STOLEN

A journey home in photographs and memories

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Old photos of stolen children brought by family members who are still looking for them. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

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About Asia Justice and Rights
Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) is a non-profit organization based in Jakarta, Indonesia, working to strengthen accountability and respect for human rights in the Asia Pacific region. AJAR focuses its work in countries attempting to build a stable democratic base following prolonged conflict, dictatorships, and authoritarian regimes. AJAR believes that peace and democracy can only be sustained if impunity, corruption, and human rights violations are addressed. AJAR seeks to empower those working to end human rights violations and impunity by increasing the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to be successful. For more information, visit http://asia- ajar.org/.

For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Stolen Child
William Butler Yeats

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Rosita/Rosnaeni reunited with her brother after 38 years. She was taken by a soldier in 1978.
Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

We compiled this photo book to share our story. Between 1975 and 1999 thousands of East Timorese children were forcibly taken from their families and brought to
Indonesia. We were among them. This photo book captures the happy moments of our family reunion visits. From 2013 to 2016, we located 65 survivors throughout Indonesia and helped 30 of them to visit their families in Timor-Leste. But many remain lost. We, the "stolen children" of Timor-Leste, hope that more of us will be found, that we will be able to visit our families easily and often (visa-free and without administrative hurdles), and that we can improve our lives.

With this book we seek to preserve the memory of what happened to us,
We have held on to the happy memories of our childhood for decades—memories of
playing with our siblings, frolicking in nature, singing songs with our friends, and the soothing voices of our parents singing a lullaby. During the dark nights when we were alone, we recalled these happy memories and they became the source of our strength. It took some of us more than thirty years to come home.

Now in adulthood, this photo book provides us with a glimpse of our personal growth as human beings, connecting memories from our past and present, making us whole.

Isabelinha Pinto (Nina)

Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Introduction

Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016

May 2015. I am standing in the sweltering heat of Dili airport. A plane surges through a wall of white cloud, landing unsteadily into the glare of the sun. A loud cheer greets the plane as it touches down. We had asked the families to wait at our office in town, wanting to spare them the burst of an emotional pipe. Instead they came out in force, and provided a rapturous
reception! One family had even hired two trucks to bring their aunties, uncles, nieces, nephews and others to the airport. They shouted with pure joy from the arrival deck.
We were all wearing our hearts on our sleeves that day.

As the door of the plane opened, we waited breathlessly as passengers filed down the steps. Finally, Muhammad (Legibere) emerged from the plane, his arms raised in a double-fisted cheer. Close behind, the rest of the group of stolen children began to emerge. Abdul Rahman (who was born José Soares) appeared, blinking his eyes as if blinded by the reality of his return. Roberto fell to his knees, and made a quick sign of the cross. A young man ran up the stairs and hugged his uncle, Rogerio, whom he was meeting for the first time. Nina ushers them from behind. She is wearing a dainty hat, prepared for the
unforgiving sun. This is her fourth visit home since 2009, but more about her later.

These are some of the stolen children of Timor-Leste, abducted during the Indonesian occupation, many of them abandoned to fend for themselves in an indifferent Indonesia. After months of painstaking effort to overcome red tape, including obtaining passports for people who have had few, if any, proper identity documents for most of their lives, then searching for their Timorese families based on only a sliver of memory about their village or parents, we finally brought these people to Timor-Leste to reunite with their families.

The Stolen Children: What's in a Name?

There is a wide spectrum of experiences of East Timorese children who were separated from their families during the 1975-1999 conflict. Some were separated by accident in the chaos of war, many others were 'adopted' out. AJAR and its partners have chosen to focus on the "stolen children." These are the children (minors) who were removed from Timor-Leste to Indonesia by a public official or with the consent of a public official and without the genuine consent of their families.

The story of the Timorese stolen children is not well known in the world. Mainstream media and popular culture have covered the stories of the Argentinian stolen children, born in custody from mothers who were political detainees and adopted out to military families. We know the story of the Aboriginal stolen generation in Australia, abducted from their families as part of a genocidal plan to destroy a people. International attention continues to be gripped by the plight of the stolen schoolgirls of Chibok, Nigeria and the children abducted to be used as soldiers by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda. Until very recently, the stolen children of Timor have remained hidden in plain sight.

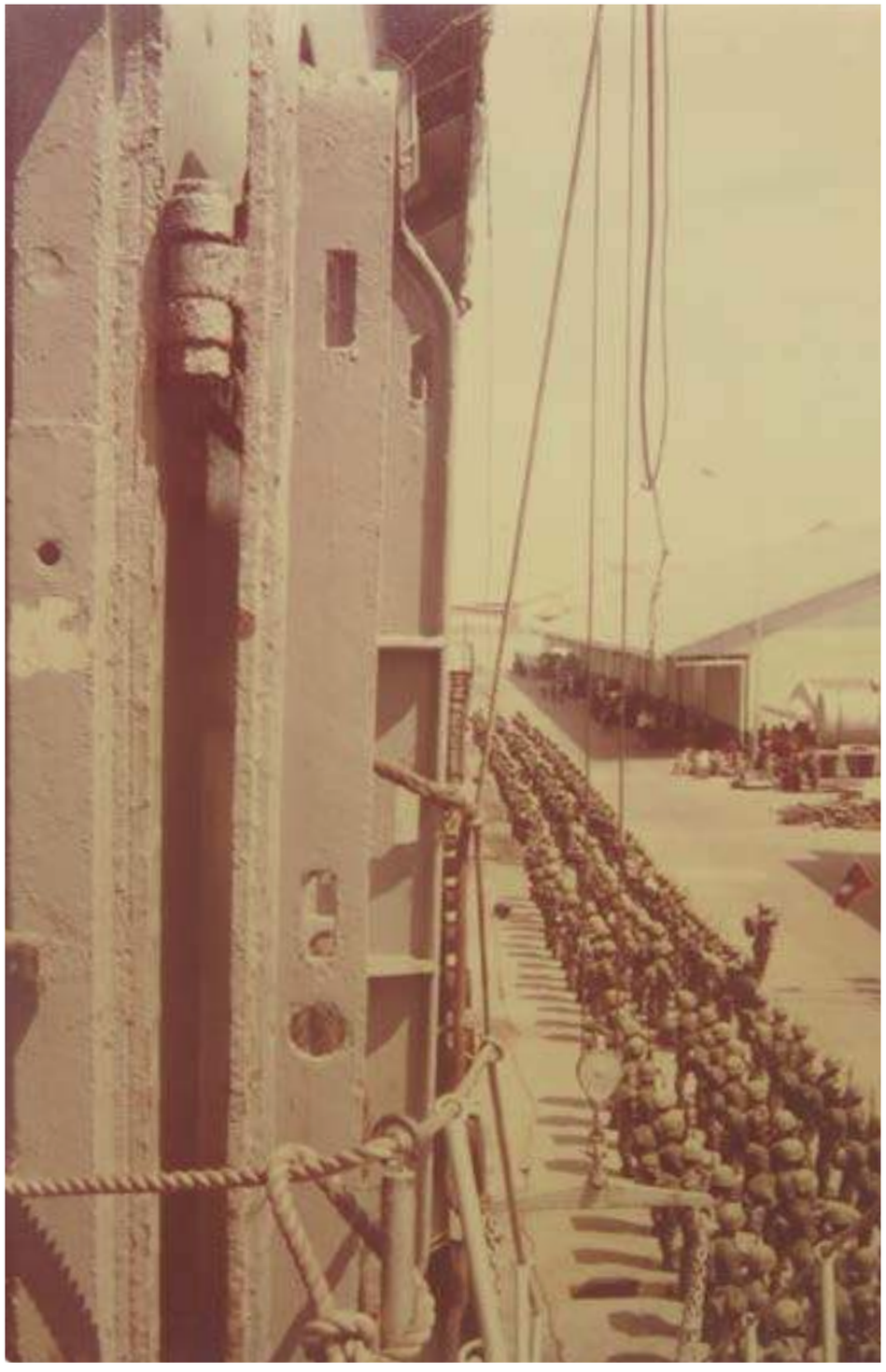
I first met Isabelinha (Nina) in transit, on our way to Dili in April 2013. We sat together on the plane, and during the one and a half hour flight, Nina told me the story of her life. Taken at the age of five, she survived unspeakable abuse by holding on to the memory of her family and her people. Now, Nina is like a Timorese Sojourner Truth, tracking down the stolen children through her dogged determination, together with Victor da Costa, another survivor.

Two years later we are back in Dili. This time with twelve other survivors, taken as children and completely cut off from their families for more than three decades. As we are escorted into a room inside the airport, all eyes are on us. An official takes our Indonesian passports for the
requisite processing. There are journalists, police and immigration officers surrounding us, asking how long we have been away. "Thirty-five years," says Dominggus with a wide smile. The crowd around us repeats the year, "1975, 1975, these are the children taken in 1975."

Abdul's brother, a school teacher who was part of the crowd that cheered the plane's landing, opens the door. Despite efforts to keep us sequestered in a room, he blusters his way in. In a flash he recognizes his brother and they rush to embrace one other. Abdul was taken in 1980 at the age of six by members of Indonesia's Battalion 721. After some years serving as a child military operations assistant or TBO (see Chapter 2), he was transported to Indonesia, along with 20 other children, on an Indonesian Navy ship, hidden inside a wooden crate filled with
ammunition. Abdul was one of the lucky ones as he was taken in by a military family who treated him well.

Abdul's brother won't take no for an answer when we try to explain that the families will meet later at the office of HAK (a human rights NGO) in town. But he insists that his brother must meet the family members waiting on the other side of the wire fence that surrounds the VIP section we've been brought to. As Abdul and his brother walk towards the fence there is an eruption of joy. Abdul's sister pushes her small hands through the fence and strokes his face. Everyone wants to touch him, to feel his skin, his face. Somehow hope has arrived in the form of Abdul/José, the little boy lost who has returned home after 35 years.

Many of the stolen children spoke about being transported on the ship, Kapal Gunung Jati. It is claimed that this was a former Nazi warship docked at the port of Copenhagen at the end of World War II. Confiscated by the British government, it was operated by various companies until purchased by Indonesia in 1962 to transport pilgrims to Mecca. In 1979, it was bought and re-furbished by the Indonesian navy and used to carry soldiers and materiel. And also stolen children.



"I found this photo in the family album of the man who took me. This is the boat that took me from my family when I was five years old. When I see this picture now, I marvel that I survived this ordeal. I think my children now could not survive what I went through." Nina. (Photos: Nina's family archives)

Nina's abductor "teaching" Timorese children in Viqueque. Photo: Nina's family archives, circa 1978.

At the very foundation of all human interaction is the bond secured and nurtured between parent and child. A universal fear is to imagine this bond severed--a child taken from the family hearth, through trickery or force. Some families never recover from such a loss. Timor-Leste is a nation still reeling from the legacy of conflict, including the absence of its stolen children.

During the past few years AJAR has been privileged to work with these abductees (now adults), taken decades ago from the battlefield that was East Timor. Together, we have cobbled a rocky path to find them, hidden in plain sight amongst Indonesia's population of two hundred and forty million. Following up leads, hunches, and snippets of information, traveling to the far corners of Indonesia's multitude of islands, a small team made up of former abductees and human rights workers was able to locate more than seventy of these stolen children. Working with a coalition of organizations from Indonesia and Timor-Leste, we have helped to reunite thirty survivors with their families. This is only a few of the estimated "several thousand" taken, a small dent in a vast landscape of victims. But it is an important start.

We put together this book to amplify the voices of the stolen children who have been reunited with their families. Taken from East Timor between 1975 and 1999, some of them were well cared for, educated and loved by their adoptive families. Some found their way back home, against all odds. But many others were abused or abandoned and forced to fend for themselves. Living on the streets, in institutions, handed from family to family, these children grew up without a helping hand from a loving adult or the support of a family. They are still living with the legacy of the violation they experienced decades ago. In fact, for the majority of them the violation is ongoing. They remain in the state of abduction, cut off from their culture, never fully belonging in Indonesia. Many remain without basic identity documents, living in poverty in the backwaters of progress. For their families back in Timor-Leste, their absence is ever present.

In line with our commitment to empower survivors of human rights violations to be actively engaged in finding solutions to redress the past, AJAR has been working closely with these survivors in the search for their peers. Their enthusiastic involvement has led to a breakthrough in tracing other stolen children in Indonesia, as their specific knowledge of particular neighborhoods and languages helped to open doors.

Can we restore broken childhoods? Other than discovering time travel, we cannot reach back to the past and fill the abducted children's long lonely nights with hugs and kisses, reinvent lost opportunities for learning and protect them from predators. But in the case of the stolen children of Timor-Leste, there is now an opportunity to right a wrong. That a small team of dedicated people can find these abductees, and then also track down their families means that there is still an opportunity. But the remaining time is short.

The Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina pushed for international recognition of 'disappearance' as an on-going violation. They support continued efforts to seek the disappeared because, unlike the finality of death, the disappeared victim and his/her family are left trapped inside the crime, bewildered by the unknown. The crime continues until the whereabouts of the disappeared are known. Similarly, the stolen children of Timor-Leste are trapped inside their abduction until they are reunited with their families. Unfortunately, so much time has passed that they are no longer children, which may mean that they have outgrown UN treaties and guidelines created to enshrine child protection. However, finding the abducted
children must remain a priority, despite the passage of time. Efforts to locate and reunite abductees with their families must be supported by governments and the international community. We must also find a way to help them rebuild their lives in their home of choice, or to weave a life between Indonesia and Timor-Leste with a special status that can facilitate their familial ties in both nations.

This simple photo book cannot possibly contain the multitude of stories we have uncovered, but we have sought to highlight those of the abductees who returned to Timor-Leste to reunite with their families. The first chapter focuses on the story of Nina and the profound impact her abduction had on her and her family. In chapter two, we tell the story of the boys recruited as child soldiers or porters, who participated in our 2015 reunion visit. The third chapter is a reflection of those who have been involved in searching for the stolen children in Indonesia and Timor-Leste. Chapter four contains the stories and photographs of the reunion visits from our first arrival in Dili in 2015 and 2016. The last chapter presents photo essays of the last mile, when the stolen children finally arrive home, and at their homes in Indonesia.

We would like to thank the Herb Feith Foundation for supporting this research and publication. There are thousands more survivors, and even more stories to document. The two national human rights commissions from Indonesia and Timor-Leste, KomnasHAM and the Provedor's Office for Human Rights and Justice (PDHJ), have shown leadership and commitment in supporting these early efforts to reunite the stolen children with their families, working closely with civil society. We are grateful for the camaraderie in the search for the stolen children between AJAR, KontraS, IKOHI and ELSAM in Indonesia, and AJAR Timor-Leste, HAK Association, ACBIT, Red Cross and the National Victims' Association in Timor-Leste. We also thank the photographers, Anne-Cecile Esteve, Michael Morgan and Sigit Pratama whose pictures capture the indescribable emotion of reunion. In addition to this photo book, we have produced a short documentary and a policy brief, both aimed to urge the governments of Indonesia and Timor-Leste to take immediate action to assist the stolen children: to be reunited with their families, and to improve their lives whether in Indonesia or Timor-Leste. The stolen children are a living legacy of our connected histories, a painful past that must be transformed into a hopeful future.

Most of all we wish to thank Isabelinha Pinto, Victor da Costa, and the stolen children themselves, for opening their hearts, and exposing their fears and hopes for the world to see. They continue to be an inspiring example of the resilience of the human spirit. As very young children, they survived abuse and neglect without giving up hope. The seed of love planted by their parents at a very young age grew strong, despite the violence they endured.

