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## **The courage of Carol Stingel**

EDITORIAL

Mike Mullins



The news last week was that Geoff Clark had finally been nailed. A Melbourne jury found that the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission chairman led two pack rapes in Warrnambool, Victoria, 36 years ago.

But the story was really about the courage of Carol Stingel, the woman who brought the case against Clark. She successfully claimed damages for the loss, suffering and pain she believes she suffered because of the attacks she alleged.

The final outcome of the case is of less significance than the fact that it actually went to court. Mr Clark plans an appeal, and it's quite possible that the appeal will be upheld and he will be vindicated in the eyes of the law.

However such an outcome would not detract from the empowerment she experienced in bringing the case to court, and having the jury—and the public—hear and accept her harrowing story.

"I have power, I've got my power back, I've got myself back, I've got my life back," she said outside the court.

She explained that she realised when she began the action, Geoff Clark still had control over her, but that now she has taken back control.

The sense of personal affirmation that comes with victory was clearly shared by other victims of Geoff Clark, with reports that "about half a dozen" people came forward with fresh claims within a day of the court decision.

But it goes further than that. People all around Australia who have been violated in many other ways are now realising that empowerment is within their grasp. These include victims of domestic violence, and workplace and schoolyard bullying.

Such people invariably feel bad about themselves. They believe the negative things their tormentors say about them. They don't confide in anybody who might convince them that they're OK and the bully is the one with the problem. Keeping their pain to themselves, they remain powerless.

Carol Stingel has shown that it doesn't have to be that way.

## All are one before the law

OPINION

Frank Brennan

The 40th anniversary of the last state-authorized execution in Australia has recently passed. We are all the better as a society for having abolished capital punishment. I remember well that fateful day on the 3rd February, 1967. I was twelve years old, having just been promoted to the large dining room at my country boarding school. Breakfast started at 7.45am. The din of 300 boys at table was always deafening. For the first and only time in my five years at the school, a handful of senior boys called for a minute's silence at 8am to mark the hanging of Ronald Ryan in Melbourne Jail.

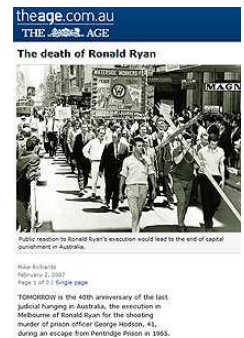
As Ryan dropped, you could hear a pin drop in faraway Toowoomba, Queensland. The recollection still brings goose bumps. This was wrong. It should never happen again. How could a nation do this? All Australian jurisdictions subsequently abolished the death penalty. My adolescent moral sensibilities found resonance in public debate, law reform and policy change. Values and principles mattered.

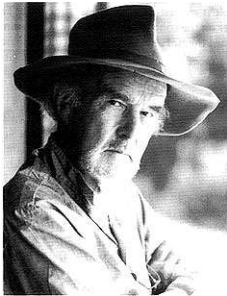
Ten years later, I had studied law and politics in Brisbane. The Queensland Premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen announced, "The day of the political street march is over." He told student activists not to bother applying to the police for a permit; they would not get one. For two years, police then exercised their discretion poorly, in accordance with the premier's wishes.

Two thousand people went to the barricades and were arrested. Ultimately there was a change of government and the law was amended, guaranteeing the right of public assembly. Public political protest bore results. Arguments about civil liberties affected the policies of at least one of the major political parties. Moral wrongs could be put right. The actions and opinions of young people mattered. Even in the wake of Sir Joh's populist politics, values and principles mattered.

In hindsight, we give all but universal approval to legal changes such as the abolition of the death penalty and the recognition of the right to assemble peaceably. But we often overlook how outspoken and unpopular a minority of citizens had to be in order to enliven the public conscience, how courageous individuals had to be so that they might be true to their conscience, regardless of the prevailing orthodoxy of the establishment or public opinion of the day.

Once we move beyond the platitudes of justice and peace, how are we to act in society?





At the 1988 Yale Conference on Australian Literature, the late Professor Manning Clark lamented,

“A turbulent emptiness has seized the inhabitants of the ancient continent. No one has anything to say. Like other European societies, Australians once had a faith and a morality. Then they had a morality without a faith — the decades of the creedless puritans. Now most of the legal restraints of the old morality have been taken off the statute book. Everything is up for examination.”

The pragmatic, consequentialist ethic in contemporary Australia has long wreaked havoc on outsiders not meriting our respect, but now we risk it turning on us. Just think of our tolerance of long term immigration detention without court order or supervision, or even without independent bureaucratic oversight, until Cornelia Rau (one of us) ended up in the bureaucratic web of detention (for the good of national security and border protection.)

