by high walls, there was no sign of Indonesian soldiers shooting. Neither were any demonstrators being shot from the back (contrary to earlier statements by foreign eyewitnesses who said that there were). What could be seen were hundreds of people running all over the place trying to get into the cemetery. At that time the constant sound of shooting and sirens could be heard.

The entrance to the cemetery looked jammed. Some of the demonstrators fell over and blocked the entry of waves of people who were trying to hide among the headstones. Others were hobbling quickly into the cemetery.

The video showed that when the camera was turned on the demonstrators, they shook their fists in the air. The next clip was very provocative: it showed quite a long scene, another close-up, of an East Timorese youth who was seriously wounded in the stomach. He was sprawled on the ground, his whole body spattered with blood, in the arms of another youth of his age, in his twenties. When he moaned and tried to raise his arm, it appeared that it too was shattered. His flesh and blood were dark-colored from a mixture of dust and dirt.

The remaining scenes in the video showed Indonesian soldiers, some in camouflage greens and armed with rifles, and others who looked like anti-riot squads, holding clubs and shields with “police” written on them. They lined up in an orderly way and entered the Santa Cruz cemetery through a gate like the one passed through earlier by the demonstrators who were trying to hide.

The end of the scene showed what was being done by the personnel in the cemetery, who were examining every section. As soon as any demonstrators who were hiding were found, there were scenes of harsh measures being taken to establish control and security.

Stories like that, with all their “refinements”, are very frank by Indonesian standards. Fortunately, JJ was able to negotiate the danger signals safely, but the journalists at JJ thought that we weren’t frank enough, particularly in pinpointing the videotape as a “provocative tool”. But in the rowdy editorial meeting my judgment of wanting to ensure that we would not be closed down was eventually accepted.

So a few weeks passed, and then we decided to send some journalists to Dili. We sent two women journalists who returned to Jakarta close to Christmas, bringing—among other material—reports of interviews with about fifteen eyewitnesses of the incident 12 November 1991. I read the raw reports, and felt something stir in my breast. In the holiday between Christmas and New Year I wrote a collection of poems entitled *Jazz*, among which were the following:

The Trumpet

Dili, 12 November 1991

“I should have played you that night.”

So those who were killed
Could rise from the dead?

“I should have played you that night.”

So corpses buried without headstones
Could push away the earth covering them
And crawl slowly to the governor’s residence?

“I should have played you that night.”

So those who were shot could walk
To the church with bullet-riddled bodies
And pray with blood in their mouths so
There would be no sound
But the sound of hate?

“I should have played you that night

Just play some jazz Wynton
We don’t talk politics when we’re having breakfast

Improvisation for a Funeral Dirge

In the holidays I wrote some poetry
Watered the roses,
Talked to the turtle
Then had a siesta.

In the holidays
I forgot about East Timor
Pretended I wasn't
Sad. Then I dreamed of becoming a general

Apparently the reports had affected me. On January 2 I went into the office, which was empty. Like every weekly magazine during a holiday period, we'd finished two and a half issues concurrently, so that we could take it easy. I came in to finish the remaining half, which were the pages of the *Gong!* column. We arranged the order of Stories from Dili as follows: (1) Mantiri: A Successful General (2) Eyewitness Views of the Tragedy (3) The Mystery of the Phantom with the Curly Hair.

What was important about these stories, especially when compared with reports of the other media? For me what was important was the finding of some testimonies which indicated that the shooting of a number of demonstrators was not just an "incident", that is, an unintentional accident. Of course, neither do I want to say that the shooting was planned. But observe the following quotes which were published in JJ no. 288, January 1992:

When the shooting took place they were divided into two rows: a front row and a back row. The commanding officer fired once in the air as he shouted, "Front row down, back row fire!" The moment the back row fired the front row attacked the demonstrators and stabbed them with their bayonets.

The impression gained at that moment was of cruelty. I saw one man who was possibly only unconscious, his head was still moving. As soon as he was seen by a certain person he was immediately battered with a rock.... Another thing I saw was a man who was still alive, on a truck full of bodies. He was pulled off by a certain person and bashed on the head. Then he was thrown back up on the truck.

It was then that soldiers in full uniform, carrying bayonets, started getting down and checking who was still alive by kicking them. Those who appeared to be still moving and still alive were stabbed with knives.

For me, this data did not show any sign of unintentional behavior at all. It was this matter which for me constituted the value of the story. In considering its publication, I still tried to provide balance and truth. On which side? Look at the following quote, the explanation of the Chair of the Commission of National Investigators, M Djaelini LLB:

Many eyewitnesses who took part in the demonstration were questioned by the Commission. But don't imagine it's the same in East Timor as it is in Java. Because there it's still chaotic. Information is confused and incoherent and sometimes people say anything at all. They look quite straightforward but they're not. In Java, ordinary people can be believed but apparently they can't there. Maybe because it's to do with anti-integration attitudes.