Galuh Wandita

AJAR






Above, from left to right: Fadli at the CAVR museum's dark cells; visit with Prime Minister Rui de Araujo; driving home to Viqueque. Below: Manuel/Yaqub embracing a relative; reunion; Gregorio Muslimin finally home. Photos by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

Nina with her cousin and abductors, a few days before she was stolen.
Photo: Isabelinha Pinto's family archives, circa 1978.

Taken

chapter 1

View from the ship that took Nina away from her family in 1979.
Photo from Nina's archives.

Nina's Story

Sitting on a dark brown sofa in her small living room, Nina recounted the moment of her abduction. Although she was only five years old at the time, the events are seared in her mind.

The soldier said, "If we don't take this child, we can kill you all." The soldier didn't have a daughter. He wasn't interested in my younger brothers. He only wanted a girl, that's how I was taken.

It was in 1979. We were brought to Laga. From Laga we were boarded onto a middle sized boat. We had to move to a small canoe to board the bigger boat. I was crying and crying, wanting to go back to my parents. But we were in the middle of the ocean. No one could take me back to land, to Laga.

In order to make me forget about going home that man plunged me into the ocean twice. I fainted. Maybe I was too tired from all that crying. I remember I was just wearing my underwear. I was put on the big boat. The soldiers climbed up the big rope. The name of the boat was Gunung Jati, if I'm not mistaken. They pushed me through a round hole on the side of the boat. When I came to I was at the back of the boat where the soldiers cooked.

"I stayed with that soldier from 1979 to 1984. During that time I was treated very roughly. Sometimes they didn't feed me. I had to work hard, selling ice popsicles. I could only come home when I had sold all the popsicles. I was five years old, but I had to go to school. I had to get up at 3am to wash all the clothes and do all the house chores. My feet were full of cuts from an infection I had. When back from school I had to help again, washing the clothes, washing dishes, helping out with everything. Then I went out to sell popsicles. If they didn't sell, I wasn't allowed to come home. I wasn't allowed to eat. The soldiers near my house, living in the barracks felt sorry for me. "Poor child, she is beaten everyday, scolded everyday, made to work hard everyday. Sometimes their wives felt sorry for me, and secretly gave me food. But I was scared because that soldier didn't allow it. He said, "It's shameful to the neighbours."

Nina was able to maintain some communication with her my family until about 1984. Then she lost contact again after she was moved to Sulawesi, to live with the soldier's sister. She remembers those years fondly. But then she was sent back to Jakarta.

I had a resolve that whatever happens, I have to get an education. I had to pay my own way. The man who took me, he paid my school fees for a while, but his wife was jealous of me. After I graduated from high school I moved away from home.

Nina found employment in a factory owned by a Japanese man. He and his wife took a shine to her, and supported Nina to go to university. One day she visited Yogyakarta with a university friend, and there she met her future husband.

Nina with the soldier who took her and the captain of the ship, and sitting through mass at the chapel. "Looking at these pictures now, I feel so sad. I remember feeling so alone. I cried and cried. I was so afraid. I would just stay quiet when anyone tried to talk to me."

Nina recalled how she wasn't supposed to be in the photograph, they shooed her away. She hid behind the motorbike and got in the picture anyway. "Now it seems funny. I wouldn't let them get the better of me. I always found a way to get back at them. I remember thinking, 'If you can do it, why can't I? I am Timorese.'

By then I had forgotten my family. I only remembered that my father's name was Manuel Pinto and my brother's name, as I recalled, was Fernando. Now, I find out that it is actually not Fernando, but it sounds a bit like it. I have a sister. I remembered her name as Magdalena, but her name is actually Filomena. At the time, I was resigned. If I ever got the chance to meet with a relative, it would be a miracle. Trying to find my family at the time was too difficult, I was busy just trying to survive. But I had a mission. I asked God to find a way, even if I were only to meet one relative.

When I was taken I was a Catholic, but the family who took me made me convert to be a Protestant. But I went back to being a Catholic when I married. According to the man who took me, my mother was named Maria, and she went back to Portugal. "There is no need to look for her," he said. "This is something you do not need to know."

When I was about three months pregnant, I had a feeling that I would meet my family. I prayed constantly and did my rosary every midnight for three years. I never missed a day. I had this hope that I would meet them.

After my second child was born, the glimpse of this day was getting closer. On July 13, 2009, I said to my husband "I want to change my name back to my original name. " My husband said it would be difficult to change all my legal documentation, including our marriage papers. Three days later, I dreamed that our house was hit by a giant tsunami wave from the Timor Sea. In my dream, my family, the four of us, were pulled into the sea. But then I realized that this is like what happened to me when I was a child. I said to my husband, "Do not be afraid. This is the sea at Laga. I was here when I was a child. I was taken from here. "

It turned out that my brothers and cousins were looking for me. I had not seen them for 30 years. Three days later, I received a phone call from my foster brother, the youngest one, who was the most kind to me. He said, "Your brothers are looking for you." I pinched myself, is this true? Oh my God, is this what I get after all the suffering I have experienced?

When I was a child my father once told me, "If you are ever apart from me, look at the sky. If the sky is blue and the breeze is cool, it is a sign that your brothers and sisters miss you. That afternoon I watched the sky behind my house, Dili felt near. Hopefully, I can tell my family that now I've two children. My cousin arrived, and I cried in my room. God, is this true? My son ran into my room saying, "Mother, your brother is here. His face is exactly like yours."

When I saw him, I thought he really looked like me. My cousin, whose name is Boy, went into the house and immediately phoned my mother in Timor. I told them all about my life's journey. My mama told my cousin to check, "Her forehead protrudes and she has a burn mark in her arm." This all matched. My cousin said she looks just like Tia Mea, my sister. Apparently, my aunt, who was ill, got up and said, "She's still alive." In East Timor, your family always set plates for the dead in the family. They thought I was dead, and always prayed for me. I prayed too. I suffered so much since I was little. I always prayed that God has a wonderful plan for me.

When I talked to my mama on the phone, she asked, "Do you still speak Tetun or not? I said "I only remember the phrase 'rou Dili seidauk mai'—the boat from Dili has not arrived." My father used to sing this lullaby, "Imi atu ba nebe..." That's all I know. Well that was it, my mother said. Your name Isabelihna de Jesus Pinto, you are called Nina. Finally I could be reunited with my family.

Before I was separated from my father, he said "You have to be strong, honest and brave." I remembered these words constantly. When the people who took me were cruel to me, I held on to those words. I held on to the truth. I wasn't just plucked from anywhere. I lived under pressure. But I became strong

Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Balbina: A Mother who Never Stopped Searching

I met Nina's mother, Balbina da Costa Soares, in her home in Buikarin, when we brought the three siblings, Juliaon, Joaquim and Aisah, back home in May 2015. I asked her to tell her story. She and her husband never gave up looking for their daughter. Balbina kept the memory of her stolen daughter alive and passed on the story to a nephew who was a university student in Yogyakarta. Her nephew took it up upon himself to seek information about Nina at a military housing complex for the battalion that was in their village. [See Chapter 5: Found.]

Sitting on her balcony, Balbina took a deep breath. Her body stooped just a bit more, as if recounting the years of longing and searching for her daughter still weighed down heavily on her shoulders.

When Nina was a little girl, she loved walking. Every day she and her father walked to the forest to fetch sago, which we pounded to eat. They also picked coconuts for us to eat, and made coconut oil. [When the Indonesian soldiers invaded], we ran to up to a mountain and hid under a big stone near Soibada. We were captured there. I was still carrying Nina's younger sister, she was only two weeks old then.

The soldiers ordered us to build a shack to stay in because it started to rain. We slept in the shack overnight until the following day. We were moved to a place called Tatuar, then to Luca, then to Viqueque. Nina was a little girl but she helped her father to search for food for us. I stayed at home with my baby, Mena. Nina and her father looked for sago, cassava, and banana for us to eat.

One day a soldier, named Mr. S came to our place and said, "I want to take Nina because she is like my own child." He said he had three children but they were all boys. I replied, "Bapak, your place is very far away; we have to cross the ocean then another to get there. I don't agree." At the time, Nina's father was detained in the house where Mr. S was living.

After her father was released, Mr. S would came to our house to take Nina to their post. When I sent her elder and younger sister to follow her, they didn't permit them to enter the house. If we needed Nina, we would send a message and Mr. S would return Nina to us. Sometimes, Nina slept at home and sometimes in their house. It was always like this until they returned home.

A soldier stole Nina from us. My husband reported it to police in several places to bring her back. I told them, "Do not to take and hide away my child. She is not animal that you can just take to put on a barbeque and eat. She is human being." Not long after, a man named J came and told us that he wanted us to sign a letter (to handover Nina.) I wasn't there when the letter was signed.

I felt sad when they left with Nina. Rather than letting my child go alone, we followed her... Then they left by boat. After that, her father and I returned home. However, when we got to the river, I said to her father, "Lets go back." My husband said, "Our child is already in the hand of the military."

As a mother, I felt lost. We never stopped searching for Nina, until her father had passed away in 2008. While he was alive, we sent letters to the military repeatedly. One commander was from Kupang, West Timor. He helped us send a letter. We got an answer that "she's doing fine." We sent another letter but there was never a reply. We asked as many military personnel as we could. One was named T. He was a Catholic. He came to our house and said, "Your child walks with God, she is not dead." Then he said, "Don't think about her too much."

When I first heard her voice again I cried and felt sad. When I finally met her again, I felt sad. But now I am happy.

Now Nina's mother travels to Jakarta to see her daughter once or twice a year. Nina, who is closely involved in efforts to locate and reunite other stolen children, sees her family each time she travels to Timor-Leste.

Nina's story is just one of thousands of similar stories. Lost and afraid, the stolen children held on to the memory of a name, a song, a landscape and hope. Nina, together with other survivors and with the help of human rights groups, continues searching for fellow survivors. Each person found has an amazing story to tell. This book is but a small token of their amazing journey home.

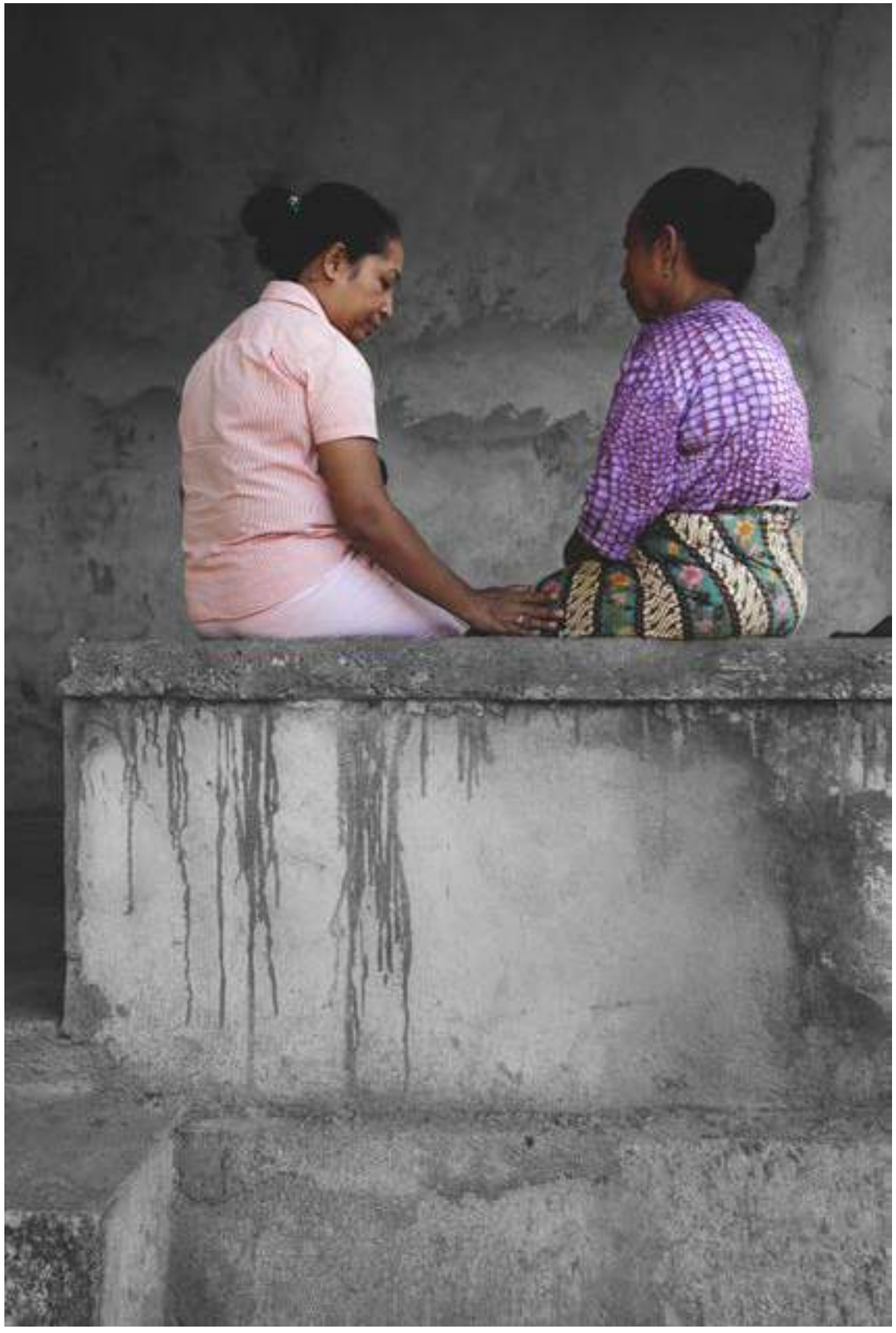


Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

What Two Truth Commissions said about the Stolen Children

The CAVR, an independent truth and reconciliation commission established by the United Nations in 2001, enshrined in Timor-Leste's constitution (2002), and staffed by over 270 Timorese and expert international staff, gathered and analysed over 8,000 personal statements relating to the conflict period 1975-1999. The Commission estimated that several thousand Timorese children were forcibly removed to Indonesia during this period. Although initially individual soldiers were the main perpetrators of the abductions, later military, religious, and charitable organizations were involved.

CAVR found that the transfer of children took place throughout the 24 years of occupation, with peaks and lows reflecting the intensity of the conflict. Three patterns emerge. In the early years of the occupation, individual soldiers took children from the battlefield, initially without consent but later with some form of official paperwork. Later, in the 1980s, religious institutions were involved in taking children for the purpose of educating them. And finally, during the violence that erupted during the referendum, refugee children were separated from their families in the refugee camps in West Timor, Indonesia.

According to the CAVR, "the widespread practice of removing children displayed a mindset that by taking control of Timor-Leste territory, Indonesia also gained unfettered control over its children . . . ABRI members and other individuals with power in Timor-Leste felt that they were entitled to take an East Timorese child home without their parents' permission."

In its recommendation, the CAVR stated that "(m)any East Timorese children were separated from their families during the Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste, including some 4,500 in 1999. Many in the pre-1999 category are now adults and include some who are looking for their families but may not know where they come from." The CAVR called for the governments of Indonesia and Timor-Leste to ensure "(a)ssistance be provided, particularly for those in remote, poor areas, so that parents and adult separated children can trace each other, communicate and meet."

In 2005 a second truth commission was established by the two governments to focus on the violence that took place in 1999. Indonesia and Timor-Leste's Commission for Truth and Friendship (CTF) also recommended that "the governments of Indonesia and Timor-Leste work together to acquire information about the fate of disappeared people and cooperate to gather data and provide information to their families," by establishing a commission for the disappeared.