Here in Australia, we now jump too quickly from talk of Australian values (which at their best are usually universal humane values wrapped in the flag) to an assessment of consequences. Our politicians are now fond of telling us that those of us who are unelected may have a role in discussing values, but then it is up to the elected politicians simply to assess the consequences of a law or policy, presuming that it is the consequences alone that will determine the rightness or wrongness of the action. Over the summer break, we have been witnessed a spirited discussion between Tony Abbott and Kevin Rudd about the place of religion in law and politics. Last weekend, Tony Abbott told the young people in his party,

“Preferring that troops not be sent overseas to fight, that environmental benefits did not have to be weighed against economic cost or that unauthorised arrivals might not need to be detained is hardly a uniquely Christian characteristic. It’s human nature to avoid decisions of this type. Christians are called to seek the good in people but not to ignore human weakness or assume evil has ceased to exist. That’s why there is no single, authoritative Christian position on the Iraq war, climate change, or border protection. On these issues, what mostly matters is what’s likely to work out for the best in an imperfect world.”

No, on an issue like war it is not mostly a matter of what’s likely to work out for the best in an imperfect world. We are required to judge the morality of war not just by its consequences. There are conditions to be fulfilled for a just war, principles to be applied — conditions which have never been fulfilled in the case of the Iraq war, and principles which have not been articulated or distinguished by government. This is not a war which is becoming wrong because of its consequences.

It is a war which was wrong from the beginning. The novel US doctrine of pre-emption is contrary to the longstanding principles of just war espoused by Christians, humanists and other religious persons over the centuries. While our government joined a ‘coalition of the willing’ to remove weapons of mass destruction, we now know that the captain of the coalition was committed to regime change whether or not there were weapons of mass destruction. (Former deputy Secretary of Defence) Paul Wolfowitz has since admitted, “The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason.”

We cannot just jump from values to consequences. "What's likely to turn out for the best in an imperfect world... is not simply what is best for the majority or what the electorate will wear, regardless of the cost to the minority or to the individual without government or majority support.



We have an obligation to remind our fellow citizens, including our elected politicians, that there are principles which preclude some courses of action no matter what the political or utilitarian calculus.

Our religious convictions help to inform our values. But it is not simply a matter of then choosing between outcomes on the basis of consequences. From our values, we derive certain principles which are to be applied regardless of the consequences of an action. Our social obligation is to do the hard intellectual work involved in articulating principles derived from values, then reconciling conflicting principles and conflicting rights with reasoning which is transparent and public.

Even if the security of Australia were to be enhanced by detaining David Hicks in inhumane circumstances for five years without trial, that does not make his detention right. Lawyers who have strenuously opposed his long term detention without trial are not simply playing politics or making utilitarian calculations about the short term, maximum personal satisfaction of the majority of citizens. They are standing up for a principle which is derived from our values — a principle which is to be respected if we are to maintain a democratic nation-state under the rule of law.

Persons should not be detained for years on end without charge and without trial. Persons should not be detained in circumstances which could provide decision makers with an incentive to convict so as to justify, excuse or rationalise long term detention. Persons should not be detained in circumstances likely to render them psychiatrically abused, with the pre-trial detention being designed to be more punishing than humane punishment for even the most egregious of crimes. These are principles to be espoused fearlessly by our government for the protection of all Australians whether they be you, me or David Hicks, and wherever they may be.

Let's pray that, as a profession, lawyers will well serve their clients, and our shared legal institutions, and that as legally trained citizens, they might assist the nation to conduct itself according to principles informed by values consistent with our finest religious traditions. Enunciating principles and resolving the conflict of principles to our intellectual satisfaction, and in accordance with conscience, we might ensure that before the law, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Galatians 3:28).