These sentences provided a balance, to which I added still another factor, that is that the Military Honor Council had been formed, apparently on the orders of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, President Soeharto, to the Army Chief-of-Staff on 28 December. Its aim was "to learn a lesson from the experience for the sake of building, especially for the younger generation of

the Armed Forces, in order to prevent any repetition of the 12 November incident of last year, in the interests of facing other tasks which require the existence of genuine truth”.

In quoting this I wanted to place the 12 November Dili Incident as something which the government did not officially endorse and that it recognized as a mistake. This was an honorable admission. So, I thought, if after all a lot of the information revealed by JJ pointed to that mistake, then that was only confirmation of something which had already been found to be the truth. Among other things, it turned out that the military authorities in the relevant area were replaced—that is, it was considered that they had to take responsibility for something that was a mistake.

So the no. 288 edition of JJ went on the market, with a picture of Okky Asokawati, the model, on the cover. In some leisure time after the deadline I wrote another poem:

Santa Cruz

The asphalt was red, like blood
 “That’s syrup,” father said,
 But anxiously mother looked for me.
 I didn’t know where the bullets struck me.

In those days JJ came out on a Thursday. On the Saturday we were summoned by the Armed Forces Information Centre of Defense and Security at Cilangkap. I should have gone by myself, but because I didn’t know the way, I asked Waskito to come with me. After waiting for several hours, we were seen by an officer with the rank of colonel. He was a kindly Javanese man, but he seemed to be forcing himself to be very angry. He was holding the relevant edition of JJ, which had apparently been underlined with a yellow highlighter.

Maybe because this officer was a good man at heart, even though he was snapping at us, his anger wasn’t convincing so the thumping of my heart quickly subsided. Moreover the charges were amusing; it seemed he’d been instructed to find out whether the editor of JJ had any hidden agenda in publishing the story. He indicated the following extracts:

On November 12 I arrived after the shooting was finished. I only saw a fire brigade truck cleaning the blood off the road. The water on the road had turned red, it was very frightening.

There were many other victims there, blood was everywhere. There were several buckets of water mixed with blood that had been used to wash the dead and wounded. A certain person ordered me and a few other people to drink from the bucket. We were forced to bend over and told to drink straight from it. If we refused we were struck with guns. All the victims were still naked, including three wounded females...

According to the officer, the words “there was blood everywhere” was dramatizing. He didn’t say the word “dramatizing” but read the quote again in a dramatic style. So, who was being dramatic? Then he indicated another extract:

..... people who lived at the back of Santa Cruz, who didn’t know anything, were also arrested. Even a madman was arrested. Yes, he was in it. He he he...

With this quote, JJ was considered to have discredited the military, because it was like accusing them of being too stupid, that is of being unable to distinguish between a demonstrator and a man who was mentally ill. But apparently it was this extract that was most upsetting:

I was stripped naked then beaten with wood. Then a “certain person” took a ballpoint pen from my shirt and inserted it in my penis. I saw a friend beside me stabbed in the head with a knife.

After that questions were shouted at me. “Where is your Nationalism? Are you a human rights activist or what?” Then I was also declared to be a non-Pancasilaist (Pancasila is the five basic principles of the Republic of Indonesia) and JJ’s journalism to be non-Pancasila journalism. I replied that revealing information like that would give the impression that openness existed, which would give the government and the Indonesian press a good name in the international world, because we were not trying to cover up the facts. Moreover, I added, President Soeharto himself had replaced the military officers in the area, which was strong evidence that what took place was a mistake. The response to my opinion was: “That’s through the eyes of the foreign press isn’t it? You must see it through our eyes.” Yes but who are we? Aren’t there many different opinions among us?

Then he raised one more matter. He passed on a question from his superiors, “Didn’t you understand the statement of the Commander of the Armed Forces at the meeting of 23 December?” In fact there had been a meeting of editors-in-chief there, and I attended it—but the Commander of the Armed Forces did not. It was the Head of the Information Centre of Defense and Security who appealed to the press to write, as usual, with an attitude of guarding national stability. Before that there had actually been a meeting with the Commander of the Armed Forces, General Tri Sutrisno, but as far as I recall, there were no bans. What was said was that the incident was something that was unavoidable, and that the Armed Forces soldiers acted in self defense.

