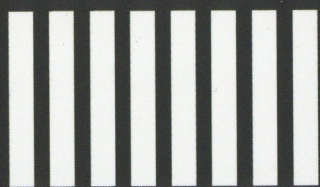


LAURA JUSTO · XAVIER JUSTO



# RENDEZVOUS WITH INJUSTICE

HOW A FAMILY SURVIVED HELL  
AFTER BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON  
THE 1MDB FINANCIAL SCANDAL

5

**"A LESSON FOR ANYONE WHO CARES  
ABOUT COMBATING CORRUPTION."**

– Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia





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HOW A **FAMILY** SURVIVED HELL  
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THE 1MDB FINANCIAL SCANDAL

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1013328

**LAURA JUSTO - XAVIER JUSTO**

Foreword by **Mahathir Mohamad**  
former Prime Minister of Malaysia



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
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“A real-life horror story, grippingly and movingly written, that deserves to be read by anyone opposed to corruption. Laura Justo’s battle to save her husband from languishing in a barbaric Thai prison is nothing short of heroic.”

— Clare Rewcastle Brown,  
author of *‘The Sarawak Report: The Inside Story of the 1MDB Expose’*

“An astonishing first-hand and no-frills account of both human greed and human resilience at its boldest. A must-read for bankers, lawyers, journalists and anyone curious to discover the inside story of one of the largest financial scandals ever. *Rendezvous with Injustice* is also a beautiful love story.”

— Florence de Changy,  
author of *‘The Disappearing Act: The Impossible case of MH370’*

“A riveting tale of love, betrayal, greed and fraud that takes the reader from London high-life to a Thai jail via Venezuela and Cannes. Honoré de Balzac wrote in the 19th Century that behind every great fortune lies a great crime. Laura and Xaxier Justo’s story shows that sentiment is just as true today.”

— Randeep Ramesh,  
*The Guardian*

“A captivating first-hand account from the whistleblower in the world’s largest corruption case. All persons faced with the prospect of taking on a role in a corrupt enterprise should read this book to make them understand the likely cost to their life.”

— Daniel Eriksson,  
CEO of *Transparency International*

## RENDEZVOUS WITH INJUSTICE

“By any definition, Xavier Justo is heroic, and his compelling story is one of courage and perseverance in the face of threats and intimidation by those hoping to prevent him from telling it.”

— *John Kucera,*  
*former US federal prosecutor*

“The story of a financial scandal and a story of love, the book also goes much deeper, showing that what’s normal and acceptable should never be let out of sight. It has all the potential of a blockbuster movie.”

— *Eelco Fiole,*  
*Adjunct Professor of Finance Ethics, University of Neuchâtel*

“Justo paid a huge price for saving Malaysia from the world’s largest kleptocracy.”

— *Tong Kooi Ong,*  
*Chairman of The Edge Media Group*

# Foreword

IN 2018, I had the opportunity to hear a direct account of Xavier Justo's painful experiences after he was incarcerated in 2015 for so-called "crimes" related to the 1Malaysia Development Berhad's investments in PetroSaudi.

Justo suffered while the real perpetrators walked freely along the corridors of power, unashamed and confident that their unfettered power would never be challenged and would ensure their crimes would go unpunished.

Mention of 1MDB in fact never fails to conjure negative connotations of greed, lust, lies, corruption and a total absence of moral values.

As courtrooms around the world have since unraveled, 1MDB was used to misappropriate Malaysian state funds on a colossal scale. The United States Department of Justice described it as "one of the world's greatest financial scandals."

Beyond the despicable acts perpetrated and the eye-watering sums of money stolen lies another facet to the story, however: the victimization of individuals.

These individuals include people who dared to blow the whistle on what was happening. Justo was among them.

I first heard Justo's name in news reports concerning 1MDB. Much of the coverage pinned blame on him for allegedly leaking information and for trying to blackmail his former employer. Luckily when I became Prime Minister I had the chance to meet Justo and hear his side of the

story. By then he had already been released from an 18-month prison sentence in Thailand.

I am much saddened by the fact that in the pursuit of covering up crimes, vulnerable individuals should be victimized and subjected to injustice. Families are made to suffer and are broken up.

It is worse when the perpetrators of crimes are in positions of authority. All too often, they have no qualms about abusing the powers vested in them to escape justice and cause others to suffer.

Modernity and the advancement of technology should make us more civil to one another. Unfortunately they have turned some of us into barbarians whose only motivations are greed and lust. What a contradiction.