*This text is an edited extract of an address for the opening of the law year at St David's Cathedral, Hobart, 2 February 2007 .*

## What's missing in Rudd-Abbott debate on faith in politics

COLUMNS

Summa Theologiae

Andrew Hamilton

**THE AUSTRALIAN**

Abbott attacks Rudd on religion

By Andrew Hamilton  
The religious Tony Abbott has attacked Kevin Rudd over the role of religion in politics during the Opposition Leader's bid to ouster Christian faith voting Labor.  
Mr Abbott, a devout Catholic and former student priest, also suggests non-voters' opposition to his and the Government's religious creation policy can be justified by Christians.  
In a speech to the Young Liberals federal convention in Melbourne today, Mr Abbott, who has been accused by Labor of rejecting his own faith into government policy, took religion from a role in both sides of politics.  
Mr Abbott, Mr Rudd, 5000 word essay about faith in politics, published last October, which suggested politicians should take religion more seriously.  
"The only senior politician who has tried to incorporate God for political purposes is Malcolm Turnbull," Mr Abbott said in his speech today.  
"... he's been right for his whole career... that's the starting point with Christianity in a democracy of social justice, such as the mission to make Christians the ruling class."  
Mr Abbott said he respects Mr Rudd's Christian faith, pointing out that the Labor leader was the minister of a parliamentary prayer group that met on Monday nights in Canberra when Parliament was sitting.

In a recent speech to a Young Liberals gathering Tony Abbott responded to Kevin Rudd. Mr. Rudd had written in the *Monthly* magazine about the relationship between Christian faith and politics. The speech also indicated that the debate on this issue will centralise the exigencies of politics, but leave in soft focus the logic of faith.

Mr Rudd used the example of the heroic German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer to insist that Christian faith has a proper place in public life, and to claim authority for an approach that identifies the core of faith with Jesus' commitment to the marginalised, vulnerable and oppressed. The Church's function is "to give power to the powerless, voice to those who have none, and to point to the great silences in our national discourses where otherwise there are no natural advocates." He contrasts this view of the Church's role with other approaches current in Australian public life.

From this perspective, he reflects on the debate in Australia between neo-liberals and progressives who focus respectively on the individual and the community. He identifies the present Government's policies with the former, and claims that in its embrace of the Christian right it uses Christian faith for political purposes. He then offers a critique of government policies.

Mr. Abbott does not respond theoretically, but by critique. He claims that Mr. Rudd also uses Christian faith for political purposes by offering a view of Christianity tailored to support Labor policies. His view emphasises social morality, while neglecting issues of personal morality like abortion and stem cell research. He implies that the strong electoral support for the Coalition by church goers has inspired Mr. Rudd's interest in Christian faith.

He also challenges Mr. Rudd to embody his rhetoric in policies, claiming that most Christian voters are concerned with issues of personal morality rather than with war or industrial relations. On issues like war and asylum seekers, there is no one view among Christians. They require a prudential, conscientious decision by politicians.

Both article and response show how Christian faith can be brought into political debate. In revealing the different ways in which politicians can use faith, they leave silent the ways in which Christian faith sees political life, and so how Christians might evaluate politicians' claims. They do not explain why Christianity has a personal and social morality of a particular shape, why that morality includes social justice as well as charity, and what space Christian faith allows to conscience.

These questions demand a more complex account of Christian faith than that provided in Mr. Rudd's emphasis on Jesus' practice or in Mr Abbott's emphasis on moral law. Such an account will recognise that God is the main actor. God loves the world and each human being in it, and wants a flourishing world in which the dignity of each person is respected. In a broken world, this means beginning with the most neglected. The life and death of Jesus

Christ represent both a beginning of wholeness, and a way of life that expresses it.

The vision of the world offered in Christian faith is based on God's love for each human being. In this vision, it matters that in our personal lives we act as if each human life is precious. It also matters that our public policies and practices we also respect the value of each human life, beginning with the most neglected.

In Christian faith personal morality and social morality are woven together seamlessly. The details of a moral code are fleshed out by asking what is entailed by considering ourselves and all other human beings as equally precious. This is the premise on which, for example, opposition both to abortion and to the Iraq war is based.



Christian faith requires both personal charity and social justice. God wants the world to flourish in a way that benefits each human being, beginning with the weakest. Because institutionalised relationships are normally shaped in part by greed and fear, they form a world in which people are marginalised. To help the world to flourish, then, we need social policies that dealt with these distortions. Personal charity is indispensable, but is not enough.

Mr. Abbott and Mr. Rudd both appeal to the role of conscience. They agree in insisting that politicians must base their decisions on what they see as the common good, irrespective of the position taken by the churches. Mr. Rudd also invokes conscience when considering issues like abortion and embryonic research, while Mr. Abbott does so in respect of issues of war, industrial relations and social morality.

The place of conscience in Christian faith is complex. Conscience is the reasoned moral judgment we make about what we should do in particular situations. It is sovereign in the sense that we must do what we believe to be right. Acting conscientiously, however, guarantees that we act rightly. It does not mean that what we did was right or that it expressed what is entailed in the unique value of each human being. If we act in a way that regards the welfare of some human beings as expendable in the interests of others, our decision may be blameless. But it will be inconsistent with Christian faith. The fact that we then justify our decision theoretically does not make our theory a legitimate version of Christian faith. This is true both of both social and personal morality.