I have forgotten my reply, but the officer told me his superiors’ guess was that perhaps I didn’t understand the appeal. Therefore

my summons was to find out whether the publication of the story by JJ was due to lack of understanding of the appeal, or because there was a hidden agenda. The officer stated that he himself didn’t see any hidden agenda. And there certainly wasn’t one. A few days later, I phoned a captain who had been present and heard the conversation. I asked whether the incident was dangerous for JJ and was told it was just an ordinary reprimand.

Up to that moment, I’d always been prepared to be summoned to the Department of Information at any time. But that summons never came. Instead I was summoned by the company executives the following week.

The company I work for is a leading one in the media industry. Besides newspapers with the biggest circulation and advertising, this group of companies also successfully developed a publishing group of tabloids and magazines. The business of these magazines was not all that noteworthy until the emergence of *Monitor*. That tabloid, headed by Arswendo Atmowiloto, was a success and became market leader of the magazine group. Market leader meant, among other things, if agents weren’t willing to sell magazines or publications that were not in demand, *Monitor* could be used to put pressure on them. So, if they wanted to sell *Monitor* they also had to sell the others. Among those not so popular was JJ. A magazine that besides not being popular was also “dangerous” was indeed very annoying.

In 1990 Arswendo committed a blunder in his illustrious career, when he published a ranking of prominent figures, chosen by readers. *Monitor* was considered to have insulted the Islamic community, because the Prophet Muhammad was ranked number 11, and Arswendo himself was number 10. So *Monitor* was closed down and Arswendo was jailed. This incident gave rise to ill-feeling that smacked of SARA ³⁾ because apart from the fact that Arswendo himself happens to be a Catholic, my company is often assumed to

be a group of Catholic enterprises. The executives and the founders have long tried to eradicate the image of an exclusive group, but the *Monitor* case suggested that this seemed to be in vain.

The situation became more serious when the *Monitor* case was followed by the *Senang* case, just a few weeks later. The weekly magazine *Senang* published pictures of a man who looked like an Arab, which, given the situation at the time, easily invited accusations of being a “picture of the prophet Muhammad”, which once again could be considered as an offensive act. So *Senang*, a unique and also very popular magazine, had an unfortunate fate and was closed down by the company itself.

These incidents resulted in extraordinary self-censorship in my company, particularly in the magazine group, because it was considered that its journalists were “still very stupid” and had no “special sensitivity”, particularly relating to anything SARA, which in this case meant nothing less than danger for the company.

It was purported that these incidents were also very unpleasant for *Kompas*, the largest newspaper, because the actions of Arswendo and “the other stupid journalists” “stuck” to it. Nevertheless, however absurd they were, concerns like these were understandable because it was already common knowledge that the real target was *Kompas*. This wasn’t just because of the accusations smacking of SARA, but—and this made more sense to me—because of business competition, no more and no less. It was clear proof of the fact that the waves of that storm were basically whipped up by the mass media, fellow journalists. The fall of *Monitor* and *Senang* opened up new markets for everyone. *Kompas* could not be beaten business-wise—even though its journalism was nothing special—but if it also fell, a lot of people would cheer. As soon as *Monitor*

3) The acronym “SARA” (from “Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar-golongan”) signifies matters pertaining to ethnic, religious and racial issues.

disappeared, two tabloids, *Bintang* and *Citra*, appeared in the marketplace with logos that purposely resembled *Monitor*’s. *Citra* belonged to the *Kompas* group itself.

In other words, any of the media in the company I worked for were—as we put it—“sitting targets”. All that was needed was one weak spot in order to shoot them down. Supervising every full-stop for the various publications that came out periodically, of course, was very tedious. So a kind of censorship team was formed for the whole magazine group. It so happened that this censorship team was comprised of JJ journalists. The problem was a matter of autonomy. In other media an Editor-in-Chief would be reprimanded by the Department of Information. At our place that wasn’t the case. Those who did the reprimanding were what was called “management”. In fact, this management turned out to be a cause for worry: who had the most authority for a publication? This censorship team could do anything at all for the sake of the security of the relevant media, and could exceed the autonomy of the Editor-in-Chief, despite the fact that reading the text of the entire output of this magazine group, clearly, very quickly led to the need for increasingly strong glasses.

But what was more ridiculous than all this was the criteria for what was called SARA. We never knew what they’d interpret as SARA, so its definition became whatever anyone else might consider as SARA, even if the relevant material itself was not officially regarded to be so. In the case of JJ at the time, the picture of a model wearing a cross around her neck could even be SARA. Well, if we threw out the picture of the cross just because we were frightened other people might think it was SARA, wouldn’t our way of thinking become confused, like someone who was mentally ill? I’m not meaning to joke about all this, because it really happened. To use the terminology of the psychiatrists, we were suffering trauma.