I do hope that Justo's experience can serve as a lesson for anyone who cares about combating corruption. His story, as documented in this book, should serve as a reminder that in our midst there are monsters who will look for any opportunity to increase their own wealth and power.

When faced with such monsters, we can either stand up to them and slay them, or we can retreat to our comfort zones, ignore them and continue with our lives as best we can.

Of course, the second option only serves to allow these monsters to commit their crimes with impunity — and at some point our lives will be affected anyway.

Obviously, Justo chose the first option, and today we are hopeful that his efforts can help to bring about justice in the biggest case of financial fraud the world has ever seen.

I wish Justo and his family all the very best.

— *Mahathir Mohamad,*  
*former Prime Minister of Malaysia*

# Introduction

MILLIONS OF WORDS have been published, in thousands of articles, about the undoing of the 1 Malaysia Development Berhad — a national wealth fund, better known simply as 1MDB, that from 2009 was used effectively as the personal piggy bank of a cast of unscrupulous individuals operating both in Malaysia and internationally. Less focus has been given to how the scandal came to light, and about how a Swiss family suffered unforeseen and shocking consequences for exposing it.

Since 2015, the full extent of the corruption involved in what ranks as one of the most colossal swindles in history has become gradually clearer, like the digital image of a vast tapestry slowly depixelating. Few outside Malaysia would have known or cared about the fund's existence before reports began to emerge of billions of dollars vanishing from its accounts and allegations arose that the money had been used to enrich Najib Razak, the country's then Prime Minister, and to fund the playboy lifestyle in the United States of 1MDB's Gatsby-like alleged mastermind, Jho Low. But when a financial scandal involves such purportedly unethical characters — not to mention a modern-day Marie Antoinette figure in Najib's wife, Rosmah Mansor, the complicity of private bankers, the bankrolling of a blockbuster Martin Scorsese movie (“The Wolf of Wall Street”) about venality in the world of finance, and the attentions of investigators across Asia, Europe and the United States — the world tends to pay attention.

It is now believed that a total of around \$4.5 billion was embezzled from 1MDB, while a Malaysian government report has put the fund's

outstanding debts at \$7.8 billion. But what did it take for these numbers to see the light of public exposure? How did the scam's conspirators manage to pull the wool over the eyes of banks, regulators and auditors only to have the details splashed all over the world's media and for the US Department of Justice to spend years hunting down their misappropriated assets?

It's clear from investigations in Malaysia that questions were being asked by certain executives at 1MDB — primarily about the lack of transparency in its accounts — from the company's earliest days. Suspicions were also rife among the nation's independent media that something was awry. However, the pivotal moment in the fate of 1MDB came in early 2015, when members of this small faction of independent publishers and journalists met with Xavier Andre Justo... and he found himself faced with a choice: whether or not to give them the evidence they said they needed to expose the fraud being perpetrated on the Malaysian people.

Around the time of 1MDB's inception, Justo had worked in London for PetroSaudi, "an oil services and production company" which had loose ties to the Saudi royal family and is thought to have leveraged those associations to win exploration contracts in Latin America and elsewhere. It so happened that PetroSaudi's owners also knew the mysterious Jho Low — well enough, at least, to help him divert a major tranche of 1MDB cash out of Malaysia in a scheme involving a supposed 1MDB-PetroSaudi joint venture. Justo didn't know any of this while he was working for PetroSaudi, but after leaving the company in acrimonious circumstances, in the summer of 2011 he came into possession of a copy of its network server, a piece of hardware that contained thousands of files pointing to fraud on an eye-popping scale. Initially he sat on it; however, in 2015, after he had met a British journalist named Clare Rewcastle Brown and some well-connected Malaysians who were able to put his evidence in context for him, everything changed — and he opted to give them the PetroSaudi data they wanted without asking for recompense. In doing so,

he set off events that were to have untold repercussions not only for those incriminated and for Malaysia, but for himself and his family, too.

If the PetroSaudi-1MDB arrangement involved manipulation and deception, aspects of what came next are perhaps even more grievous.

In *Rendezvous with Injustice*, you will discover details of this scandal-of-the-century drama which have been somewhat less widely rehearsed than the tales of Jho Low's excesses. These include claims of some jaw-droppingly ruthless actions taken by PetroSaudi's Patrick Mahony and Tarek Obaid, and by others including a former police officer who seemingly masqueraded as a current Scotland Yard detective: actions whose consequences Xavier and Laura Justo are living with to this day.