"The Commission shall also be tasked to identify the whereabouts of all Timor-Leste children who were separated from their parents and to notify their families. The Commission also recommends the continuation of programs previously undertaken to ensure protection of displaced children's rights, primarily for those whose cases are unresolved and those still in the hands of their Indonesian wardens, including the rights of those children to freely access identification and citizenship procedures. Priority must be given to education and scholarship programs for these children who were victims of the violence."

Source: "Long Journey Home: Reuniting East Timor's Stolen Children Living in Indonesia with their Families in Timor-Leste," AJAR, 30 August 2016.

I asked Nina how this experience had affected her and the other "stolen children" whom she has come to know during the past few years.

When we were taken from our families, unceremoniously brought to a strange place, we fell into a deep sadness. It did not seem fair. Family is where we seek shelter, where we can talk about our problems. Our family protects us no matter what. But we were made to forget them. We were made to feel alone, rootless, without our culture.

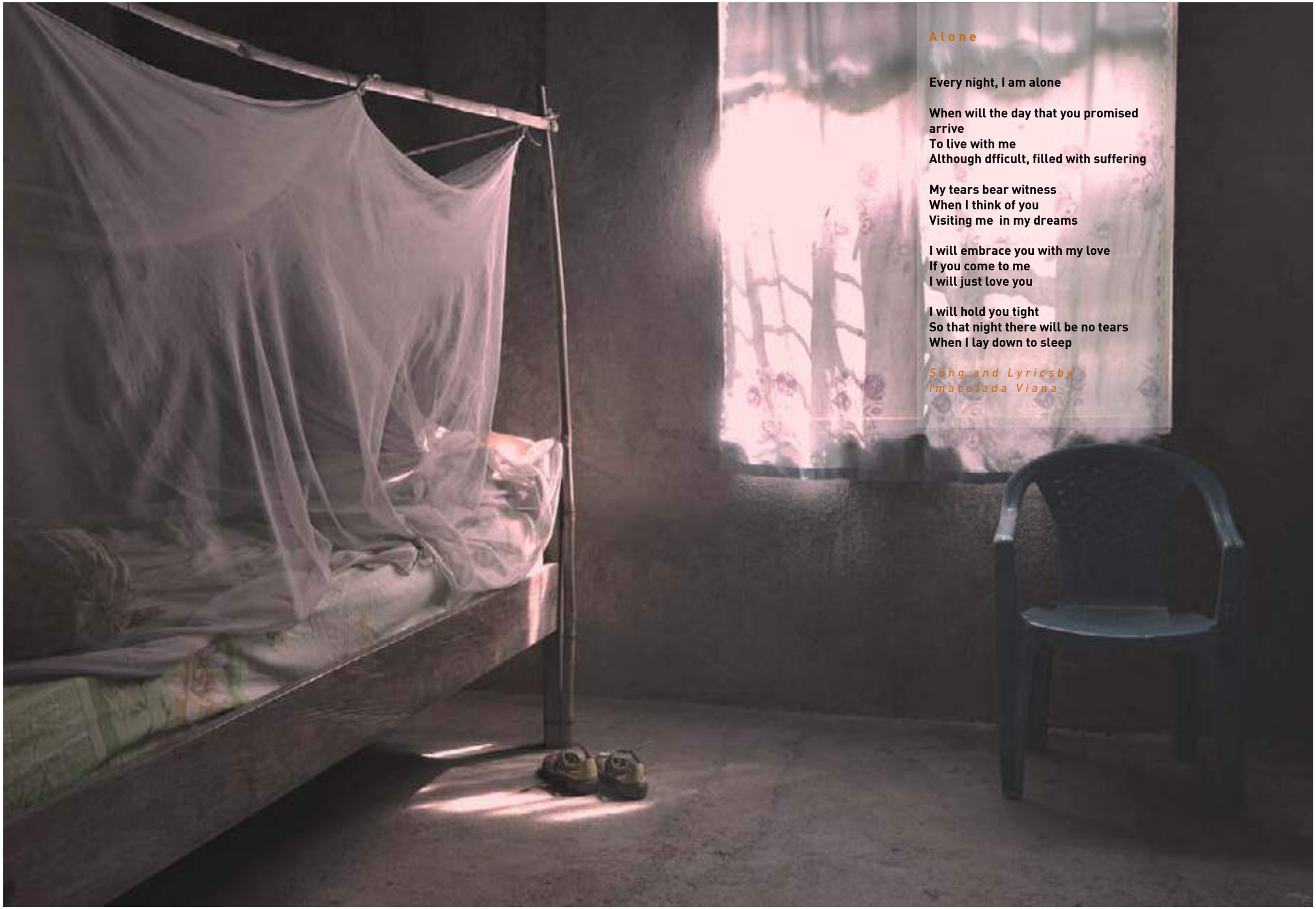
Many of us who were taken from our families changed our religion. We lost our confidence; we did not know how to speak the local language. We became so emotional when we were beaten. Some of us became victims of sexual violence. Others weren't able to go to school.

We are so afraid to speak out about what happened to us, even one or two words. When we were children we experienced intimidation. Some of us have buckled under the stress and pressure, becoming disabled because of the treatment we experienced in our childhood.

Some "stolen children" were luckier as they found a place where there were other Timorese people. Thus, they found a way to have a family, although it was not their biological family. They were able to preserve their memory and to keep their mother tongue.

In the end, it was whether we received an education that most determined our future. Many of the "stolen children" were not able to get an education so are unable to read and write. This makes them even more sad and isolated, without any possibility of improving their lives. Our dream is that our children will have a better future.

Victor da Costa at CAVR entrance. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.



Alone

Every night, I am alone

When will the day that you promised arrive
To live with me
Although dfficult, filled with suffering

My tears bear witness
When I think of you
Visiting me in my dreams

I will embrace you with my love
If you come to me
I will just love you

I will hold you tight
So that night there will be no tears
When I lay down to sleep

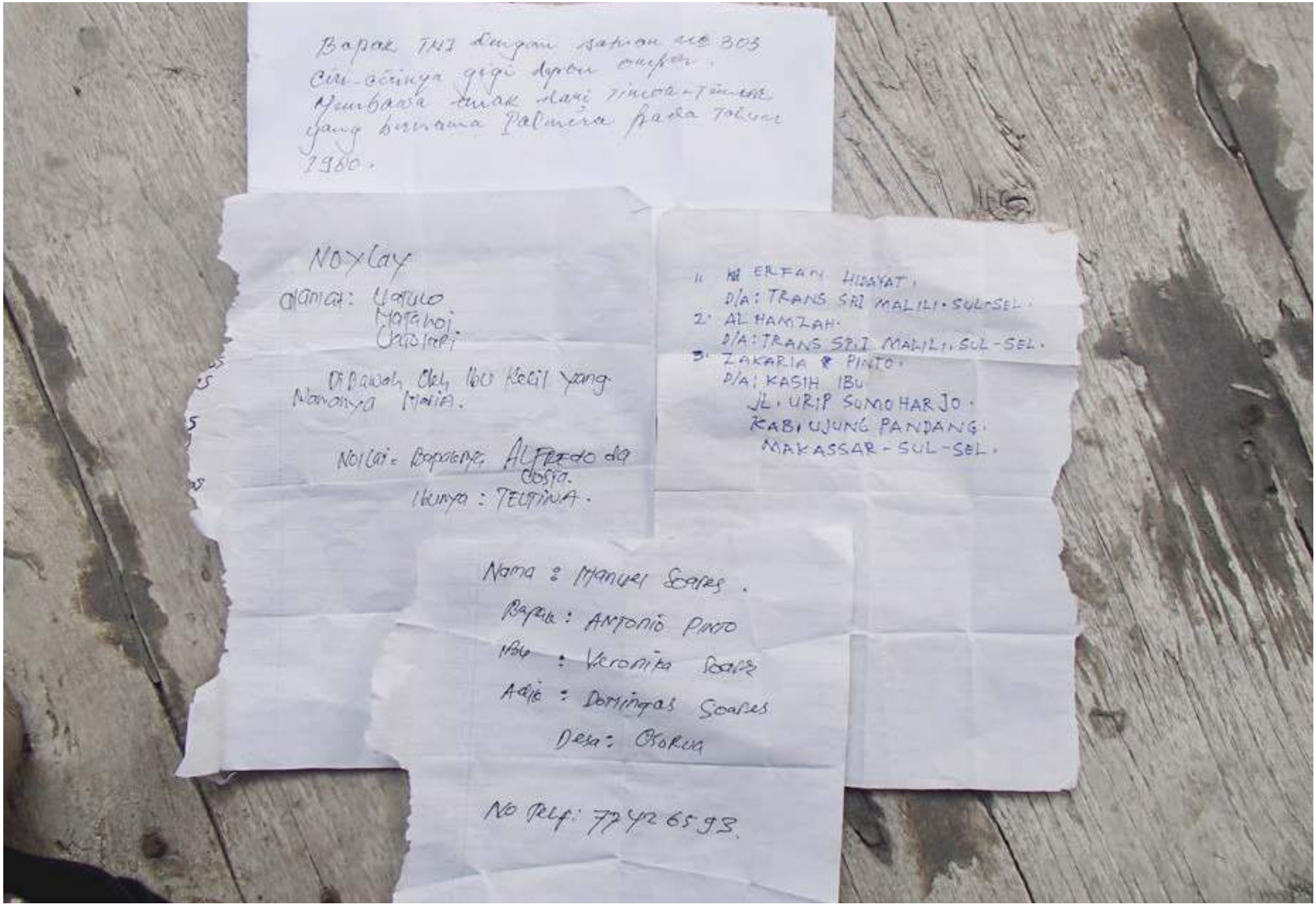
Song and Lyricsby
Imaculada Viana

Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Photos of stolen children from Mauchiga village, Ainaro. Photos: Family archives, years unknown.

lost (boys)

chapter 2



Scraps of paper with names and clues to find more stolen children, handed over to AJAR's team. Photo by Galuh Wandita, 2015.

But why? This question is the most common reaction from those who learn of the plight of the stolen children. Various motives seem to have been at play. From the 10 women and 55 men we have found, we can conclude that most of the stolen children were boys. Many of them were initially recruited as "child soldiers", known by the military as TBOs (tenaga bantuan operasional - "operations assistants"). Boys as young as six were tasked with transporting supplies, carrying ammunition, and serving as guides in the jungles of East Timor. Children were considered by the Indonesian military to be malleable and less of a security threat than adults. At the end of their tour of duty, some soldiers simply took their "assistants" home with them. With the promise of education, or because of a mutual dependency forged by survival on the battlefield, many children agreed to be brought to Indonesia. Later on, the military tried to control this practice to a degree. Some survivors talk about how they were smuggled in boxes onto Indonesian navy ships and told to hide from the military police. But efforts to stop the smuggling of children lacked gravity.

Even the CAVR had to take pause to ponder: "The question remains why children and youths were selected for service. There are several possibilities: indiscriminate demand for unpaid labour, a hearts-and-minds tactic, or a perception that young TBOs posed a lower risk of betrayal or escape." [p. 2065]

Whatever the motives, the impact of recruiting children to take part in military operations was devastating. If there are records about the number of child TBOs wounded or killed during this time, CAVR was unable to locate them. Their families long for these children, forever frozen in their memories as vibrant young lives with their futures ahead of them.

Marciano Alves Quintao

Marciano was shot twice during his time as a TBO. He recalled being taken by soldiers when walking home from school with six of his friends in Ainaro. His parents looked for him for a month before finally discovering that he and his friends were working at an army post. During his time as a TBO, he traveled with the troops to Ainaro, Cassa, Suai, Soibada, Fatuparliu. In 1982, he was shot in Los Palos and sent to Jakarta for treatment. In 1984, he returned to Timor, only to be shot again. He again traveled to Jakarta.

Today Marciano walks with a pronounced limp, one leg is visibly smaller than the other. He lives with his family in a simple house in South Jakarta, working as a night guard at a nunnery.

Serturio de Oliveira/ Ibrahim Orlando

Serturio/Ibrahim became a TBO for a policeman at the age of eight, after being taken from his home in Manatuto. When he was only in second grade, he was handed over to a teacher in Dili after the policeman returned home. He was then taken to Alor Island in eastern Indonesia, and on to Makassar, Sulawesi, where he was put into an Islamic boarding school for three years. Later, he found work in a car repair workshop. In 1989 he moved to East Kalimantan, working as a mechanic.

Serturio/Ibrahim recalled that there were forty other Timorese children who were brought to the boarding school in Sulawesi. They came in waves during 1984, but some have returned (to Timor-Leste) now.

Marciano's surprise reunion with his aunt, Margarida, at the AJAR office. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2014.

"We hope that perhaps our suffering in the past is enough. With this reunion, I hope the two governments will pay attention to our lives, our children's future."

Photo by Selviana Yolanda, 2014.

Joaquim Soares

I was born in the shadow of Matebean
mountain. We were four siblings, three boys and one girl. When the war happened, I was still a baby. We ran to another village called Matahue. I lived there with my parents, helping them in the fields. But then the war became more tight. There were guard posts everywhere.

When I was twelve years old I was asked to work as a TBO in the Matabean area, my parent's village. There was a lot of fighting between those
who were pro-Indonesia and pro-independence.

I was only twelve, I couldn't stand it very much. It was very hard for a small child to be expected to join the fight. I wasn't in school. I decided I had to find another way.

Before I turned thirteen I went to Irian Jaya (now Papua.) I called my aunt in Dili and she helped me find work in a mining company. I then moved to Makassar, then Kalimantan. Now I am working in a palm oil plantation.

My hope is that Indonesia and Timor-Leste can work together. This will be better for me and my family. When the AJAR team came to talk to me in 2015, I was finally able to speak to my family in Uatulari after many years. I found out that my brother died in 2013, and my father in 2014. So there are only three of us left, including me.

Photo by Sigit Pratama for AJAR, 2016.

Luis Mateus Parera / Luiws Hutajulu

In 1977 Luis, a 13 year old living in Los Palos, became
a TBO. He traveled with four different battalions over the next four years. His family did not know that he was brought to Indonesia. In 1979, he boarded the Gunung Jati ship from Dili and was transported to Java.
He initially stayed in a navy housing complex in Surabaya. From Surabaya he boarded an army truck to Jakarta and was finally adopted by a military family in Bekasi.
Luis always felt anxious. Although his adoptive parents took good care of him, he still had problems. Luis dropped out of school and joined a local gang in a marketplace on the out-skirts of Jakarta. He later became extremely ill, struggling with addiction. Before attending a reunion he shared his story:

Before the referendum in 1999 I had contact with my family, but after the referendum I couldn't contact them anymore. In 1997 I had contact with my younger brother, Francesco; I had news that my parents were still living. My family told me to come home, but I was afraid. Because I was a TBO, I felt traumatized and didn't want to remember anymore, especially remember people who had been killed in front of us.