So that it's more credible, I'll give an example. Like all the other publications, at the end of 1990 we presented a kaleidoscope: a series of incidents that had taken place that year. Among those incidents, naturally it was appropriate to include the Arswendo affair. We put in a picture of Arswendo with a short account of the case. The management asked us to remove that section. When I asked about it I was told it was at the request of the chief executive. So I even telephoned him at his home, close to Christmas, on December 23. I managed to convince him that if the magazines in our group removed pictures of Arswendo, it would be the same as someone not admitting to making a mistake and being dishonest. The decision was that the Arswendo story would be permitted to go in JJ's kaleidoscope. But when it came out, the story had mysteriously disappeared. Who had the most authority in this case? Above the editor was the censorship team, above the team was the chief executive. The censorship team removed the picture at the request of the chief executive, yet, even when the editor obtained the agreement of the chief executive to publish it, Arswendo's picture removed itself.

This is all just an illustration to give a picture of the "management of fear" that enveloped the company where I worked, which in turn produced a "journalism of fear". With all that the company was growing at a rapid rate.

A few days after the summons from Cilangkap I was asked to see the management. I was questioned by three senior men of the magazine group, and got the impression that what for me was ridiculous for them was quite frightening. Apparently the Armed Forces summons itself was dramatic enough, something that for me was almost routine. Being summoned to the Department of Information or being phoned by the Information Centre of Defense and Security with all the "bonus" of their great anger, was

part of my daily work. I laughingly told them what I'd experienced, which apparently wasn't funny at all as far as they were concerned.

The basic question they asked was: why did JJ publish an article that was so "vulgar"? The comparison given was, if we wrote a story about a rape, we wouldn't describe the rape itself in minute detail.

Vulgar? I'd better take up the defense on this matter.

I think the Dili Incident was a unique event. We couldn't just write: "A number of soldiers accidentally shot dozens of demonstrators who were running around wildly", or, "bullets fired by a soldier flew through the air and took the life of a demonstrator who immediately collapsed in the gusts of hot wind that blew around the town of Dili."

Writing a news story is not a matter of aesthetics, it is not beauty of language. It's a matter of facts: what actually happened? In the case of the Dili Incident this became more important because it turned out that the Commission of National Investigators was formed to answer the same question: how did it happen? The fact is that those who did not speak to the Commission were prepared to speak to JJ.

This question was the most important one. It could only be answered by revealing the facts in detail, so as not to make a hasty decision about who was right and who was wrong, before knowing the details of what had really happened. That being the case, it was not appropriate to water down the affair, just as it would have been very wrong to dramatize it. Let the facts speak for themselves. If tried to report as comprehensively as possible, without any intention other than for the sake of that comprehensiveness itself. Unfortunately, the incident itself proved to be not just vulgar but also brutal. Does an incident that is vulgar and brutal have to be written about as though it is not vulgar and not brutal? I think that if the Dili Incident gives an impression of vulgarity, that isn't because of the behavior of journalists, but because of

the perpetrators, who shot, stabbed with bayonets, ordered the drinking of blood and so on. It was the task of journalists to rewrite it, based on the reports of the eyewitnesses. The difference between the Dili Incident and criminal incidents was that the Dili Incident had a political dimension, so that the details of the affair explained a certain position. This is what made the details more important than the murder of an ordinary person by another ordinary person, even though perhaps the cruelty was the same.

I think this matter is clear, but I still have another defense in this matter of vulgarity.

We return to January 14, 1992. I had already asked earlier: what did we do wrong? What did we have to be held responsible for? It was mentioned that the three of us were fired from JJ because of “a request by the Armed Forces for re-organization”. Was that true? Only then did I find out that the Head of the Information Centre of Defense and Security had read out the yellow highlighted sections before a session of the Press Council in Palembang on January 10-11, indirectly aiming them of course at our chief executive, who had been present. It was there that the sophisticated word “re-organization” had been pronounced.

Very well, that utterance was sacred. But what was the real opinion of the senior men in the company I worked for who, first and hopefully last, were journalists? In any case, I picked up four key words that seemed to denote our wrong-doings: stupid, vulgar, bad taste, foolish.

At the time I made no comment because as far as I was concerned it was an administrative meeting: there were three people being fired from JJ and that was that. When it was over I didn't actually want to say anything, because I no longer had a job, did I? But I was asked to speak, so I just said, “Why does it have to be three people? Isn't one enough, that is, wouldn't it be better if I, as the

one in charge of JJ, were transferred?” I've forgotten the reply to this question but their logic seemed to be like this: I was in charge, Waskito was the managing editor who also did the re-writing as did Usep Hermawan as editor of stories about internal issues, who also worked on the Dili report.