A story, in part, about their devotion to one another through adversity — this book offers a powerful testimony to Xavier's resilience and Laura's indomitable courage in the face of intimidation and kangaroo justice. It also takes a clear-eyed view of what it means to be a whistleblower, and refuses to shrink from describing the difficulties inherent in “doing the right thing” when the people you're blowing the whistle on seem capable of going to any lengths — aided and abetted by expensive lawyers and PR hitmen — to protect themselves. As Laura writes, the book contains all the elements of an outlandish thriller novel: “Billions stolen from a country that badly needed the money by its own prime minister and a small band of crooks; drugs, decadence and gangster-like behavior; twisted lawyers; the scapegoating of an innocent man; and at the center of it all, me, a young mother alone with her child and living in fear.”

The book's lengthy gestation can be explained in part by the slow pace of justice in the various jurisdictions in which 1MDB's activities have come under legal scrutiny. The Justos are still awaiting the outcome of a Swiss investigation following a complaint they filed against Obaid and Mahony in 2017. Xavier is also the subject of a separate investigation in Switzerland over allegations, which he strongly denies, of industrial espionage in relation to the PetroSaudi data he handed to journalists in 2015.

## RENDEZVOUS WITH INJUSTICE

In August 2022, Najib Razak — who was ousted from office in 2018 — began a 12-year prison sentence in Malaysia after losing his final appeal against conviction on seven counts of abuse of power, money laundering and criminal breach of trust. The following month, Rosmah was also found guilty of corruption and sentenced to 10 years in jail, although she has appealed her conviction and remained free on bail at time of writing. Earlier in 2022, the former Goldman Sachs banker Roger Ng was convicted by a US jury on charges of helping to embezzle and launder billions of dollars from 1MDB and bribery of foreign officials. Tim Leissner, who had been Ng's boss, pleaded guilty to similar charges in 2018, and in 2020 Goldman paid nearly \$3bn in fines.

Lawsuits have also been filed in Malaysia and the United States against Jho Low; in Malaysia against some 1MDB officials; and in Malaysia, as well as Switzerland, against Obaid and Mahony. Most of those implicated deny any wrongdoing, while some — including Jho Low — are fugitives. Whether the individuals accused of putting Xavier and Laura Justo through the worst experience of their lives will ever stand trial remains an open question.

— *Kenny Hodgart, Editor*  
*January 2023*

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# *Prologue*

XAVIER

## **A LAST MOMENT OF FREEDOM**

MONDAY, 22 JUNE 2015. It's 6am on Koh Samui, a small island in the Gulf of Thailand famous for its stunning beaches and exclusive resorts, and I'm ready to set off on a 100-kilometer bike ride. Early mornings are the best time to go out: it's still reasonably cool and the island is asleep. I've had my breakfast and our dogs have been fed too.

I get on my Cervelo P5, a bike designed specifically for triathlons — those who know it will appreciate why — and head out for three hours of sweet suffering.

At the age of almost 50, I've just learned to love sport. Having a beautiful wife and an eight-month-old baby motivates you to stay in shape, but that's only part of it. With time and training, fitness has become an addiction: being physically sore and mentally tough are my daily pleasure.

The triathlete community of Koh Samui has also been a huge motivating factor, and I'll be forever grateful to my friends Laurent, Alex, Billy, Stephen and others for pushing me and sharing my toils and personal triumphs. This kind of training strengthens the body and hardens the

soul — two things that will undeniably help me during the 547 days of pain and suffering that I'm about to recount to you in this book.

I've signed up for an Ironman triathlon — in November, in Australia — and right now I'm in the preparation phase. Next week I have an intensive training regime planned on the Thai island of Phuket, which happens to be one of the biggest triathlon centers in the world. To be honest, my old friends in Geneva would hardly believe this version of me. I was never a sportsman; I'd always preferred simply to watch football or Formula 1 from the safety of my sofa, equipped only with the remote control.

After returning from my bike ride, I have a three-kilometer swim scheduled, and then I plan to spend the remainder of the day resting and waiting for a visit from the Thai Immigration Department about the annual renewal of my work permit. My wife Laura and I are building a resort in Koh Samui and it's almost finished. The project has taken a long time and cost us a lot of money, but we're confident the results are going to be magnificent.

Laura and our little boy Xander are currently in Geneva visiting family on holiday and I'm due to join them in a fortnight's time to celebrate Laura's birthday. I call Laura in the afternoon to say hello and talk to my son. The conversation is brief. I tell her I'll call her back in an hour or so once the immigration officers leave.