Politicians certainly must work within the framework of a secular society. We might also expect that they will commend their personal vision of the good society, and that if they are Christians, that this will be based on a conviction that each human being, beginning with the weakest, is precious.

It is good that Mr. Rudd has opened a discussion of the relationship between Christian faith and politics. It will be important that both sides of that relationship are represented accurately in the discussion.



## The pulsating cut and thrust of international Scrabble

COLUMNS

By the way

Brian Matthews

What with the Ashes being a let down, the One Day Internationals more interminable than ever and Federer just too bloody good, the serious student of TV sport has been shamefully sabotaged this summer. There was beach cricket, of course, but don't start me on that. Then suddenly, bereft, contemplating alcoholic comfort, and idly browsing, I came across a flyer for the National Scrabble Masters Tournament.

Interested as always in the arcane, I sought out the Tournament organiser, a woman who, according to the website, was called Ann Smith, but who told me when we met that she'd changed her name to Ann Xafz [giving her a basic score of 23 but a blinding 69 on a triple word spot in those games where you're allowed to use your surname]. I naturally deferred to this adjustment and thereafter endangered the wellbeing of my larynx by twisting it round the labyrinthine corners posed by the words 'Ms Xafz'.

"Well, Ms Xafz," I began, "tell me about the tournament. Do you have Scrabble enthusiasts coming here from all over the world?"

"Oh, indubitably," [24 with triple word score on the 'b'] she said, "And just while we're on that, I'd like to point out that there are 109 two-letter words in the English language. Twenty-seven of these are familiar, like 'it', 'in' and 'to', but among the eighty-two others are incantations, (Om), mathematical symbols, (Pi), and various contractions that can be highly controversial if deployed [basic score of fifteen but go for triple letter score on the 'y'] in competition."

"I suppose," I probed, "that for an audience, Scrabble is a bit like Chess — long periods of silent concentration, the drama of waiting."

"Well, I don't think Scrabblers see much drama in waiting," she speculated. "The best players tend to be aggressive about slow opponents. If time wasting is suspected, what is known as the Rintoul-Bollock manoeuvre is sometimes employed in tense finals competition." "The Rintoul-Bollock manoeuvre being ...]"



Ms Xafz gave me a pitying look. It appears that a player named Thelonius Rintoul-Bollock, the Republic of Vultava's sole international standard Scrabbler, was in sight of victory in the 1968 Scrabble Scramble at Scunthorpe, when his opponent attempted to run a word across Rintoul-Bollock's 'zismathoid' [48 with double-word scores on the first 'z' and the 'd'].

This bloke apparently hesitated for long minutes until Thelonius initiated the ploy that bears his name, which was to lean across the board and belt him on the nose. The board became sanguineous [36 on triple word spot], but Rintoul-Bollock was disqualified anyway because of a dispute about the authenticity of the word ...æzizmathoid... . He maintained that it was a medical condition in which the sufferer imagined he or she had turned into a



musical instrument — usually a zither. The judges disagreed. “Would you say Scrabble is ordinarily a contact sport?” “Rintoul-Bollock”, she retorted doggedly, “also contributed to the game’s development, pointing out that the suffix ‘-oid’ is a particularly useful and productive tool. For example — “

“You mean, as in, ‘Oid prefer to read a book’”, I suggested, relieved to be able to make a contribution. “ — humanoid, mucinoid, actinoid, petaloid, factoid, plasmoid”, intoned Ms Xazf, her suddenly glazed and popping eyes proclaiming perhaps a malfunctioning thyroid. “Haemorrhoid?” I suggested, pleased to be in the spirit of things, but Ms Smarty-69-triple-word-score came over all genteel on me, objecting to obscene or ‘doubtful’ words in competition. “There must be some great anecdotes to emerge from the clashes of Scrabblers at the elite level?” I adumbrated.

An expression of intense boredom suffused her features which, I had already noticed, had a sort of chiselled, focused cast to them, honed no doubt by hours poised over the board with a head full of alphabet and mathematics — letters to make mettlesome words, mathematics to calculate complicated triples and doubles and to check on your opponent’s almost certainly faulty powers of addition and multiplication. But in answer to my musing [unobtrusive but a useful 15 with a triple on the ‘m’], she simply proclaimed, “What is much more interesting is the fact that there are many other productive and classic suffixes, such as ‘-mata’”. “As in ‘tomata’,” I ventured, reasoning that Scrabble should not be without its moments of humour and flightiness. “Stigmata, traumata, dogmata, miasmata, zygomata”, enunciated Ms Xazf. She was, I concluded, agreeing with me in a merry way. Though possibly not — these Scrabblistes play their tiles pretty close to the chest except when employing the Rintoul-Bollock strategy.