Legibere/Muhammad

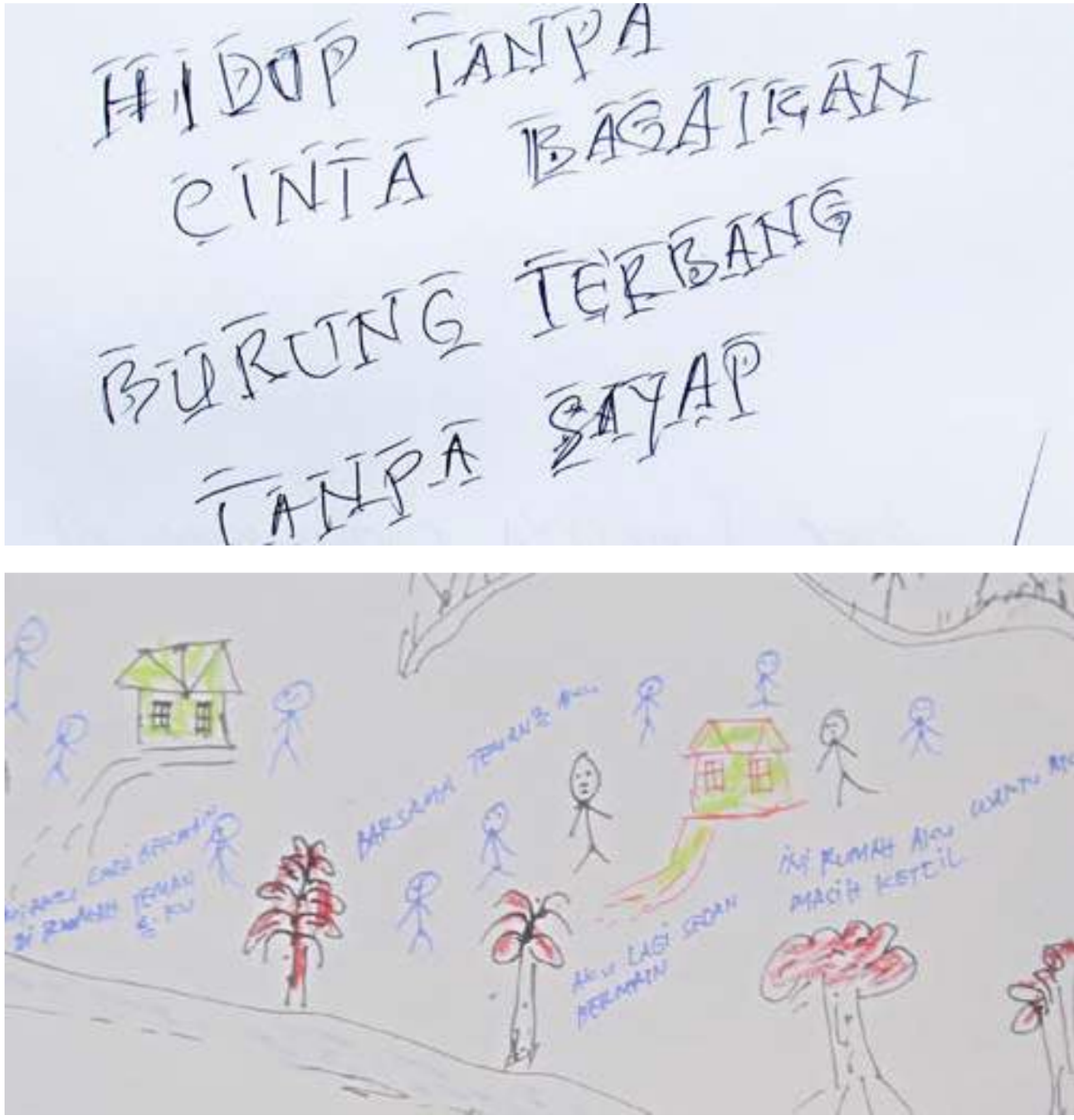
Legibere/Muhammad held on to the memory of the river that ran through his village back home. Nina made contact with Legibere in 2014 through a Timorese policeman who was working in Kalimantan. Legibere was taken from his village in Manatuto district and brought to South Sulawesi by a soldier in 1984. In 1986 the family moved to Bandung, where he was abandoned by his foster parents. In 1989, hearing that his foster father was working in Balikpapan, he traveled to find him there. However, his foster father told him that he could no longer care for him, so Legibere began to live on his own. He eventually became a barber.

Legibere drew a child-like picture of his village as part of a healing workshop he attended ahead of his trip home to Timor-Leste in May 2015:

This picture has lots of trees because when I was little I was surrounded by trees and a valley. I lived at the head of the Manatuto River. That was when our life was peaceful, [but] after the war we were scattered everywhere. Our parents kept the four of us siblings safe, although I was then separated [and brought to] Indonesia. My place here is Watukalung Village, now it's become Laklubar, Manututu District. My house is close to a garden and rice padi. After that Indonesia came. Everything I longed to have with my family disappeared and I never saw them again, then a soldier took me to Indonesia.

We had to try to live. We tried our best to survive. So at the time I worked as a child soldier, known as TBO. I was just a child, I didn't know. What they told me to do, I just followed.

At the end of his visit to Timor, Legibere wrote "Life without love is like a bird trying to fly without wings." Photo by Galuh Wandita, 2015.



Before traveling to Dili, we asked a group of 12 stolen childtren to introduce themselves using a symbol to represent who they are. Six of them drew a mountain landscape of their childhood. Holding on to the memory of Timor's mountains was a way for many survivors to preserve their identity. Photos by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

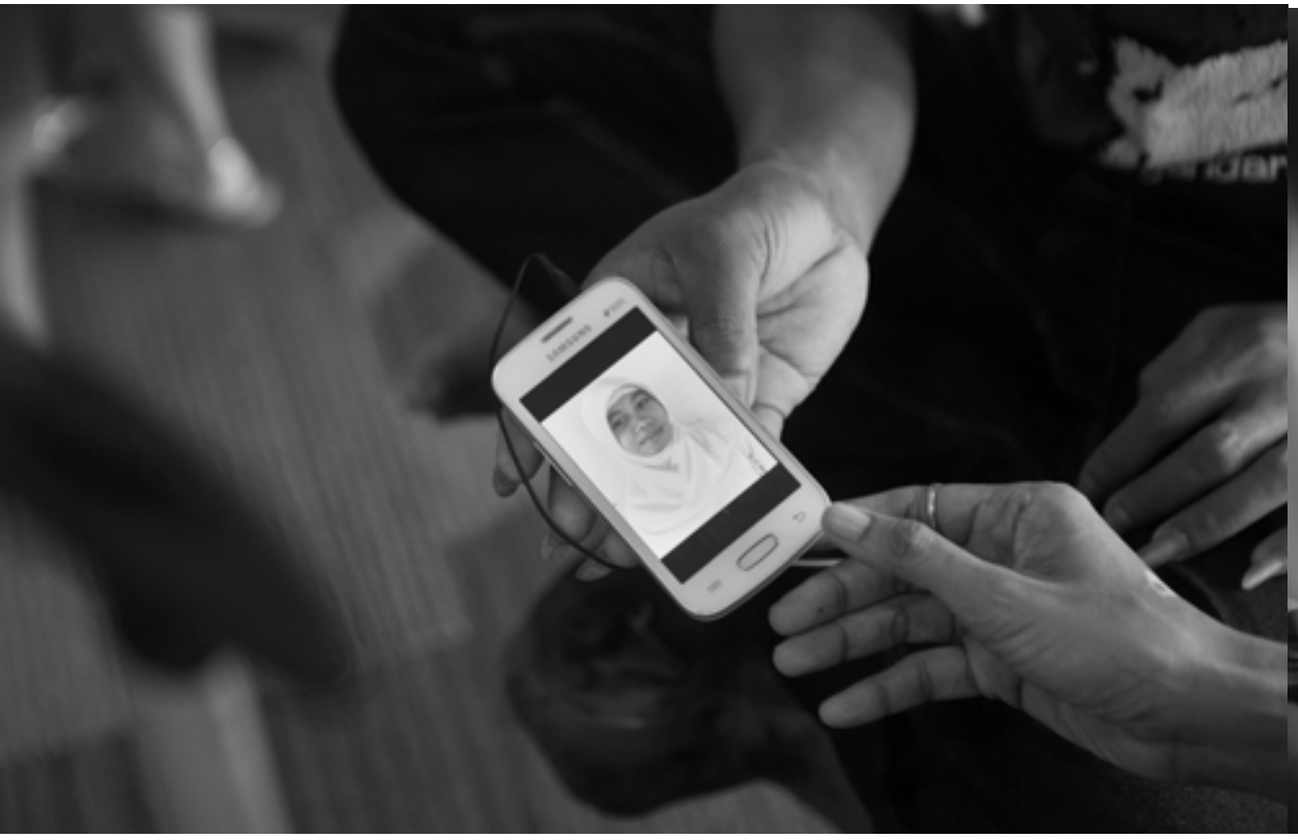
STOLEN

Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Lost (Boys)

Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

STOLEN



Lost (Boys)

Joao Soares / Muhammad Ridwan

Joao/Ridwan and his sister, Mika, were taken to Sulawesi by a soldier in 1997. He was only nine years old at the time. As we sit in the airport in Bali, waiting to board our plane to Dili, he takes out his phone and shows me a photograph of his sister. "She wears a hijab now," he said, as he flicks to another image that he has edited, of the same face but with her hair modestly covered. The last he heard she is married and living in another province.

I was brought to stay with a family for a few years. I attended junior primary school, grade one to four, but then they moved me to an orphanage. This is where my suffering began. I had to work very hard to meet my basic needs- clothing, school books. I went around and collected people's trash. I also cleaned people's homes. I got 1000 rupiah, 2000 rupiah, or a bit of food. I saved my money to buy a uniform and school supplies. I completed my primary school until sixth grade. In 2000, I got news that my mother passed away. That news made me lose concentration at school. I lost my motivation because I felt I had no family anymore.

I was moved to a boarding school. Things got worse. I was beaten to a pulp each time I made a mistake. I wanted to run away but there I knew no one.

I worked as a construction worker building the Hassanudin airport (in Makassar, Sulawesi). Then I got in touch with Irfan, someone with the same story as me. I was able to finish high school and now I am staying with him. I wish that I can be together again with my family.

In May 2016, we gathered 12 more stolen children for a healing workshop in preparation for another reunion visit to Timor-Leste. When we asked participants to introduce themselves using a symbol to represent who they are, independendly six of them drew a mountain landscape of their childhood. Holding on to the memory of Timor's natural environment was a way for many survivors to preserve their identity.

Gathering Strength: A Meeting of Survivors in Dili, April 2013

As a first step, we organized a meeting of a very small group of survivors: two from Jakarta, Nina and Victor, and two from West Timor, Indonesia, Ermegildo Soares and Immaculada Viana. The meeting was attended by officials from Timor-Leste's national human rights commission, PDHJ, and the Commission on Children's Rights, as well as survivors who had already found their way back to Timor-Leste.

As Nina remarked, the lucky ones are those who were taken in a group, or who were able to find others from East Timor. They were able to keep their mother tongue, Tetun, and their sense of self. Some of them lived with decent families that cared for them and were able to get a good education

Claudio Geronimo

In 1980, the Red Cross came to Illiomar. I became a volunteer, stealing medicine to bring to the resistance fighters. One day, a marine tried to take a bracelet from my brother's wrist. When my brother tried to resist, the marine started beating him. I thought, we won't survive this way.
Finally I decided to become a TBO . . . I ended up staying with a lieutenant colonel in Dili and in 1984 entered junior high school just as he was about to return to Indonesia. He gave me two options, "You can still be a TBO in Indonesia or remain in East Timor." I said, "There must be a letter stating that I can go to school." . . . I was put on a military ship to Surabaya and made my way to Semarang [where the soldier lived]. He tried to force me to convert to Islam, but I refused. As a TBO I knew what to do, but when in Indonesia I had to work to get food on my plate and to continue my studies.
[However,] my experience was quite different from my friends [as] the person I lived with was very kind, he never forced me or hit me. I woke up every morning at 3 o'clock in the morning to prepare coffee, mop the floor, and wash a stack of clothes before going to school. But I held on to the principle that I had to finish school and return to Timor-Leste.

Photos by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Ermenegildo Soares

I'm from Los Palos. I worked as a TBO for the army from 1989 when I was in grade school. The person who took me was a ranking officer. I was still in primary school. I met the military officer on the street. Then he asked about one of my family members about me. They came to our house, the soldier asked permission from my mother. He said because he was still unmarried, he would take me and that he would treat me like a little brother or son. I went through elementary school and junior high school while I was living with him.

When I finished junior high, I was taken to Bali. Before I had been lazy and barely made it through my studies, but when I got to Bali my foster father told me . . . students in Bali were clever [and that] I had to graduate, be ranked first or second. My foster family were Muslims but if I do not go to church on Sundays they were upset with me. They gave me transport money to go to church. My father decorated my room with a cross and a statue of Mother Mary. He also gave me religious books on Catholicism.

I finally got good grades, ranking number one or two in class. In school I was the only East Timorese. People thought that East Timorese were physically strong, so asked me to compete in . . . [sports]. They soon found out I couldn't play basketball and volleyball, but I could run. All the high schools in the Tabanan feared me. I ran 1000m, 1500m, 10,000 meters. When I graduated my high school teachers cried.

Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Muslim Maumoto

I said the Islamic syahadat in 1985, in Kuluhun. At that time there was an Islamic foundation, under the guidance of ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association). I come from Luro, Los Palos. I was born in 1973, and came down Mount Matebean in 1978. At that time I was old enough to walk, carrying my dog.

There was a program organized by [a Muslim organization] to send children from East Timor to Indonesia. About 27 [of us] were sent to [a conservative] Islamic boarding school [in Makassar, South Sulawesi where national symbols] such as flags or uniforms were not allowed. Sometimes we did not eat. Three of my friends died of malnutrition; a few ran away. . . We butchered chickens and dug wells to earn a bit of money so we could eat . . . We fought over food. I once got into a fight with a person whose knife was poisoned. I got a small cut, but the infection was so bad that worms got inside. It took me a year to recover from that. Dr. Abu [who had worked in our village in East Timor] . . . came and took us. I entered sixth grade [although] I was already old. I then went on to junior high . . .
All my school expenses were paid. Dr. Abu had foster children from Timor, Maluku, and [Papua]. They lived with other families, but he paid for all their expenses. I was in a modern Islamic boarding school where I learned English and Arabic . . . for four years. I continued to study in a martial arts school. I won. I also won competitions . . . and gave my medals to Dr. Abu. I entered a special high school for athletes. I made it to the youth national sports competition, I wore a T-shirt with Xanana's picture underneath my martial arts costume. In 1997 I returned to Dili. The situation was getting heated. I was a new person at the time, but slowly I began to understand. In 1998 I entered university in Jombang, East Java. My relationship with Dr. Abu was never broken. This is the consequence of life, some good and some bad.

The Seroja Orphanage was where many stolen children stayed before taken on ships to Indonesia. Petrus Kanisius visits this now abandoned building. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Petrus Kanisius Alegria

My name is Petrus Kanisius Alegria. In 2004 I represented the lost children testifying at CAVR's Children's Hearing. I recommend that the governments of Timor-Leste and Indonesia should look for the children who were lost during the war. Despite issues of language, religion, political views, we all have the right to have a family. Thus, we continue to look for each other.

There were those taken individually, and those taken in groups. We were strong because we were taken in a group. We spoke to each other Tetun and Indonesian with others.

Actually there was only one goal: to separate us. Separating us from our families: some were forced, some taken, and others separated because their families were fighting in the forest. The children who were taken when they were slightly older fared better because their memories of their origins were still strong.

In 1975 Indonesian troops invaded. . . . I hid in a cave with some older people. Around March, we were captured . . . [and] about June, the military started a program where they trained Timorese as TBOs or civil defence officers. Two soldiers and a Timorese man came to my house. At that time I lived with my brother [and his wife], because my parents had passed away. They said, "We have come here to look for children who are orphaned." The Timorese man pointed at me: "This child, this child." My cousin and I were taken from our home. My brother's wife tried to stop this, but I said, "It's OK." She cried, she said, "You're going to die." We went with only the clothes on our bodies. My cousin was only four years old.