All told, I'm feeling great. In fact, I feel like I'm the master of my world. I have a dream life, an incredible wife and an extraordinary son. I've achieved everything I ever wanted to.

Around 3pm, our cleaning lady, Pon, calls my attention. I look out the window and am surprised to see about ten cars and 20 people standing outside our house. The military took power in Thailand about a year ago in a coup d'état, and my first thought is that the new government must have tightened controls for obtaining work permits.

I walk out of the front door and an officer approaches me and says hello. I reach out to shake his hand, but instead — out of nowhere —

another man comes up to me, grabs my arms and handcuffs me. I'm in utter shock.

They push me back into the house and tell me they're police. They then hand me a document written in Thai and tell me to sign it. My first confused thought is how exactly they expect me to do so with my hands cuffed behind my back.

Another ten or so policemen make their way into the house, all dressed in civilian clothes. If they hadn't shown their badges, they could all easily have passed for local *tuk-tuk* drivers. None of them seem to speak English. I ask Pon to try to translate what they are talking about, but they tell her to be quiet.

The handcuffs are very tight, and I start yelling. The guy in charge orders another officer to put new handcuffs on me, this time with my hands in front of me. The officer puts these new cuffs around my wrists so tightly that I start bleeding quite profusely — at which point they at least have the decency to put on looser-fitting ones. (Pon will keep the bloodied set of handcuffs and show them to Laura when she returns to Thailand in August.)

Before turning the place upside down, the officers next look for the electric switches to turn the power off on our security cameras so that nothing is recorded. They search the house for at least two hours, taking computers, tablets, phones and other items.

Finally, one of them speaks to me in pretty good English. I figure he'd acted dumb just to put more stress on me. He tells me he is an officer of the Crime Suppression Division (CSD) of the Royal Thai Police, and that his name is Pongsawai. This man will play a huge part in what's coming for me.

After searching every corner of the house, they put me in the back seat of one of the cars and tell me they're taking me to the police station in Nathon, the nearest town.

I have no way of guessing it but this will in fact be the last time I see our house. My arrest signals the end of our dream life in Thailand — and the beginning of a long nightmare. Never again will I see this beautiful island where Laura and I got married, nor our Thai friends, nor even the pets and animals we've grown so attached to (all save for our dog Veggie, who will have the dubious honor of continuing to share in our tribulations). By extension, I will not see the completion of the resort project in which we have invested so much time and money.

I'm told I must go to the station to fill in some papers, and that they want me to sign a document stating that I am guilty of blackmail. Blackmail? This is all news to me. I refuse, naturally, and tell them I want to speak with my lawyer. To my astonishment, I'm not allowed to call one. I start to feel increasingly bewildered.

The person in charge of the Nathon police post tells me he can bring in some lawyers he knows. Since I have no other options, I accept his offer. These lawyers will later turn out to be small-time crooks, as is often the case in the legal profession in Thailand.

The lawyers arrive, a man and a woman, both in their 40s. They look friendly and are very nice to me. They read the documents to me, in Thai, and tell me I'm only accused of a minor offense — in fact, they're 100 percent sure I will be released on bail in Bangkok. Since the supposed offense is said to have been committed in the capital city, that's where I'll have to go to sort things out. In the Thai documents I can see names that are familiar to me — “PetroSaudi” and “Patrick Mahony” — but I can't understand the connection to any crime I could possibly have committed.

The lawyers ask me for money — for their fees and for my release. I naively give them my Thai credit card and the codes they need to use it... which turns out to be a big mistake, as they subsequently empty my account.

I'm to be taken to Bangkok in the morning, which means spending the night locked up in a cell — it feels more like a cage — outside the station. It's filled with cockroaches, bugs and rubbish.

Pon comes to see me together with Rot, the construction foreman we've been employing. They bring me food and drink, because when you're arrested here you get nothing from your jailers. Pon starts crying and Rot offers to give me money for my bail: a sum of about \$10,000, his entire fortune. I'm moved by their kindness. I decline his generous offer and thank them both.

I ask the duty manager at the police station if I can call my wife, but he refuses. Rot knows him, however, and the manager reluctantly allows me to talk to Laura through speakerphone on Rot's phone. I explain the situation to her as calmly as I can. I try to reassure her that everything is under control — I tell her not to worry, that it's a minor offense. I'll go up to Bangkok the next day to pay the bail, I say, then I'll come back to Koh Samui on the evening flight.