All in all, I felt that my flawed interviewing technique had somehow caused me to miss the visceral, controversial and heart-stopping cut-and-thrust of international Scrabble. I wished Ms Xazf all the best and set off to find a calming ale [meagre basic score of 3, but a marvellous little connector].

## A day to remember the Holocaust

CORRESPONDENCE

Michael Danby

Last week marked the 62nd anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz — Birkenau extermination camp in southern Poland by the Soviet armed forces, which took place on January 27, 1945. At the behest of the UN and the initiative of the former Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, the United Nations has asked the international community to designate the anniversary of the liberation as a day for commemoration.



Today there are only a few survivors who have adult memories of Auschwitz. Soon there will be none. This makes it all the more important that the memory of what happened there is preserved. In part through commemorative events such as those that took place last week.

More than one million people in cold blood as part of the calculated campaign of extermination that is now called the Holocaust.

The world now knows that when Hitler told the Reichstag on the 30th of January, 1939, that a second world war would end with *Vernichtung die Jüdische rasse in Europa*, (the extermination of the Jews in Europe), he meant it. The overwhelming majority of those killed in camps were Jews, transported in freight cars to the site from almost every country in Europe, to be exterminated in gas chambers or worked to death in mines and factories, their bodies incinerated, and their ashes thrown into a lake.

The total number killed in the seventeen extermination camps was at least 3.2 million, and possibly 3.8 million. These camps thus accounted for about half the total number of Jews killed in the entire Nazi Holocaust. Virtually the whole Jewish population of Poland died there. To them were added Jews from the Czech and Slovak lands, from France and Belgium and the Netherlands, from Greece and Italy, Romania and Serbia. Finally in late 1944, 400,000 Hungarian Jews were sent to Auschwitz following the German occupation of Hungary. In addition, in the Nazi occupied Soviet Union, including the Baltic Shores, had more than 1 million Jews were killed on the spot by the Einsatzgruppen.



At Auschwitz, as the Red Army approached, the SS evacuated the camp on January 17 and 18 1945. Tens of thousands of prisoners were marched westwards through the freezing landscape to other camps, such as Gross-Rosen, Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald in Germany.

Thousands of freezing, half-starved prisoners died in the snow in these futile marches.

On January 27, 1945, soldiers of the 60th Army of the First Ukrainian Front, under the command of Marshall Ivan Koniev, reached the town of Auschwitz.

Only about 7,000 prisoners were still in the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps, whose barracks had once housed 200,000 prisoners at a time. Most were Polish forced Labourers rather than Jews sent to the camp for extermination. The Jews were almost all long dead. The Soviets thus gained a misleading impression of what had gone on at Auschwitz and it

was some years before the full truth emerged.

Some governments, such as those of Bulgaria and Finland, did refuse to co-operate with the Nazis. In some countries, such as Denmark, the Jews were saved through swift action by the non-Jewish population. In the Netherlands, there was a general strike in protest against the deportation of Jews. In France and Italy and Greece, the resistance tried to save Jews and many more were hidden by courageous non-Jewish families. Even in the heart of darkness in Nazi occupied Poland, many brave Catholic Poles, including the late Pope John Paul II, risked their lives to help and rescue Jews.

Nevertheless, the Holocaust killed 55 per cent of the 11 million Jews in Europe (including the Soviet Union) in 1939 and 35 per cent of all the Jews in the world. The heart of the Yiddish-speaking Jewry of central and Eastern Europe was destroyed, bringing to an end centuries of Jewish history and culture in the region.

The repercussions of these terrible events have echoed through post-war history. The state of Israel came into existence because there were hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees, survivors of the Holocaust, languishing in camps throughout Europe with nowhere to go, and because the experiences of the Holocaust gave the Zionist movement a determination to prevail over the British, and the Arab states, in the creation and subsequent defence of the Jewish state - Israel.

Twelve years ago, one of the best-known survivors of Auschwitz, Elie Weisel, spoke at the site of the camp, as others will speak there this week. "As we reflect upon the past," he said then, "we must address ourselves to the present and the future. In the name of all that is sacred in memory, let us stop the bloodshed in Bosnia, Rwanda and Chechnya; the terror attacks against Jews in the Holy Land. Let us reject and oppose more effectively religious fanaticism and racial hate."