I wanted to get out of the room quickly but apparently that was not to be, because an hour later the chief executive and other JJ journalists entered. I think this was a tactic to prevent any kind of consolidation taking place in JJ itself, something I wouldn't be part of, even though I felt I could support it. As someone who was *persona non grata* I knew how to conduct myself. The chief executive didn't say much, except to repeat the story of what happened in Palembang, and at that stage I picked up one key phrase, which was that news stories in the JJ style “couldn't be done” in Indonesia. I will examine this matter, together with the four “mistakes” mentioned above, in my own defense.

The term “stupid” was attributed to Assagef, a senior journalist whose skills, as far as I was concerned, left a lot to be desired. But in this case I saw that the person who'd quoted him had only borrowed a name, in order to put forth his own opinion. Fine. I think the term “stupid” was directed at JJ's decision to print the facts about the cruelty, because we didn't understand the consequences, that is, the danger to JJ.

I state now that I did know what I was doing. Firstly, I pursued journalistic achievement, that is, an exclusive story and the courage to reveal sensitive facts. Secondly, I had already calculated that in the international spotlight JJ would not be closed down, although of course there would be a harsh reaction which I realized I would face. Thirdly, it is the obligation—and shrewdness—of a journalist, to be able to state the facts as clearly as possible, at the same time not sacrificing the media he works for.

In the case of the Dili Incident, JJ achieved these three criteria, proving that we were not stupid. Furthermore, if the opposite of the word “stupid” is “clever”, then does cleverness mean having the ability not to tell the truth? From the tone of how the word “stupid” was applied to JJ’s policy, I suppose the implication is that the media who chose not to tell the truth were considered to be clever. I’m not pretending to be naive when I admit that I couldn’t understand what it meant. Perhaps my question was stupid; what religious teaching is there in this world that agrees that cruel slaughter of unarmed civilians by the military, which also means an assault on humanity, is best either not reported or reported in such a way that the cruelty is “not felt”?

The term “vulgar” can be dealt with together with “bad taste”. These terms were used because JJ’s news story could not be criticized as fact. “JJ’s story became a problem precisely because it was the truth,” said one of the senior men, “the problem is the matter of bad taste”. Earlier I thought that term was only a problem of foreign language. Apparently not. I only found out then, because I have no formal training in journalism, that bad taste is a term in journalistic theory for repugnant stories that are best left unpublished, such as a grandfather raping his young grandchild and such like.

Right, if JJ’s story was categorized as bad taste then where did that leave international stories like the massacre of Palestinian civilians by Israeli soldiers, the rape of English nuns by Iraqi soldiers or the behavior of Idi Amin who ate the human organs of a hostage in the hijack at Entebbe airport? All of those stories, no matter how horrifying they were, were considered valid as news in the international newspapers that were not scandal sheets and not specialists in criminality because they had a political dimension. The story of the Dili Incident published by JJ was quoted directly by various international media and news bureaus, including prestigious papers like *The Guardian* (Jan. 16, 1992), and as

a matter of course the terms vulgar and bad taste, that we were accused of, fall down.

One of those senior men, a journalist who was successful in the foreign language newspaper business, said, “It seems that our friends at JJ are foolish.” The context for that sentence was the situation at that time. The Indonesian Armed Forces were very sensitive, not just because of the Dili Incident, but also because the commanding officers who were transferred were basically “good soldiers”. I didn’t quite understand—was he praising the soldiers? I wanted to laugh when I heard that and just for fun I said to myself, can I reply that I’m a good journalist too, which is precisely why I’ve also been transferred?

I’d better respond to this question of “foolish”. I didn’t just go ahead and publish the story because I wanted to do it no matter what. I considered that JJ’s report came from the “same direction” as the government’s actions, that is, considering that the Dili Incident was a mistake, and acknowledging that by transferring two important commanding officers. This was an admission that was not only mature but also honorable. So a story that revealed the facts of that mistake would certainly not result in the magazine being closed down, although there would be some people whose ears would be burning—something we would face. And in fact JJ was not closed down. This was not just a matter of conviction, but also calculation, and my calculation was accurate: the situation did not become a sensation, there was no panic, JJ was not closed down and reactions were able to be handled: meaning we were not foolish, so there! That the viewpoint of one of the powers-that-be, who always considered himself a big-time senior reporter, was different from our viewpoint with regard to the Dili Incident, can’t be helped. There’s a big difference between an attitude of being cautious and one of safety at all costs. I hope this wasn’t because of the difference in our ages, because maybe I’ll be that old one day.