We were put on a military truck. We picked up three other children from Aileu at a market place. They told us that the military took them. By evening we arrived at the Seroja Orphanage. Other children soon arrived from Suai. At Seroja we went to school . . . our teachers were Timorese. After six months, some of us were sent to the Vincencius Orphanage in Bandung, West Java. We were received by the bishop there. Then we were taken to meet President Suharto. Why we were brought there remains unclear. There were 20 of us; one went missing, another had died, but the others were still alive. Suharto gave us two options: "Do you want to live at the Gatot Subroto Orphanage or St. Thomas?" We imagined that St. Thomas belonged to the Catholic Church, so we said St. Thomas. In the orphanage, life was quite difficult, but we were educated through high school. Then I went to university. When I graduated, I returned to Timor-Leste.

How did I find my family? They had already prepared my grave, but then they received a letter and photo from me. They had received news that one [in our group] had died and thought it was me. The person who died did look similar to me.

Photos by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Abilio Maia

I have been here for two months, so my Tetun is not very good. My name is Abilio Maia. My father's name was Alfredo Amaral from Semara, Hatulia. My mother was Felicidade Soares from Cailaco. They are both dead now.

During the Portuguese time, my father was a soldier. He was on active duty in Bobonaro until 1974. At the time the political climate heated up and eventually a civil war broke out. We ran our separate ways - my father, mother, me and my two sisters. They ran to Zumalai, my grandmother and I ran into Maroubu and then Hauba. We surrendered in Hauba, and were brought back to Bobonaro.

Since that time we have never been reunited, until this day. I have spared no effort or resources to look for them but I have not been successful.

After the war, sometime between 1975-1976 I was taken to Cailaco with my relatives. In 1977 I was taken to the Seroja orphanage in Dili for eight months. While I was there, an Indonesian military officer offered to take me. In 1978 I went to Jakarta, with permission from the Social Welfare agency and security clearance from the military commander. I was adopted by a high ranking navy official. I went to university but did not complete my education due to various reasons.

In 1993 I was able to find information about my younger sister in Timor. Through a mediation process we were able to meet face to face. However, there were customs and procedures that were expensive, and we had to pay some kind of belis (bride price) to compensate for the costs of her care. At the end, she was taken back by the people who were taking care of her. When Timor-Leste became independent we lost contact and do not know where she is.

The consequences of our life stories: We lost the religion and belief that we held since we were children; We had to follow the religion and belief of our adoptive parents; We lost adat culture and traditions of our ancestors; We do not know what our position and status should be in any traditional ceremonies; We lost confidence in relationships within the family and our surroundings.

The worst effect is the emotional distance between our parents and siblings. We also sacrificed to achieve this independence, and still experience psychological trauma until now.

Photos by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Photo by Yudianta Ignasius, 2015.

searching

chapter 3

Leonardo Soares: My Family Missing Like You

Leo with a family that has just been informed that their lost son is alive. Photo by Odino da Costa, 2015.

For the last two years I have been involved in finding family members of the people we are locating in Indonesia. First, I receive the information from my colleagues at AJAR in Indonesia. I feel moved by their stories. Many of these children were taken by force, by soldiers. Some were taken by religious foundations, without the full knowledge of their parents.

Sometimes looking for the family is difficult, when the information about where they were born is unclear. I often have to travel far on a motorcycle. Many families live in remote areas. The terrain is very difficult here in Timor-Leste. If there is rain, there may be landslides, floods, or fallen trees on the road. But those are not impediments for me to find their families. Instead, I feel so committed to finding them wherever they are, however far they live. Some do not speak Tetun. They are more comfortable speaking in their local language, Makasae or Fataluku. When I meet them, it is difficult to communicate other than giving them a smile.

From my experience of looking for the families of the stolen children, I first try to speak with the head of the village, the local police, and the neighbours whom I may pass on the road. I try to find out if there were any children missing during that time [of the Indonesian occupation].

For me, looking for the families reminds me of my own family members who are also missing.
We still do not know where they are. Because of that, I am always ready to look for the families here in Timor-Leste.

José Luis: Finding the Children Swallowed by War

As a child who grew up during the conflict, I have an idea of what it was like for children to be separated from their families and taken away; what it was like to be caught in the cross-fire between two armed forces; how parents must have felt when they were forced to let soldiers take their children to become TBOs, forced to be doing a man's job; or how the climate of fear caused many families living in poverty to surrender their children to religious institutions, even without a clear future for them. In such a terrifying situation, children need the love and protection of their families. Certainly the children were very homesick, very sad, even more so when in their new homes their rights to be loved, to play, and to study like normal children were never realized.

No matter how long the separation, the children's desire to see their families never passes; it can only be relieved if they are able to reunite with those whom they missed so much, even if their families thought they had been swallowed by the war and were dead.

My experience during 2014 touched me deeply. I helped to facilitate the meeting of a young teenage girl with her mother from whom she'd been separated since the 1999 referendum. She longed to see her mother, who had remarried. Her mother was not enthusiastic about seeing her. The young girl expressed her longing in a song to her mother, but her mother remained unmoved.

Another man had a similar experience when he met his family in 2004. His family felt a mixture of longing and surprise because they had already 'buried' him in a traditional ceremony and had erected a gravestone in his memory. Although the man was very excited to meet them after decades of suppresseed longing to reunite, he became angry when he was told that he would first need to pay for a traditional ceremony to recall his spirit to the family. It was as if he were present physcially when he first met his family, but they felt his soul wasn't there.

Just imagine, when thousands of people were celebrating Timor-Leste's independence, there were also many children crying because they didn't know who their original parents were. In their hearts they must have asked, "Who am I, really?"

For a person to know who gave birth to him or her is a fundamental human right. Therefore, the search for children separated from their families and the facilitation of their reunions contributes to a luta continua (the continuing struggle) for the fulfillment of human rights during this era of independence. Just because independence has been achieved doesn't mean an end to human rights problems of the past and present. The state still needs to address many violations of the past; they cannot be ignored with the excuse that the current government is not the perpetrator. Children who disappeared during the conflict are victims of human rights violations committed by a past regime, but if these people have not been reunited with their families, then it becomes a new violation.
The current government must take responsibility for this in line with current international norms.

We seek to push the governments of Timor-Leste and Indonesia to take responsibility for the disappeared children. These two governments must take responsibility and fulfill their "promise", as expressed in the 2008 report of the joint Indonesia–Timor-Leste Commission for Truth and Friendship (KKP), Per Memoria Ad Spem, to establish a joint commission to search for the those disappeared, including children, during the conflict of 1974-1999. This promise must be kept so that the two
governments do not contribute to the perpetuation of this human rights violation.

Yolanda: Searching in Indonesia

Since 2014 I have worked with AJAR, searching for stolen children taken from Timor-Leste to Indonesia. At first I was confused because I'd never heard of such cases during the conflict in Timor-Leste. I read the CAVR report and other reports and began to understand the problem. In August that year, I joined Nina and Victor to interview two survivors we had just found in Jakarta, Luis Pareira and Dominggus Sampelan. When we met them, they were not very open and were very cautious about telling their stories. It was understandable; it was hard for them to talk about something they'd held onto for years.

In Indonesia, the presence and stories of these stolen children were never discussed; in fact, they were forgotten. Dominggus was pessimistic, plus he no longer remembered what his parents or siblings looked like. Were they still alive or had they died? He only expressed one hope at that time, and it touched me. Dominggus said, "I just want to know where I come from."

The search for Dominggus's family wasn't easy. A friend in Dili, Sisto from HAK, met with a distant cousin of Dominggus in Los Palos who wanted to welcome his return. We had yet to find his immediate family. Dominggus had given up hope and almost canceled his trip. At that time I tried to encourage him: "It may be we'll get there and get some information. Just think of this as a first trip to get information about other members of your family. Who knows, maybe your cousin has information."
In May 2015, I went with Dominggus to visit his relatives in Los Palos.
And it was true. His family in Los Palos (located at the eastern tip of Timor-Leste) contacted his family in Dili and other relatives in Maliana (on the western border with Indonesia's West Timor province.) It turns out that Dominggus's parents came from Maliana and his older sisters lived there. He also found out that both his parents were buried there. In August that year, three months after he came with us on the reunion visit, Dominggus visited his sisters in Maliana, and prayed at his parent's graves.

Dominggus now communicates frequently with his family in Maliana and is in the process of planning a traditional ceremony to welcome him back into the family. For me this is a miracle. A sliver of hope, expressed with hesitancy at the beginning, has become a reality. I feel happy each time Dominggus calls his family or communicates with them. It turns out he has a lot of family members. Dominggus is no longer alone. His father's three sisters have children so he has a lot of cousins.

The last time I visited Dominggus, his wife and children at their home outside of Jakarta, he was excited to tell me about his visit to Maliana and the preparations for his ceremony this year. We showed Dominggus's Indonesian foster family the film documentary of our visit in 2015. His foster family responded well, asking lots of questions about the story of the stolen children. They didn't doubt that Dominggus was a part of this story.

Dominggus has also began to open up and talk about his life, beginning with his feelings of being treated unfairly, rejected, and the difficulties he faced being moved from school to school, etc. He talked about it as part of an experience that was important to be shared and no longer something he had to hide.

Although at first this was part of my work with AJAR, as I engage with it more I realize this is a deeper calling for me. I've begun to share this story with friends and acquaintances who live in areas noted as places where the children were taken.

The effort to search for these children who are now adults is very important because besides this being a humanitarian effort, children have a right to know about their families, just as their families have a right to know about them. The number of children separated from their families— several thousand—is a very big number and Indonesia is such a big country. By searching for them, although it is just a few at a time, at least we are in a stronger position to urge the government to reveal more. Of course the search for these stolen children is not easy, but I believe that their stories will encourage many others to be open and share information. At some point, the Indonesian public will also begin to push for the truth about the situation of these children.

Victor da Costa: Finding Our Families

I was taken in 1980. I lived with my foster parents and never met other Timorese. I was often beaten. Sometimes a neighbor would defend me. There was one neighbor who often took me away. She even once asked [my foster father], "Why don't you give him to me?" I was in third grade then. Living with a foster family was a different life. In the morning I was never given warm rice, I was given leftover rice to eat. I had to work, while the other children did not. I had to walk to school, about three kilometers. My foster siblings were given money for transport. Before school I had to boil water, cook rice. My foster father paid for my education from Grade one to six, but I paid my own junior high school fees. Since junior high I lived on my own. My foster family also had many economic problems. My mother concentrated more on taking care of my brothers.

But I am thankful because I became involved with pro-democracy activists who also defended the independence of Timor-Leste. I went to prison for two years, from 1996-1998. There I met prisoners from Timor—Xanana, Fernando Lasama, and João Camerao, but they did not know that I was from East Timor. They thought I was from Kupang or Ambon.

I felt an increasingly strong motivation to search for my family. Were they still alive or not? When I was freed from prison I joined the demonstration in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta. Nearly 7000 East Timorese students in Java joined that demonstration.

My heart continued to feel restless. When will I find my way back to East Timor? But I did not know what East Timor was like. I did not know where Dili was. . . . My foster father often told this story, " You were taken from Baguia. Your father's name is Alberto, your mother's name is Maria." But I did not know my mother's face or my father's face, until this moment.

Inside me, grew a powerful motivation and I wanted to go back. But I didn't know how. I tried to discuss with some friends that I wanted to go back to East Timor, finding my own way. My friend said, "Try going to HAK. Maybe they can help." I came here [to HAK] on Christmas eve in 2004 after getting an Indonesian passport at the border. I was assisted by a friend in Atambua [West Timor]. He said, "Be careful there. If anything happens, just run into the forests." Of course, I had no idea what the forest was like.

I traveled in a minibus across the border. When the immigration officials asked where I was going, I didn't know except to say I was going to Farol where the HAK's office was. In Farol I met José Luis, Oscar, Gil, and some friends that I knew in Indonesia. They asked, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I want to search for my family." They did not know that I was from East Timor. Oscar eventually helped to find information about my family. We found out that Oscar and I are related. Within two weeks, Oscar brought a relative who had also been imprisoned in Jakarta, called Armindo. He saw me and said, "Oh, that is the son of Alberto. I took care of him when we were in the forest."

So that is my story. Maybe my story is a good story. There are people who have not had an opportunity like me. The fact that we have lost our language and culture also affects us psychologically. This is experienced by the children who were taken away at a young age, like me. We don't want to burden the already independent Timor-Leste, assigning this "unfinished business" to the government. We just want to find our families because, after all, we all have a family, a mother, a father, sister, brother, and we have a place where we were born. That's the most important thing.

Yolanda and the stolen children in front of Hotel Flamboyan, in Baucau. Photo by Odino da Costa, 2015.

Victor da Costa looking at the landscape of his village. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Nina: Searching for You, Finding Myself

I got a lead from a soldier. He is Timorese, and also a member of my church in Jakarta. I asked him if he knew about the Timorese children who were taken. Initially, he was suspicious. He said, "You know that those people are a state secret? Indonesia and Timor-Leste have a past." But I invited him to my house and he slowly began to trust me. He told me he knew of a woman. Her name was Filomena and she was also from Viqueque. I gave him my contact details to pass on to her.

Three days later I received a call from Filomena's husband. Oddly, he said that my father had given him a photograph for me when Filomena and her husband visited Viqueque in 1996. My father was still looking for me then. He asked them to look for me too. So we were looking for each other.

A friend of mine knew someone who lived in one of the military housing complexes in Jakarta. One day she was visiting her friend there, so I tagged along. There I asked around about people who were stationed in East Timor, and whether they knew about any Timorese children who may have been brought here. I was told to ask one of the veterans. I went over to his house, but no one was there. As I walked out of his house, a man approached me. "Are you Timorese? I think I know you. You are one of the children from Battalion X." He invited me into his house and we talked. He gave me a lead to go to the Veteran's Hospital and ask for Mr. A.

A few weeks later, Victor and I went there and met with Mr. A. After listening to us, he said, "Go to Battalion X housing complex. There's a girl there called Lina." We smiled and Victor said, "This is Lina." We got five names and addresses from Mr. A.

The next Saturday, we went looking for one of the five. His name was Dominggus. He was adopted by the army chaplain. We first asked at the local church, 'were there any Timorese children?'. Yes. We walked to Dom's house and knocked on the door. His adoptive brother opened the door, and recognized me immediately. We were in the same school. We went in and chatted. Dom had moved out of town, but his brother gave us Dom's phone number. It was funny that Dom's brother had their father's photographs. One of them was of me when I was five years old, on the navy boat that took me.

My husband makes maps for his work. When he traveled to Kalimantan, he saw there were many plantation workers who looked like they were from Eastern Indonesia. I asked him to find out their background in case anyone was from East Timor brought by the military when they were children. We got more leads and found four more people.

Later on, I got information from my village in Timor-Leste about three siblings taken by a religious institution. I got in contact with some Timorese university students living in Yogyakarta and Bandung, and finally was able to get a phone number. So far I have found twenty-two. There are more.

Nassrum (Achunk): Holding on to Hope

I never imagined how it would feel to live in a time and place where you could be uprooted from the traditions of your ancestors, separated from your family, economically squeezed, having to live the rest of your life in loneliness. This is not a fictional story, but the actual story of children who were disappeared from Timor-Leste. I also never imagined that I would be part of the effort to search for those who have been separated. If there is one thing I've learned from these children of Timor-Leste, it is never give up hope.

The search for stolen children in South and West Sulawesi has not been easy. Together with friends from KontraS Sulawesi and AJAR, we began in early 2016 with information that was only hazy. The process has required a fair amount of time and resources, considering the number of locations we covered. Problems emerged at the beginning of the searching and documentation process: information was limited, the search locations were far apart and difficult to reach, and there were difficulties with verification of data due to changes of identity. I also had to be sensitive of the psychological impact of the search, considering those stolen had heard nothing about their homeland for so long. There were also challenges in explaining the purpose of the searching and documentation to foster families.