She is crying. She is in shock. I reassure her again. I am 100 percent convinced I will be back the following day — because I haven't done anything wrong. It's all a mistake.

HOW CAN YOU go from being on the top of the world one moment to the depths of hell the next? What events and decisions shape your path? To understand how this all came about, how we ended up in this nightmare situation, I'll have to start from the beginning.



## *Prologue*

LAURA

# FAREWELL TO THE CAREFREE LIFE

IT'S THE BEGINNING of June 2015 and I'm on holiday in Geneva, together with my son Xander. He was born in Thailand, so it's a chance to introduce him to all of my friends and relatives back home in Switzerland. Xavier is preparing for an Ironman race in Australia and is staying in Koh Samui to train.

I'm having a great holiday and enjoying seeing all my friends and family again. I have missed them enormously. I spend lots of time by Lake Lemman in Geneva, where I indulge in one of my greatest passions: wake-surfing. I'm often to be found at Le Reposoir, a small harbor, where I hang out at the wake-surfing club there, EasyWake. My dad also has a little boat, and we love to take it out on the lake to go swimming. I even introduce Xander to water sports, which he loves.

We spend time too in our little secret garden at my parents' home in Grand-Saconnex. It's where I grew up and where they still live, and it's the best place I know to have a barbecue.

We go for walks in the forest and by the lake. I also go with my mother to visit some flea markets — her passion. I am filled with happiness, love,

friendship and a sense of safety. Surrounded by my family for the holidays, I feel like I'm living a dream life. I couldn't be happier.

We miss Xavier, though, and he misses us very much. I feel like going back early to be with him, and I tell him I can change my tickets and shorten my stay in Geneva. But he says to wait: he'll be coming to join us in just a few short weeks.

In mid-June, I meet a friend of Xavier's. This guy happens to know a certain Tarek Obaid — a friend and former employer of Xavier's. He tells me he has heard from someone that Xavier should be careful, because Tarek is "planning something against him."

I call Xavier on Skype to warn him, but he jokingly brushes off the warning. Instead, he makes fun of me by pretending to be under arrest as we speak. He doesn't take me seriously.

Two days later, on 22 June, I speak to Xavier briefly on the phone early in the morning — but when I try to reach him later he doesn't answer. I feel increasingly uneasy, and I begin to fear something has happened to him. I tell my mum that I think maybe he has had an accident, but in reality I suspect it's something else. In the early afternoon, as I am walking with Xander and my mum in the park of the Château de Pentis in Geneva, not far from my parents' house, I receive a call from a Thai number.

I pick up and I hear Xavier on the other end: "My love," I burst out. "Are you alright?" He answers me: "Darling, don't worry... but I am in detention at the police station on Koh Samui." It's hard to hear him, and he tells me it's Pon, our cleaning lady, who is holding the mobile phone — because he is in a cell.

I feel myself trembling. From my meeting with Xavier's friend, I have a pretty good notion of why he is there. He quickly explains to me that Tarek and his business associate Patrick Mahony have filed a complaint against him in Thailand, but adds that everything will be sorted out very

quickly. He says he'll go to Bangkok the following day with the police to get bail, and that everything will be fine.

I'm scared and I'm crying. Little do I know that this is just the beginning of the hardest and longest period of suffering that I could ever have imagined.

“A riveting tale of love, betrayal, greed and fraud.”

– Randeep Ramesh, *The Guardian*

“A real-life horror story, grippingly and movingly written,  
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– Clare Rewcastle Brown, author of

‘The Sarawak Report: The Inside Story of the 1MDB Exposé’



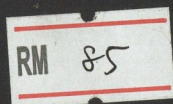
What happens when you blow the lid on a financial scam involving playboy businessmen, the prime minister of a country, and the laundering of billions of dollars? For Xavier Justo, it meant being thrown in a sordid Thai prison as the mother of all cover-ups swung into action. For his wife Laura, left alone with their infant son, it meant finding the courage to fight intimidation, manipulation and malicious lies.

*Rendezvous with Injustice* is an account of the 1MDB scandal that focuses on the real human cost to the people who dared to expose it. It’s a story that involves financial chicanery, crooked lawyers, greed, decadence and even a fake Scotland Yard detective. Ultimately, though, it’s a cry for truth and justice — and a testament to human resilience and tenacity.

“An astonishing first-hand and no-frills account of both human greed and human resilience at its boldest. It’s also a beautiful love story.”

– Florence de Changy, author of

‘The Disappearing Act: The Impossible case of MH370’



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