Conclusion: we were not stupid, we were not vulgar, we did not actually have excessive bad taste and we were not foolish. If the facts of history can be used as proof, there have only ever been two groups of this company that have been closed down by the government, *Monitor* and *Kompas* itself. We had released an important and sensitive story but had not been closed down. Who was “stupid” and who was “clever”? Regarding the opinion of the chief executive that stories of that kind “can’t be done” in Indonesia, we proved, with all the risks, that they “can”. Everything went according to calculations except one thing: above us was not the Department of Information but the company. And after realizing the position of the company I was in fact able to accept everything that I experienced. Nevertheless, there was still one thing that I did not understand; the men at the top, who were basically fellow journalists, didn’t fire us in the context of asking for understanding because there were some parties who were very angry, but they were very angry themselves. They considered we had done wrong. Their view was the same as that of ABRI (Indonesian Armed Forces). The difference was that they were angry with us because we’d made them terrified of an even greater power. Imagining that fear, I’m always reminded of a dog whose tail is caught between its legs. The difference with the dog is that it’s frightened because of instinct. My company was frightened because of trauma.

Proof of this opinion that we were guilty could be seen in the attitude of the personnel section. Waskito and Usep were transferred with the status of demotion, that is transferred because they’d done wrong and because of that they were down-graded and demoted to being reporters at the magazine *Tiara*. As a journalist I knew that wasn’t a major problem for them, but what I considered indecent was the concept of demotion that was forced on both of them. A few days later I ran into one of the senior men in the personnel section who stated his opinion that it would be better

if Waskito and Usep were to write a letter voluntarily asking to leave, “so that ABRI thinks it’s their own realization”. I said to him, “Don’t try that on”. In fact, in the daily logbook I read that Usep did make a request for transfer himself, but this, according to him was “in the context of insurance”. Meanwhile Waskito tried very hard to get an official letter about his transfer. In that meeting on January 14, I heard the plans of the company to apologize to the ABRI Information Centre. Once again I was reminded of the dog I mentioned earlier.

So Waskito and Usep were transferred to *Tiara* and new people came in to run JJ. Until they left again, apparently I was still at JJ.

Who actually read the story of the Dili Incident in JJ? I don’t think many people did, and until the following editions came out apparently there was no problem. I think actually the whole thing would have blown over if nothing had happened to us.

Only about two hours after we came down from the fifth floor, Radio Hilversum telephoned me from the Netherlands asking for confirmation. We’d been asked to keep our mouths shut, so that our transfers would be regarded as routine management: a remarkable request. How was it possible that an editor’s office with forty people in it could keep a secret? Moreover, if our names disappeared from the list of editors after that news story, which journalist’s brain would not be thinking? Besides, the sacking of three editors because of a story about the shooting of unarmed people by soldiers was clearly not an internal problem of the company.

Andy Warhol said, “In the future everybody will be famous for fifteen minutes.” I have experienced the truth of the words of that master of Pop Art. Within only twenty-four hours the names of the three of us had been carried in various international news stories. But what was more important, in every one of those stories, JJ’s report of the Dili Incident was requoted with the same detail. Later,

an *Asia Watch* report (Vol.4, no.12, April 27, 1992) even covered it in depth, by quoting JJ's story, which was really "gratifying".

It wasn't till then that I knew there were all kinds of human rights committees in the world, with their own specializations. I once received a copy of a fax which was sent to President Soeharto, if I'm not mistaken, from the Committee for the Protection of Journalists, which is located in New York. It asked about my sacking and the freedom of journalists to work. And this wasn't the only one. All this for me was just confirmation of one thing: we did no wrong. If the idea had been to stop the flow of news about the Dili Incident, I think that decision backfired. The JJ story was quoted and requoted, even including parts I'd censored myself because of SARA elements in it. I don't know who disclosed them.

The "wisdom" and "best choice" proved in fact to have the reverse effect, which it is certain would not have happened if nothing had been done to us. But what's done is done and I never regretted it. Besides which, as a journalist I feel fortunate. Why? Because I feel I carry history in my pocket. I became part, although a small part, of the major story called the Dili Incident, not as a journalist, but as a source of news. I think there isn't one journalist who knows more about what I experienced than I do. Now I reveal it.

That "wise" decision was also proved to be wrong because, of course, it didn't take into account that finally I myself would write about the Dili Incident again, in various forms of short stories. My purpose in re-writing them, was not to pursue literary quality, but to reveal the incident again, as an act of opposition.