There were several ways I obtained information on the whereabouts of stolen children in South and West Sulawesi, whether taken by the military, civilians, or religious organizations. I had intense communication with those who had already been located and asked their help to continue the search. I use every bit of information, no matter how small, or from who or where, it didn't matter as long as they knew of a child who disappeared from Timor-Leste. I used organizational and personal networks to find the children who disappeared. I sought contact information through social media such as Facebook or through voter registration data.

One needs patience to develop communication with those who have been identified. Sometimes although there is an agreement to meet and collect data on a person's identity, suddenly that person will cancel or not answer when telephoned. A person may not even confirm via SMS. Finding a person's house can also be difficult if the wrong address or directions are given. But I believe we must continue to be patient and build trust so that more are willing to meet and share data about their identity and their families in Timor-Leste.

I usually work with people who live close to a person we want to approach. I sometimes request their help to learn about the person and get a contact number for them or someone who can reach them. That's what I did in the search for Bapak Yusuf. Bapak Yusuf was taken by a soldier and lived in Polewali Mandar District, West Sulawesi about 276 kilometers from Makassar [where I live]. In an effort to save time and expense, I contacted a friend in another area of West Sulawesi who, in turn, had a friend in Polewali Mandar District. After about a week, my friend contacted me and said that his friend had managed to find Bapak Yusuf. My friend then contacted Bapak Yusuf and called me so that I could talk to him directly. I introduced myself and where I worked. I also explained that I had joined a reunion several months earlier and had met his family in [Timor-Leste]. I then promised that I'd go to see him to conduct an interview.

The story of searching for Paulina was different, however. She was taken by a soldier named M and now lives in Lilikira Village, North Toraja District about 355 kilometers from Makassar. Information about Paulina came from one of the stolen children who participated in a reunion visit. Using my network with Torajans, a friend learned that there was indeed a woman named Paulina in Lilikira. My friend then tried to get contact information of Paulina's foster parents so that I could communicate with them. I haven't yet met with Paulina, but trust I will find a way to do so.

My friends at KontraS Sulawesi and I must make every effort in this endeavour. We must develop communication with Bapak Yusuf, Ibu Paulina, and others. We must convince others to participate in efforts to find and document lost children from Timor-Leste so that they can communicate and be reunited with their families in Timor-Leste. We believe that the latent and long-standing longing to reunite with their families will have a happy ending as long as we all give this process our best effort.

Nina speaking at a small ceremony to welcome the three siblings back at their village in Buikarin, Viqueque. Photo by Galuh Wandita, 2015.

Nassrum (Achunk) taking a rest after traveling 3 hours by motorbike to Tobadak, West Sulawesi searching for the stolen children. Photo by Mulya Sarmono, 2016.

Initiatives to Look for the Stolen Children

In 2003, the CAVR established a research team to focus on the impact of the conflict on children and organized a public hearing on the topic. The CAVR facilitated a reunion visit for Yuliana (Bileki), who was taken in 1979, to see her family in Ainaro. In its final report (2005), the CAVR recommended that the two governments assist the children from Timor-Leste who were separated from their families, and help them to establish contact, allowing them the liberty to choose their own future.

In 2005 the governments of Indonesia and Timor-Leste jointly established the Commission for Truth and Friendship (CTF) with Commissioners and staff from both countries tasked to investigate the violations that took place in East Timor in 1999. The CTF report (2008) reaffirmed the CAVR's recommendation on separated children, urging the two governments to establish a joint ministerial commission on the disappeared with a mandate that includes finding the children. In October 2011, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono issued a Decree on the implementation of the CTF recommendations. However, to date there has been little progress on the establishment of specific mechanisms to find the disappeared and separated children.

Efforts focusing on the issue of the stolen children have gradually diminished over time. In 2012, a website to help reunite separated (now) adult abductees with their families in Timor-Leste was established by a survivor together with a former researcher from the CAVR. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continues to report on the lack of progress in establishing a joint ministerial commission between Indonesia and Timor-Leste on "persons unaccounted for" between 1975-1999, with a mandate that would include the facilitation of individual reunions.

AJAR's recent work on this issue has included contributing to and encouraging official cooperation involving both Indonesia and Timor-Leste. In 2013 Indonesia's National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) and its counterpart in Timor-Leste, the Provedor for Human Rights and Justice (PDHJ) signed an MoU to follow-up on the CTF recommendations. In February 2014, Komnas HAM established a data gathering team focused on children transferred from Timor-Leste to Indonesia between 1975-1999.

In the meantime, AJAR initiated its first reunion visit and workshop in Dili in April 2013. A year later, working with survivors, KontraS, Elsam, IKOHI, ACBIT, Timor-Leste's Victim's Association and HAK Association, we began to trace the stolen children and their family members. This involved carrying out often difficult and time consuming work in Indonesia, locating victims, and similarly challenging work in Timor Leste identifying and locating their families. In some cases those taken as children remember very few details of where they were taken from. In a number of cases parents who believed their children had perished had erected gravestones and had been praying for them for over 30 years before discovering that they were, in fact, still alive.

In 2015 and 2016 AJAR and partners collaborated with Komnas HAM and PDHJ to facilitate two reunion visits for those victims who had been located and wished to be reunited with their families. The visits between 2013 and 16 reunited 30 of those abducted with their families in Timor-Leste. To date, we have documented the stories of 65 stolen children.

Source: "Long Journey Home: Reuniting East Timor's Stolen Children Living in Indonesia with their Families in Timor-Leste," AJAR, 30 August 2016.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Domingus Sampelan and his wife at their home in West Java. Photo by Sigit Pratama for AJAR, 2016.

STOLEN

Searching


POLITIKUS RAKUS
MATI SAJA


BURBERRY

Dirt road on the way to Tobadak, West Sulawesi. Photo by Nassrum (Achunk), 2016..

Yusuf Fernandes holding a picture of the man who brought him to Sulawesi . Yusuf is originally from XX. He now lives in East Luwu, South Sulawesi, a thirteen hour bus ride from Makassar. Photo by Aswin, 2016.

found!

chapter 4

STOLEN

Imaculada Viana on her way to look for her relatives in Viqueque. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Found

Versimo waiting to board his plane to Dili. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.


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Your Flying Partner
Monday, 16 May 2016
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Nina: I'm sorry, who are you?

Boi: My name is Boi, I'm from Dili. I am looking for someone in my family. During the war in the 1970s she was taken by an Indonesian soldier.

Nina: If you are really my family, what's my father's name?

Boi: Your father's name was Manuel De Jesus Pinto. He was from a village called Buikarin, in Viqueque.

Nina: But I remember a place called Boromatan.

Boi: Yes, that's where you were staying at the time, when you were small. I am a university student in Yogyakarta. They told me about you. Some people thought you had died, I am sorry. We had no news from you. So I took the initative to find you.

Nina: I am alive. Where are they now? I remember I had a brother named Fernando, and my sister, Magdalena.

Boi: Your father died in 2007. Your mother is alive, living in Viqueque. Your brothers and sisters are all alive. They are living in Viqueque, Dili, and two are in university in Yogyakarta. If you agree, I want to call our family in Dili to tell them I've found you. When I saw your face at the door, I knew it was you, Isabelinha. That's your real name, Isabelinha.

Nina: I am so happy that we have met now. I was told that my whole family was dead. But I always remembered my brother was called Fernando, my sister Magdalena, and another cousin named Alda. It's been so long, I have forgotten a lot. I have forgotten how to speak Tetun, but I remember a song, it was a lullaby. The refrain was "rou Dili seidauk mai." How did you find me?

Boi: In 1990 there was a letter claiming to be from you, with a photo. The letter said you were a nurse. Your father was invited to Jakarta in the 1990s. He came looking for you. He asked a number of military officers, but found no answers. He never gave up looking for you. His last wish was to find you.

When your mother and cousins were on holiday in Yogyakarta, we were sitting around shooting the breeze and your mother told us the story of how you were taken. Someone said, "What if she is alive and married someone from Yogyakarta? What if she lives somewhere here?" So I said, "Why don't we look for her?" Let's ask around. We had the name of the soldier who took you, and his batallion number.

So then another cousin and I left Yogyakarta by train. We had an economy ticket, so we had to stand! We traveled to Bandung, then to Jakarta. I didn't really know Jakarta, so I contacted another cousin there. Together we went to the Battalion X barracks. We asked at the security post, "We are looking for veterans who were stationed in East Timor, where would they be living now?" We were told to go to the local military headquarters. There we explained we were looking for Mr. S. Another veteran suggested we try at another housing complex. We got the name of one of the high-ranking veterans, and we went there the next day. A woman said he lived one block away. It was late, about 8pm. We wondered whether we should wait until the following day or continue. We decided to continue and knocked on the door. There was a sign with his name on it.

Now we knew that Mr. S had passed away and his son lived in the house. A man answered the door, we asked, "Is this Mr. S's house?"
"Yes, where are you from?"
"We are from Dili."
"Who are you looking for?"
"We are looking for our relatvie."
"What took you so long? Why are you only looking for her now?"
He looked like he didn't believe us. Maybe it was also because it was late at night, and this was Jakarta—lots of scam artists. His tone was like he was interrogating us.
"Are you really from Dili? Just come back tomorrow morning."

We went back to where we were staying. That night I called Timor-Leste, to tell my family that I think I have found her. Someone said, "It's impossible."

The next morning I went back to Mr. S's house in Bekasi via public transport. His son asked another brother to take me to your house. The journey took about 15 minutes, on the back of a motorbike. Then I found you.

When a 'stolen child' is located, another process begins. First is the approach. For some of the stolen children, the person whom they were when they were taken is buried deep inside. They need time to reach back to this other self, interred within an unspoken past. A few are reluctant to revisit this past, distrusting our efforts to get to know them at first. This is when the voices of other survivors are so important. Trust builds slowly. As the person tries to recover pieces of distant memory, we send each piece of information back to Timor-Leste where our fellow team members begin the search for their families.

Many of the stolen children lack identity documents, or if they do have them, they contain inconsistent identity information (due to their names, religions etc having been changed in Indonesia). Without parents to help them learn and preserve their name, their religion, and their culture, their identity shifted over time, a process dictated by the adults in their new life. One of the most difficult challenges is the process of gathering their official documents in order to obtain an Indonesian passport. Working with Indonesia's human rights commission, Komnas HAM, has helped us to overcome some of these administrative barriers. A letter of recommendation from the Commission helps us face the bureaucrats who are reluctant to provide them with the required papers.

Muhammad says that now he uses the name his adoptive parents gave him and no longer remembers his birth name. He remembers only his Timorese nickname, Legibere. He also became a Muslim, following the faith of his adoptive family, so it would be easier for him to attend school. Aisah/Siti Hapsah, Juliãon/Yanto Soares, and Joãquim/Mustaqin Alfonso Fikeke were all asked to convert to Islam and to change their names when they were taken to Al Yakin Foundation in Dili. They were promised a free education in Indonesia. Later they realized they were simply neglected.

Serturio de Oliveira/Ibrahim Orlando was eight years old when he was taken to Makassar, placed in a Muslim boarding school and converted to Islam. According to Ibrahim, about 40 children from East Timor lived at a Muslim boarding school in front of the boarding school that he attended.

Eugenio/Muhammad Irfan Soares was taken on a ship to Makassar by Al Yakin Foundation in 1995, together with six other children. 'Muhammad' was added to the beginning of his name by a Muslim cleric at a boarding school.

I was taken by Kopassus [Special Command Force] from Buikarin [military] post in an army vehicle. In Viqueque they picked up six other children; [we] were put in a cattle truck and taken to Dili. After two weeks in Dili we were taken by ship to Ujung Pandang [Makassar]. We hoped to go to school. When we got to Ujung Pandang we were made to change religion, we cried . . . we'd already been baptized in our villages. Then we were put in a Muslim boarding school. We weren't given food. A friend of mine went back to East Timor because he couldn't stand it and he didn't want to accept that religion.

Changing their names and religions scared the children; they did not trust themselves. They worried they would be rejected by their families when they met again. As he approached the reunion with his family, Irfan Soares said, "I feel I've disappeared, like I'm not going back because my name's been changed, so probably the people at home won't know me anymore. Secondly, my religion's been changed. I'm afraid if I go home to my village my family won't accept me."

Source: "Long Journey Home: Reuniting East Timor's Stolen Children Living in Indonesia with their Families in Timor-Leste," AJAR, 30 August 2016.

Arriving in Dili, we witness the transformation of these survivors. It begins when they take their first step on the airport tarmac, when they take their first breath of air in their homeland. It is a re-awakening of the stolen child who had to grow up so quickly. On the journey from the airport to the NGO office, they find themselves in a peaceful city, with signs of development. New roads, buildings, bridges, monuments, very different from the Dili of their memory and from what people cautioned them about back in Indonesia. Then, as we arrive at the meeting place where family members are waiting, another seismic shift takes place. They are greeted with tears, smiles, and long embraces: hands touching cheeks, stroking hair, sitting as close as they can, trying to make up for lost time. Suddenly, they are no longer invisible. For a moment, they are the center of this universe. At the last two reunion meetings, Timor-Leste's prime minister and president have taken a personal interest in them. We have been invited to their offices to spend an hour with each of them.

The stolen children became a symbol of hope,

A group of 12 stolen children arrive at the Dili airport in May, 2016. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

Juliãon/Yanto, Aisah/Siti Hapsah, and Alfonso/Aqim Soares

In 1992 Juliãon, Aisah and Alfonso, aged eight, seven, and five respectively, were taken from Buikarin, Viqueque by a soldier with the promise they would receive an education. They were then handed over to a foundation in Dili. Currently Yanto and Aqim work in the tourism industry in Bali. Aisah is married and has a baby.

Juliãon/Yanto

They said, if you want to go to school in Java, register here. That's what they said. Then we heard from Jakarta, that yes the Timorese children who want to go to school will get assistance . . . We arrived in Jakarta in 1993 or 1994; we were put in a foundation. Then a man came and said he would take my sister so she could go to school in Medan [North Sumatra] . . . We had to pay to go to school . . . a Timorese businessman said that he would pay. That was about 1995 or 1996. But then he went away. My brother was moved to Bandung; I don't know where. I was moved there too, we ended up in the same school. I stopped going to school for a year . . . and started to beg on the streets.

Alfonso/Aqim

I was put in a foundation. Sometimes, we needed our parents' love. We were still so young.

Aisah/Siti Hapsah

In 1994 I was brought here by a soldier. I wanted to go to school, but I didn't go to school. I was brought to another family that made me work as a servant. Every day I washed clothes and I only went to school until junior high. I was brought to Bandung with my two younger brothers. I was very sad there every day. Once they poured hot water on my face. I was treated like an animal. I now feel relieved, as I will meet my parents. So when I am going through hard times, or good times, I feel relieved because I have met my family. I hope I can have my own house, and not be bothered by my past. I don't want to hear about it anymore. I have a child, a husband. When I feel sad I talk to my husband. He is kind to me.

Yanto and Aqim near their boarding room in Bali. Photos by Manuela Pereira, 2015. Aisah with her baby in front of her home in West Java. Photo by Isabelinha Pinto for AJAR, 2016.


Sedaap
Sedaap

Arnaldo Soares /Fadli Muslimin

In 1988, when he was about ten years old and in fourth grade in Dilor Viqueque, Fadli/Arnaldo was taken by a military officer from Battalion 726. He was brought to South Sulawesi where he went to school. Currently he lives in Jakarta and is a swimming instructor.

The person who became my foster father didn't have the required letter of agreement from my family. He hid me in a landrover. When I was discovered, the commander asked me, "Who brought you?" When I told them, they made my foster father do push-ups. I was sad to see him punished. Then his commander made him promise to put me to school. If he couldn't keep his promise, then he had to return me.

I experienced a lot of sadness, but that is between me and God.

There were times when I didn't have enough to eat, I was thrown out of the house, not allowed to have a girlfriend. Then I started working at a fish pond, and learned how to swim.

In Makassar I became a swimming coach. I taught Yusuf Kalla (current Vice-President of Indonesia). He almost drowned once. I also taught his grandchildren to swim.

My source of strength is my children and my wife. My son is also a swimmer. He came second in a competition in Singapore.

When I left home for this trip, my foster mother fainted. She wanted to burn my passport. But I wanted to see Mount Bibileo again.

Arnaldo Soares/ Fadli embraced by his cousin at the Dili airport. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

Eugenio/ Irfan Soares

Eugenio/Irfan's father was beaten to death in 1992 by Falintil fighters when he accidentally stumbled into their camp in Kararas. He had been out hunting and they mistakenly thought he would reveal their location to the Indonesians. Eugenio/Irfan was not a TBO on the battlefield, but agreed to go with a couple of soldiers who promised they'd put him through school. What happened instead was that he became a servant for them at their base camp, washing, fetching water, and raising the flag. In 1995, he and six other children were taken by cattle truck to Dili where they were put on a ship to Makassar.

On the ship [from Dili], we were not given any food, [but] some women who felt sorry for us fed us. There were 14 boys on the ship . . . six of us stayed in Makassar . . . We were put in a Muslim boarding school. We were made to change religion. We cried . . . we'd already been baptized in our villages. A friend of mine went back to East Timor because he couldn't stand it and he didn't want to accept that religion. Our lives were hard. We weren't given food. Once I had to live in the market for a week, surviving on rotten bananas. When one of us found a piece of candy, we would share it among the six of us. We took turns licking the candy, passing it from one mouth to another.

In 1999, we heard many Timorese refugees had arrived. We went to the refugee center to find our families, but they were not there. In 2000, I joined the Timorese refugees who were being granted land as part of a transmigration scheme. There I met my wife, Dorotea/Siti Latifah, a fellow Timorese who had been brought to Makassar.

I made contact with Nina in 2006. I wanted to go home to see the mountain where my father was buried. When we arrived in Dili, they told us that we would meet with President Taur Matan Ruak. I didn't believe it. In Makassar, it's hard to meet with the local leaders, let alone a president. When we did meet him, I asked him if the government of Timor-Leste would help those of us who wanted to come back. In particular, I asked him to help us put our children to school. I almost wept talking to him. I don't want my children to be traumatized by moving them somewhere.

Dorotea Hornai/Siti Latifah

When I was little, I am not sure how old, my father passed away. I was raised by my grandmother. I had to work quite hard, fetching water and firewood on my own. I remember being scared of wild animals. My grandmother died, and I was brought to an Islamic foundation in Dili, where I studied from first to fourth grade. Then I was boarded on a container ship to Makassar. The journey took about a week; we were hardly fed anything. When we got thirsty we drank water from the tap in the bathroom. In Makassar, I was put in a boarding school. I was very sad, thinking of my family. In 2001, I met Irfan, who was also from Timor-Leste. We decided to get married. We have four children.
My husband and my children are my source of strength.

Eugenio/Irfan Soares. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

Dorotea reunited with her brother. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

José Soares/Abdul Rahman

José/Abdul was taken to South Sulawesi by a soldier in 1980. He returned to Dili in 1986, but in 1991 went back to Indonesia to work for a timber company. Currently he works as a casual laborer. Abdul is married and lives with his wife and three children in Kalimantan.

They said we must run. If we don't run we will be burnt alive inside our home. We ran up to Matebean Mountain. I was separated from my mother, my siblings and relatives. I began following a soldier from Sulawesi. At the time, I just followed him everywhere. I was so young, I traveled to Viqueque, Los Palos, Baguia, Laga, and finally to Dili. In Dili, we were told that the East Timorese children were not allowed to be brought outside of East Timor. It was a strict regulation, but I felt that I was already with him. The ship was docked, and his time was up. I remember there were about 20-30 other children. They checked everyone going on board, and there were announcements saying that the children were not allowed to be taken.

But by then I had agreed to follow him. We were put in a long box, with ammunition in it. So when the military police came, they kicked the box. They said, "What's in it?" "Ammunition." I was inside this box with 10 to 20 kids.

We all ended up in different places. I was in Makassar for about 7-8 years. The man who took me was kind. He never hurt me, and I was put in school. But he got sick and died... Life was hard, so I ended up going to East Kalimantan.

Jose/Abdul heard that Nina and Victor were searching for people like him. They communicated by phone and then visited his house in East Kalimantan.

They interviewed me. Then, maybe because God is so great, that day, I would say it took only a few minutes. After ten to fifteen minutes, I was talking on the phone with my family. Praise God, because I still remembered my parents name, my brother, my village. I didn't remember their long formal names, just their short names. I spoke with my family that day.

Teresa Moreira/Siti Alma

During the conflict in Baucau in 1999, Teresa was brought to Atambua in West Timor as a refugee. From Atambua, she was later moved to Makassar on a military ship. In Makassar, she stayed at the Al-Ansar Islamic Foundation. She lived in a simple hut because the boarding house was still being built. After the boarding house was completed, Teresa and other stolen children were allowed to stay there. However, she was often beaten because she did not know how to pray and because she was a refugee child from Timor-Leste. Now she lives in Malili and works as a domestic worker. During a healing workshop prior to a reunion visit in May 2015, Teresa/Siti explained a picture she drew:

This is my house where I lived with my father. My mother had already died. We had rice paddies. [When] father worked in the rice paddies, I'd spend the night at the neighbours. In 1999 there was unrest. I followed others who were migrating; I went in an army vehicle. In Kupang [West Timor] I stayed at the social welfare office. [I joined] friends who wanted to go to school in Makassar. In Makassar I went to school and got married before I finished. I moved to Malili in 2002. In 2013 I had my first child. The source of my strength is my family.

Thomas Freitas/Muhammad Faisal

When Faisal was 10 years old in 1986, he was brought to Makassar by An-Nur Foundation to be given an education. He was put in the Al-Anshar Islamic boarding school, but he was often neglected and suffered from hunger. Now he lives in Malili, South Sulawesi, and works as a farm labourer.

I lived in an isolated place. It was difficult to study; I cared for sheep. In 1991-1992, my younger brother was sent to Makassar. I was jealous. Why was I left behind? I told my grandmother I wanted to attend school. My goal was to learn how to read and write so I wouldn't be fooled by others. My parents agreed and I attended primary school in Makassar. In 1998 I wanted to go home . . . and a ticket [was to be] purchased. Then we heard there was unrest; a police vehicle in my home region was bombed. We cancelled our departure. Refugees arrived and stayed in our dormitory. For three months they trans-migrated to Mamuju and Malili. Finally I piggy-backed along. Life [in Malili] has been impossible. We've planted cassava, chocolate, but it has all died . . . the land has nickel in it. My hope for the future is that this kind of arrangement can help those of us who could not otherwise meet our families. We want to go home, but can't afford it. All I remember and hope to see again is a view of Mt. Matebean.

Rozerio Soares Freitas

Born in Uatu-Lari, Viqueque, Rozerio was recruited as a TBO in 1976. He served in the Matebean area when he was about 15 years old. In 1976 he became a security guard in Baucau at the Hotel Flamboyan for two years. A soldier took him to Indonesia on 25 August 1986. He is married with two children and lives in Kalimantan. His wife died in 2013. Before participating in the 2015 reunion, he had not had contact with his family since 1976.

Jose/Abdul catching up with his family at the HAK office in Dili. Photo by Galuh Wandita, 2015.

STOLEN

Found

The group meets with Timor-Leste's President Taur Matan Ruak, Minister of Social Solidarity Isabel Guterres; and poses in front of the prime minister's office. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

STOLEN

Found

STOLEN

Found


UARY 2015
FEBRUARY

Journey home. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

Irfan and Dorotea's daughter read a sign at the CAVR museum about forced displacement. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

home

chapter 5

The siblings from Buikarin with their mother and relatives. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Patrick Burgess playing his song "Stolen Children" one day before the group traveled to Dili. Photo by Selviana Yolanda, 2016.

Stolen Children

I was holding on tight to your old blue dress
When the car came into view
The man in green said I'll take this one
I thought he meant to school

They put me in the car and drove away
Rivers of tears ran down your face
Thirty years pass slowly by
But today

I'm going home
I'm going home

They took me in a ship across the sea
And left me in a strange house
The lady and the man seemed kind to me
Until the lights went out

Mama mama mama, come now please,
don't leave me here alone
Take me in your arms,
I want to go home
I want to go home
Timor Lorosae

So many miles across the water
But its not water that runs in our veins
Stolen children, sons and daughters
Voices silent as they led us away

Every week my mother's been
putting flowers on my grave
Then a lady came and brought the news
That I'd been found far away

Can she let herself believe
This really could be true
Miracles do happen, mama
I'm on my way to you

I'm alive
I'm going home
Timor Lorosae

Song and lyrics by Pat Burgess, written and performed at the May 2016 healing workshop, a day before the group left for Timor-Leste.

After a few days in Dili adjusting to being back in Timor after decades away, we arrange for visits to the returnees' home villages. The morning of these journeys is chaotic. Eight to ten vehicles going to different parts of the country, dropping different groups in connected destinations, a complex itinerary to bring them home. In each vehicle, we pack luggage, food and also manage to fit in the newly reunited family members who have traveled to Dili to greet their long lost 'stolen' relatives. We also send along some basic supplies - rice, cooking oil, canned fish, coffee and sugar – so that the extended families are well catered for and can focus on just relaxing and enjoying their time together. There is excitement in the air.

Some of the "boys" who were taken away as young teens begin to speak a few words of Tetun. By day two, slowly formulated full sentences begin to emerge from their lips. Like oiling a rusty wheel, their fluency slowly returns, then begins to pick-up speed.

But for those who were taken when they were very young or who lived without any Timorese companions, Tetun does not re-surface. Many of them had outdated information about the current situation in Timor. They feel anxious about going home. Will they be accepted? Will they remember the culture? What are the words to describe how they feel? For many of them who have changed religion, there is another layer of anxiety. Will their family accept them as they are? Although there was coercion in their conversion, many have found refuge in their new faith.

Having been involved with the return of some thirty "stolen children," to date, I am pleased to report that they have been unanimously received by their families with open arms. Without judgement, they are welcomed back whole-heartedly. Their families accept the story of their survival, and the twists and turns of their lives as the consquences of war. "Tanba funu" --because of the war.

In the end, we learned that coming home does not happen all at once. For many of the stolen children, coming home takes place in consecutive steps. Domingos, Jose/Abdul, and Irfan have returned again to Timor-Leste after their first reunion visit. Domingos came back in 2016 to find his parents' graves and discover his sisters. Abdul/Jose brought his wife and three children to take part in a traditional ceremony - a process to remove his name from a family tomb, reconciling the fact that he still walks on this earth with the spirits of his ancestors.

For some of the stolen children, they have also made a home in Indonesia. Married with children, and even grandchildren, they join the growing number of global citizens who call more than one place home.

Rosita/Rosnaeni

"See this scar? I did that!" Bright smiles and peals of laughter erupt as Rosa's brother touches her forehead gently, brushing an almost invisible scar. He reaches for her earlobe, "When our mother made that earring hole in her ear, she cried." It has been less than an hour since our plane landed at the Dili airport. Rosa's siblings, an older sister and brother both in their 50s, sit close by her side. After 38 years of separation, they cannot stop holding Rosa, caressing her cheek and hair. Across the room, ten other families are each inside their own cocoons of love and longing.

In 1978, during the height of the war in Timor-Leste, Rosa and another sister were separated from their family.

My sister and I were found in Aileu. The soldier said, "Let me take you, I will put you in school." My sister was scared, she tried to say no. The soldier took me to their camp for two days, then I was put into a car headed for Dili, then put on a ship to Makassar, Sulawesi. When I got there I was brought to a small village in Toraja.

I lived for a long time with the soldier's parents. Every day I worked in the rice paddy and took care of the livestock. I wasn't sent to school because it was far from the house. I lived there for more than ten years, but when I became a teenager I felt that the burden of taking care of the soldier's parents was too much. I left to look for other work and ended up working in a copra plantation. Later, I met my husband and we married in 1989.

When I finally came home (in May 2016), there was a celebration that lasted five days and four nights. Everywhere I went people wept. It was like I had been dead, and had come to life again.

Dominggus Asabere Halobao

In 1977, at the age of 7, Dominggus started working for a military pastor and traveled with him through the jungle. In July 1979 he was taken on a navy ship from Laga to Jakarta along with several other children, including Nina, arriving in Jakarta on 12 July 1979. This date is now used as his birth date. He was "adopted" by the pastor's family, with a letter signed by a military commander in Jakarta. His foster family also had a son. He was never allowed to talk about his family in East Timor.

In 1979 I was taken to Indonesia. I went with the hope that my life would improve, that I could continue my education to become a church minister so that when I went home I could make a better life for my brothers and sisters in the village. In Jakarta I was sent to grade school, but because my foster parents barely managed economically I couldn't continue my education. . . . I wasn't strong with my parents because of so much work. My foster father was mean . . . I was once hung by my feet . . . but [if he did] more than that I rebelled.

Rosita/Rosnaeni received home in her village. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

Ernani Monteiro/ Mubarak Wotu Modo

In 1990, Mubarak was taken from Ossu to Sulawesi by members of Battalion 726. He was raised not by the military officer who took him, but by one of the officer's relatives. He was put into a progressive Islamic school and later completed a university degree. Now he lives in South Sulawesi.

I was born in 1976. Sometime in 1979 [during the invasion] we ran to Mount Perdidu. My mother died in 1979 and my father in 1983. One day soldiers came looking for children. My friend told me to join them. A soldier asked for permission from the liurai [a traditional leader]. He didn't agree, but was then threatened. I skipped school, walked, and was then hidden inside a military vehicle, underneath a pile of mattresses, just like a lost kitten. In my group there were 39 children who were taken.

Life in Sulawesi was hard. For months I had to survive on cassava and coconut milk. I almost lost my hand once harvesting rice. Making a little money, I could buy clothes. The village head . . . invited me to stay in his house and put me in school. But five months later, the soldier came back and slapped me. I was moved to his father's house where I was a domestic servant. I learned to cook better than any woman, I went to the market, I learned to do everything. In 1994, I was taken by Dr. Abubakar. I no longer had to think about where to sleep, what to eat, or my health. I went back to school. I would cook dinner when I came home from school and we would eat together.

I want to see Mount Perdidu, where I was born. The sun was hidden behind the mountain, now it is shining.

Mubarak with his family in Ossu. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

Home. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Nina with her mother and family. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Roberto da Silva

As a young boy in Watulari, Robert remembers playing with his friends. But when troops entered his village, it all changed. The soldiers would take children with them without talking to their families. Robert went with a soldier and waited on him with the promise that he'd eventually be sent to school. He followed this soldier to Bali in 1985 and became connected with another battalion, but his situation didn't improve and he was beaten. With help from a kind soldier he managed to escape to another military command post in Bali where he finished high school. Robert now lives in Jakarta with his family.