What I experienced—not mentioning any particular body—I consider constituted the arrogance of power, which was so unwilling to be criticized even though it was doing wrong. Arrogance is not a sin in itself, the sin lies in sacrificing someone else. But if I am that someone else, then humbly and reluctantly I will oppose it. As they say, "Even a worm that's been trodden on will wriggle, let alone a

human." I hereby want to state that my opposition was not an act of heroism—it was only a natural instinct.

The choice for my opposition fell on sensitive matters, because I thought only in this way could I show how the Dili Incident not only cannot be forgotten—as we forget any news, no matter how important it is, when other big stories come along from day to day—but I would even immortalize it. Because in fact there lies the difference between journalism and literature. I consciously wanted to foil our gagging. I opposed it. This made every second of my life more valuable than before—although my official status was unemployed.

I've already said I had no literary pretensions in the stories in this *Eyewitness* collection. Nevertheless, releasing the Dili Incident theme to various media with far larger circulations than JJ proved to be an "art" in itself. I wanted people to know definitely that the context of my writing was the Dili Incident or the East Timor situation. But at the same time I also had to conceal that fact, so that my stories would escape the self-censorship of the editorial committees of the mass media wherever I sent the stories. So, I could only insert a number of clues for the reader. Firstly, there is the context of the massacre of unarmed people. Secondly, there are names inherited from the Portuguese colonization. Thirdly, where possible I have synchronized the stories.

Did I succeed? I don't know. What I must explain is: apparently I wasn't always aware that I was opposing. For a long time I've been accustomed to saving up ideas floating around in the air to write down as short stories at some time. What I experienced plucked me out of the routine mechanics of producing a magazine. I was thrown more intensely into the world of ideas. Like it or not, I couldn't stop thinking about the people who had been shot, which almost automatically presented all the aspects of ideas for a short

story. In an essay for *Kompas* I wrote, “When journalism is gagged, literature must speak. Because when journalism speaks with the facts, literature speaks with the truth.” In another section I stated, “Covering the facts is a political act, hiding the truth is the most stupid act a human can do on the face of this earth.”

The testimony of the eyewitnesses was muzzled. From that conclusion came the story about an eyewitness who arrived in court without any eyes.

In JJ’s report it was written that the Governor of East Timor, Mario Viegas Carrascalao “received four youths in his office at the end of October, 1991. Two of them had had their ears cut off”. The visual image of that sentence imprinted itself on my brain so that the result was the story “Ears”.

I met several East Timorese activists who told me the history of the province, as they had experienced it. After they left I wrote the story “Manuel”. Its contents are no more and no less than the facts they told me.

I thought a great many people had “disappeared” in the Dili Incident. If the people who disappeared had mothers, how would the mothers feel? I tried to show the mothers’ feelings in the story “Maria” and at the same time commemorate the first anniversary of the incident.

Xanana Gusmao was captured and he was harassed. My ideas about that went on to become the story “Salvador”. Who can suppress ideas? I answered that with “Clandestine”. In “The Rosary”, just to show my opposition, I even included facts that I had already censored myself in the JJ story. I read an Amnesty International report that East Timorese political prisoners had been tortured in various ways, including electric shocks to their genitals, so I wrote “Electricity”. I commemorated the second anniversary of the Dili Incident with the story “The History Lesson”, about a history teacher who brings his pupils to the Santa Cruz cemetery.

Of course I didn’t write the name Santa Cruz. Meanwhile “The Mystery of the Town of Ningi” was written to welcome Christmas, but Christmas in a town like Dili, where the population statistics are different from those of other towns.

“The Flute of Loneliness” is perhaps rather personal. With great difficulty I moved from line to line to calm my emotions at the times when I felt very alone. That story was actually an attempt at sublimation from concrete problems and, as well, a small experiment to achieve poetic quality in a short story.

In fact not all the stories were released easily. There were times when a particular story would wander from one paper or magazine to another, not because—as they said—the aesthetic value was not praiseworthy, but because of what was always termed, “The East Timor problem”. Whenever a story was rejected I really felt the meaning of the difficulty of speaking out. They say that ideas cannot be suppressed, but at least I felt how difficult it was to convey what we think to others, because I couldn’t make speeches on the footpath.

The last episode of the Dili serial in that period was, “The Blood is Red, General”. There I tried to see the Dili Incident through the eyes of an Indonesian soldier, also based on facts from an interview at JJ (“People Think I’m Benny’s Man”, *Jakarta Jakarta* 368, July 14-30, 1993). By this stage I felt I’d become exhausted by the obsession of my opposition. I was frightened of losing integrity, frightened of masquerading as a hero, so I thought I’d finish for the time being, and leave more space for other ideas which for a long time had thrust forward asking to be written.