. . . Although I lived in the [army] barracks [in Timor-Leste], I wanted to see my family. Although we were fed and paid some money, we weren't allowed to play with the neighbors or visit our families; it was as if we were quarantined. . . . Around 1985 . . . we moved to Denpasar [Bali]; I was moved to another battalion where there were a lot of East Timorese. I stayed in the barracks, but wasn't comfortable . . . The soldier who invited me to join him always treated me well when we were in East Timor, but after arriving in Bali he started hitting me with his pistol. He'd say, "Now you are in Denpasar; you are far from East Timor. If I kill you no one will know and there's no one to help you."

I felt I could not continue living this way; I had to get out of there. There happened to be a good soldier from Flores, Mr. Y. His wife worked for the commander so whatever the commander did to me, this woman would see it and report it to her husband. Mr. Y gave me money so I could run away. As soon as I got the money, I threw my shirts into a bag and in the middle of the night I ran away.
I walked until I got to the district military command post in Denpasar at 2 in the morning. I wrote a letter that Mr. Y took when he was stationed in Timor-Leste. . . Before he left he said, "Robert, I'm going to leave you here." I told him I wanted to return to East Timor and he said, "Don't. You are already here . . . Finish junior and senior high school. That'll be great." . . . So I started fifth grade and finished high school there.

Communication with my family in Timor-Leste was broken after I graduated from high school in 1995. I ran off to Jakarta and began to meet some people from East Timor as the unrest there escalated in 1998. In 1998 I . . . got a job at Bank Bali . . . and I met Victor. We began to communicate and . . . I started getting to know East Timorese students who were studying [in Indonesia]. I finally learned Tetun . . . Whenever I met a student I'd send a letter back with him or her . . .
Finally [my family] got my letter and thankfully we could communicate, but we never met. Then there was a miracle, [When I first had a chance to return] I said I wasn't ready to go yet . . . perhaps the next time. . . . When this opportunity came, I had to make a decision. Being this old, I must meet my family. Because that's the land of our birth we can't forget it; we can't forget because we have blood relatives there.

Vilomena de Fatima Viana

Vilomena was just seven years old in 1979 when she was taken by a battalion commander. She was taken to live at the 703 District Military Command complex. Her relationship with her adoptive parents began to deteriorate and she was often scolded and beaten. She finally left.

I was taken from Timor-Leste in 1979. Mr. S. brought me and at first it was good, but after arriving there it was no longer comfortable. I married in 1994 and in 1998 I went home [to East Timor for a visit] with my husband. Until now our household has managed well. I am happy that I can return to Timor-Leste to see my parents and siblings. I'm happy. I am very grateful to all who have arranged for us to return home. My hope is that all goes smoothly between Indonesia and Timor-Leste so that so that sons and daughters of Timor-Leste can return home to their villages safely.

Roberto da Silva. Photo Sigit Pratama for AJAR, 2016.

Violemena Viana at her home. Photo by Sigit Pratama for AJAR, 2016.

Victor da Costa talking with his relatives. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Manuel Marito da Costa/Muhammad Yaqub

Yaqub was brought from Viqueque to Kalimantan around 1990-1991 by a soldier from Battalion 612. Currently he's married with children and lives in East Kalimantan. He works as a trader.

I had a happy childhood with my family in Ossu. We had rice paddies. The army began to come in 1974-1975. There was so much shooting at each other that the river flowed red. In 1992, I don't know exactly, but I was about 12 years old, I was taken away from East Timor. I didn't feel sad because I was given some medicine so I wouldn't be afraid. I was taken to Samarinda [Kalimantan] and enrolled in school. It wasn't until I was in high school that I began to think and realized that we'd been manipulated. I was really, really sad when Timor-Leste gained its independence, when all I wanted was to go to school so that I could develop. I began university, but didn't finish. I got strength from my friends at the point I wanted to go home but could not because there was so much unrest. I married in 2002 and that was when I was again motivated to live. I went to Malili [Sulawesi] to look for my family. I am happy because I get to meet my family. I want to hug and kiss my mama.

Yaqub embracing his mother. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.

Versimo da Costa

Saimo was taken to East Kalimantan by Battalion 623 Comp. C from Illiomar District. He worked as a TBO during the conflict in Timor-Leste. He currently lives with his wife in Banjar, East Kalimantan and works as a casual laborer. At a healing workshop in Bali prior to the May 2016 reunion visit to Timor-Leste, participants were invited to tell their stories. When it was Versimo's turn, he stood up, but found that he couldn't speak. So he sat down again. When he finally managed to speak, this was his story:

I was born in Iliomar in 1977. In 1988 my parents died. When I was little, I took care of water buffalo by the side of a river. I became a TBO when I was 10, before I had even been to school. In 1997 I left with a soldier from [Battalion] 623 who offered me a better life. I lived in a dormitory and lost contact with my family in Timor-Leste. I became a handyman. In 2000 I left the dormitory, started a family, and obtained an Indonesian identity card. I divorced in 2004 and my first child stayed with his mother. I remarried in 2006 and my second child was born in 2012. In 2015 I was happy to have contact with my family in Timor-Leste. I had to keep going back and forth to [offices] to arrange for my passport.
I had to borrow money to pay for it. The source of my strength is my enthusiasm to meet my family.

Reminiscing: A Conversation between Versimo da Costa/Saimo and Ido Hornay

During his reunion visit to his home village in Los Palos, Versimo/Saimo reminisced with his uncle, Ido Hornay.

Ido: Do you remember the past or not?

Saimo: I still remember it. I remember all of it.

Ido: Do you still remember the time you met Falintil?

Saimo: Ya, I remember. We were still little and scared to see people carrying guns. Some carried guns, some long machetes, and their hair was long and unkempt. And then they just disappeared. We didn't know where they went. That's what I remember.

Ido: We met Falintil twice. Once they ordered us to climb a sukun (breadfruit) tree to pick sukun fruits and roast them for them to eat. When we got to Dilofo, soldiers and civil defense officers beat us.

Saimo: I remember. [Once] we had to watch the corn until night so the cockatoos wouldn't eat it. But because we were coming back at night the civil defense officers and soldiers beat us.

Ido: Do you still remember when we watched water buffalo?

Saimo: I still remember. We had to go up and down the mountain looking for missing water buffalo.

Ido: Do you simply remember or do you ever cry?

Saimo: Sometimes tears fall. In my heart and mind the desire to return to Timor is always there.

Ido: Have you talked to your children and wife about someday returning to your home village? Have you and your wife discussed it? Can you sit and discuss this with your family there?

Saimo: I'll consider it when I'm back home. I may not immediately tell my wife and children the whole story. I need to ask my wife and children if they want to come or not. They probably won't want to live here, but they could come for one or two months to see what it's like for people here. That's what I'm thinking.

Versimo/Saimo speaking with his neighbour in front of his childhood home. Photo by Odino da Costa, 2016.

Versimo/Saimo speaking with his neighbour in front of his childhood home. Photo by Odino da Costa, 2016.

Gregorio Muslimin home again after 39 years. Photo by Isabelinha Pinto, 2016.

Gregorio Pinto/Muslimin Fernando

During the conflict, Gregorio was recruited as a TBO. When he was 14 years old, soldiers took him away from his village to Sulawesi. Since leaving Timor-Leste, Gregorio has never heard of his family's whereabouts.

In 1975 we could still play, but when Indonesia invaded that stopped. In 1975-1976 my family had to migrate. I joined the army in 1975 when I was 12 years old. In 1977, as a TBO, I was sent to Sulawesi. Even though my life was helter-skelter I still went to school, I followed the battalion. In 2015 I received a call [from Lina]. She said she was East Timorese. I asked her to send her photo. She sent one and it's the photo of a child of East Timor. That was when I knew they [others like me] were in Indonesia. Apparently I was not alone.

Herlando with his son. Photo by Sigit Pratama for AJAR, 2016.

Herculanus De Oliveira (Herlando)

In 1966 Herlando's father died. Later, several other relatives also died because of war and famine. Life became a heavy burden for Herlando after his father died. He and his family had to live in the forest because of the war. In 1977 at the age of 12, Herlando became a TBO in order to survive. He worked as a TBO for a year. From 1978 he lived in many different places and then, in 1980, left East Timor for Surabaya. In 1985 he moved to Jakarta. In 1997 Herlando returned to East Timor for a short visit, but has not been back since.

When I was five, my father died. I was one of nine siblings. It was very difficult for my mother. My mother remarried, and had two more children. When the war started, we ran to the mountains. We saw that our house, our traditional house, everything was an ocean of fire. The soldiers entered Bobonaro, and we were brought to Balibo.

In 1977 at the age of 12, I ended up as a TBO, working in Bobonaro and Marobo. I traveled to Atsabe and other areas. Then we were offered an opportunity to become members of the police or military. The second option was to travel to Java. I chose the latter. I thought that if I became a soldier I had to take an oath to die, and that I would be killing my own brothers.

I ended up going to Balibo, then Atambua working with a Chinese shopkeeper. I sold ice and bread around the town. Then we sold candlenut (kemiri) and banana in Kupang, and then loaded trucks with cement to sell back in Atambua. I ended up working in Ende, sending cattle to Jakarta. When I got to Jakarta, I told my boss I wasn't going back.

I feel so proud that we all have been able to return to Timor-Leste. My hope is that the governments of Indonesia and Timor-Leste will work closely to strengthen our relationship, so that we Timorese living abroad can visit our families easily.

Victor da Costa with his cousin. Photo by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

Versimo/Saimo at home with his family. Photo by Odino da Costa, 2016.

At home with their family in Indonesia. Photo by Sigit Pratama for AJAR, 2016.

At home with their family in Indonesia. Photo by Sigit Pratama for AJAR, 2016.

Epilogue

A hat and calendar at Roberto's home in Jakarta. Photo by Sigit Pratama for AJAR, 2016.

I will continue to search for and find more stolen children, no matter what happens. Of course, the search requires a lot of resources—we all know how big Indonesia is. Support is needed for transportation costs to remote areas and for the costs of phone calls to obtain information and track down people who know where the stolen children are. We face many challenges.

The first is where people live—far away from major cities and in remote areas that are difficult to reach quickly. Transportation costs are expensive for us, not only to locate them, but also for travelling to visit and support each other. Another challenge is getting permission for time off from their jobs to participate in the reunion visits. Some of them lost their jobs because they requested a week off to see their families!

Many survivors face economic difficulties. This is a problem shared by many of the stolen children because they have limited education and skills. We talk about this in every meeting we have --how to improve our economic situation. Whatever their story, what happened to them was not their choice or their fault. We hope that the governments of Indonesia and Timor-Leste can sit together to seriously discuss a solution to this problem. Perhaps we could be assisted by setting up a cooperative or by the provision of seed funding for small businesses so we can survive and send our children to higher education. We would also be greatly assisted by receiving free health care, etc.

Many girls experienced violence and sexual abuse when they were stolen. It is very difficult for them to tell their stories. It's also difficult to invite them to meet because they are tied to work in their homes. Many of the women survivors lack self-confidence and are closed emotionally. We must do more for the girls/women who were stolen children.

I have faced many obstacles in my searching work, but to date we have found more than seventy people who were stolen children, and there are thousands more. Of course this cannot be separated from the responsibility of Indonesia and Timor-Leste to take a greater role in supporting our work to search for the stolen children of Timor-Leste and reunite them with their families there.

We hope that we will find many more children who were taken from East Timor so they can be immediately reunited with their families in Timor-Leste. The need for support is urgent and we hope for concrete support and action by the two governments in this process. We need both moral as well as material support to help reunite families, including simplified immigration procedures and documentation requirements.

Nina

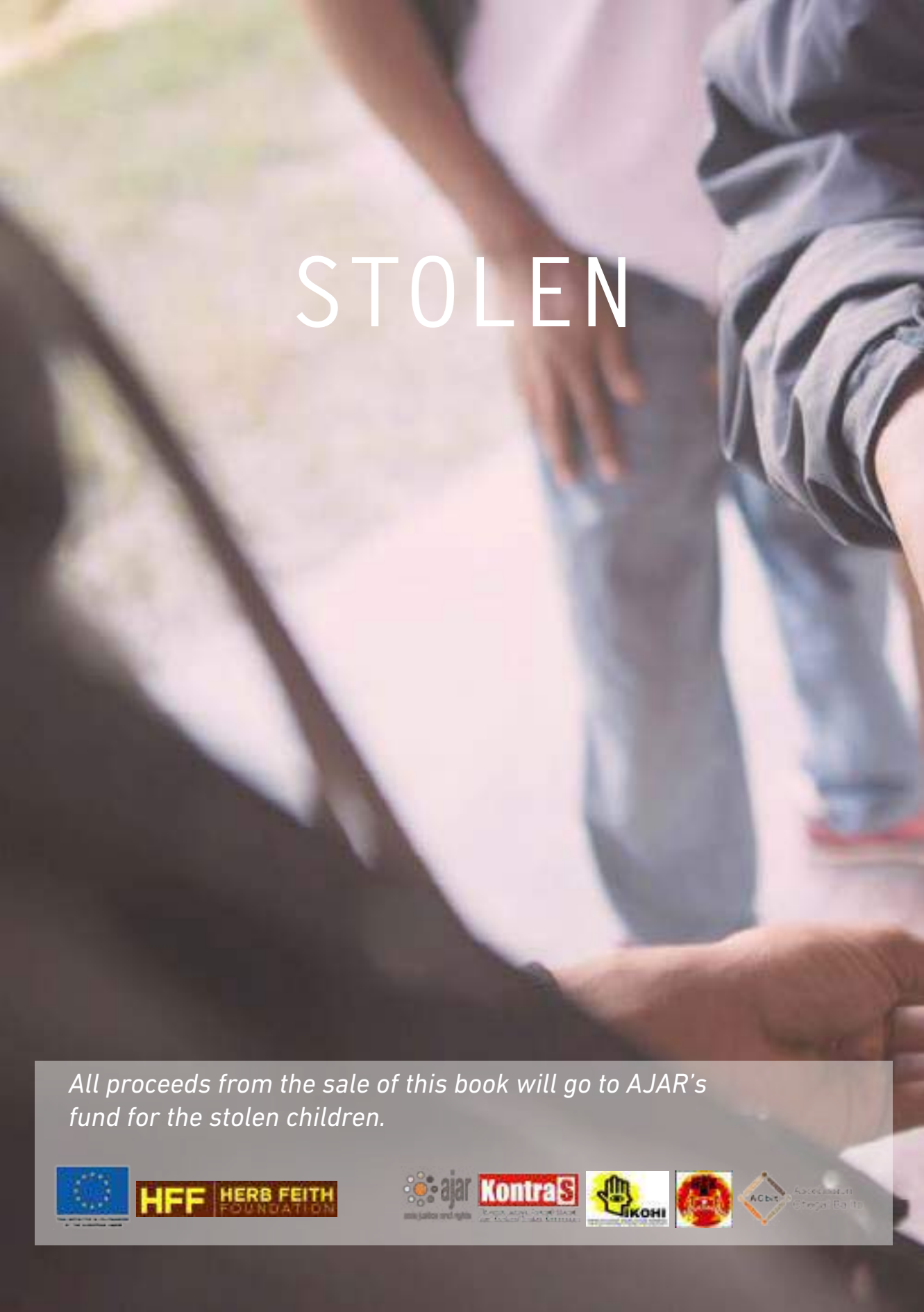
Collage of photos by Anne-Cécile Esteve for AJAR, 2013.

STOLEN

“Home is where one starts from...
In my end is my beginning.”

T.S Eliot

Timorese children playing in Dili. Photo by Michael Morgan for AJAR, 2016.



All proceeds from the sale of this book will go to AJAR's fund for the stolen children.