I wrote twelve stories in two years within the context of the Dili Incident. I think that the number twelve is “sacred” enough to link it with November 12, 1991. Through writing them I gained an understanding which theoretically is perhaps already a cliché, but which for me gained new meaning: aesthetic achievement

is generated by concrete experience—beauty is achieved not by tinkering with language but by a complete struggle with life.

In the world of art there is a convention: good art explains itself, good art does not need to be explained by its creator. These notes of mine are not intended to explain anything of the short stories in the *Saksi Mata* collection. I am only presenting a context, which can be used or not. Or maybe this can be considered as a “short story” itself. The stories are still responsible for themselves as stories. The context of their birth which I note here will neither enhance nor detract from their worth as short stories. What I mean is, these stories don’t need to be connected to the Dili Incident—they are open to be read just as stories, if in fact anyone wants to.

At the end of 1993 I was asked to run JJ again and I consciously changed it into a magazine purely for entertainment, something I’d been going to do on January 14, 1992. So JJ changed. I don’t think there is any great problem with this. It was part of the consequences of following business dynamics. Does this also mean that I’ve changed? I hope not. Although even if things do change there is nothing wrong with that. Only I think that a magazine that is alive is better than one that is dead. JJ does not need to take unnecessary risks. If we have idealism, which is full of risks, then it’s better we accept responsibility ourselves, without involving others—especially not using other people’s money.

I have written what I feel I had to write. I am really only a small journalist from an entertainment magazine, but I think the task of all journalists, big and small, is the same: to record. I feel I must be grateful to the situation that has enabled me to do that.

Translated by Jan Lingard

Publication History

The source and initial publication date of the short stories in this collection may be found in the table below.

English Title	Original Title	First Publication
Eyewitness	Saksi Mata	<i>Suara Pembaruan</i> , 1992
Ears	Telinga	<i>Kompas</i> , August 9, 1992
Manuel	Manuel	<i>Kompas</i> , 1992
Maria	Maria	<i>Kompas</i> , November 1, 1992
Salvador	Salvador	<i>Kompas</i> , January 24, 1993
The Rosary	Rosario	<i>Kompas</i> , June 27, 1993
Electricity	Listrik	<i>Matra</i> , March 1994 (and later in <i>Suara Pembaruan</i> , April 1994)
The History Lesson	Pelajaran Sejarah	<i>Republika</i> , December 5, 1993
The Mystery of the Town of Ningi (or The Invisible Christmas)	Misteri Kota Ningi (atawa The Invisible Christmas)	<i>Kompas</i> , 1993
Clandestine	Kiandestin	<i>Republika</i> , 1994
The Blood is Red, General Salazar	Darah itu Merah, Jenderal Salazar	<i>Horison</i> , July 1993 <i>Suara Pembaruan</i> , September 25, 1994
Junior	Junior	<i>Kompas</i> , July 12, 1995
The Head on Da Silva’s Fence	Kepala di Pagar DaSilva	<i>Basis</i> , January-February, 1996
A Tree Outside the Village	Sebatang Pohon di luar Desa	<i>Hidup</i> , December 21, 1997

The first thirteen stories were published as a collection under the title *Saksi Mata* by Yayasan Bentang Budaya, Yogyakarta, in November 1994. These same stories were then translated by Jan Lingard and published in Australia by ETT Imprint in 1995. All sixteen of the stories were published as a collection with other works by the author relating to East Timor in *Trilogi Insiden* (The Incident Trilogy) by Bentang Budaya in 2010. The last three titles on the list were translated by John H McGlynn.

Biographical Information

The author, Seno Gumira Ajidarma was born in Boston in 1958, raised in Yogyakarta, Central Java, and began work as a journalist in 1977. The author of more than thirty books, Seno's work includes most every literary genre: novels, poetry, drama, short stories, essays, and even screenplays. He has received numerous awards for his work and seen several of his books translated into English and other languages. Holding a doctoral degree in Cinematography from the Jakarta Arts Institute, Seno is a lecturer at several prominent universities. Also an avid photographer, he has held several solo exhibitions in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta and other large cities.

The Translators

Jan Lingard is a former lecturer in Indonesian at the University of Sydney. An award-winning translator, she has translated several books of Indonesian short stories including *Diverse Lives* (OUP, Kuala Lumpur) and is the author of *Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia* (Australian Scholarly Publishing (Melbourne, Victoria)).

John H McGlynn, originally from Wisconsin, USA, is a long-term resident of Indonesia, having lived in Jakarta almost continually since 1976. Through the Lontar Foundation, which he established in 1987 with four Indonesian authors, he has edited, overseen the translation of, and published more than 100 titles containing literary work by more than 275 Indonesian authors.