Today we could add Darfur in Sudan and Iraq and Somalia to that list. It is sometimes difficult to be optimistic about the future when we look back over the bloodstained history of the last century.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust died in vain. Their memorial is the modern State of Israel, the patrimony of the dead.

## **Iraqi innocent pay for misplaced US spending priorities**

INTERNATIONAL

Immigration

Georgina Pike

When Prime Minister John Howard committed Australia to war in Iraq on 18 March 2003, we were told "it's not likely to take a long period of time". We were also told that war was necessary to rid Iraq of its 'weapons of mass destruction'. No mention was made of the millions of ordinary Iraqis whose lives would be irrevocably altered by the actions of Australia and its coalition partners. Almost four years later, Australia's military involvement in Iraq continues and no 'weapons of mass destruction' have been found. And still, the needs of the rapidly growing numbers of Iraqi refugees are being forgotten.

According to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, the Iraq war has precipitated the largest long-term population movement in the Middle East since the displacement of the Palestinians in 1948. Of a total Iraqi population of 26 million, around 1.7 million Iraqis have been forced to move within their own country, while a similar number have fled to nearby countries.

The refugee crisis is the untold human story of the war in Iraq.

The flow of people out of and within Iraq has been unpredictable, making contingency plans difficult to implement. Predictions of a mass refugee exodus immediately after the March 2003 invasion proved to be initially unfounded. In fact, 300,000 Iraqis returned to their homeland between 2003 and 2006.

However, that trend shifted dramatically after a Shiite shrine in Samarra was bombed in February of 2006, igniting widespread killings between religious factions. According to the UNHCR, the escalating sectarian violence is forcing 50,000 people per month to leave their homes, and they predict the number of internally displaced people — those forced to leave their homes but not the country — could reach 2.7 million by the end of this year.

In this climate of religious hostility, Iraqi Christian minorities are particularly vulnerable. According to UNHCR, 40 percent of Iraqi refugees are Christian, though they make up only 4 percent of the nation's total population.

President George W Bush has decided to send an additional 21,500 troops, signalling that the US (and Australian) presence will not end soon. The question must then be asked, what is being done to house, feed and clothe the millions of refugees created as a direct result of our military intervention? The answer, thus far, has been precious little.

The burden of providing protection to the Iraqi refugees is being borne, overwhelmingly, by Middle Eastern nations. Syria alone is host to 1 million refugees, while Jordan is hosting 700,000. Jordan has however recently closed its borders to Iraqi men between the ages of 18 and 35. After a series of bombings in Amman in November 2005, authorities have tightened security.

More worrying is that there are strong indications both Jordan and Syria are frequently violating the most fundamental principle of refugee protection — nonrefoulement, which prohibits the return of refugees to persecution or serious harm. It is clear that protection of Iraqi refugees in their country of first asylum is growing more precarious by the day.

Of the 700,000 refugees currently subsisting in Jordan, some 21,000 Iraqis have registered with UNHCR, but only 800 have been given refugee status and can be considered for resettlement. This extremely low rate of refugee status recognition means that only a tiny proportion of Iraqi refugees can gain genuine protection in countries of first asylum like Jordan.

With the humanitarian crisis escalating, the response of countries better able to lend assistance — countries that bear a greater moral responsibility to lend assistance due to their involvement in the war — has been belated and inadequate. While Australia has resettled a modest number of refugees — 2,425 Iraqis settled in Australia during 2005-2006 — the response from the United States to the humanitarian needs created by their military actions has been almost non-existent. A mere 466 Iraqi refugees have been admitted to the United States since the war began almost four years ago. Clearly, political imperatives are overriding humanitarian needs, and it is innocent refugees who are suffering for it.



The needs of refugees are also being sacrificed due to misplaced funding priorities. As the only international refugee protection organisation, UNHCR has a mammoth task to ensure that refugees have access to basic needs. However, the organisation is chronically under-funded. An appeal is currently underway for US\$60 million to enable the UNHCR to tackle the Iraqi refugee crisis this year. This is a relatively insignificant sum. By way of contrast, US\$2 billion is spent every week by the United States on their military operations in Iraq.

Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom have demonstrated their ability and willingness to co-ordinate a military response — it is now time to co-operate for humanitarian, rather than military, ends and to address the crisis for which we bear the weight of responsibility.

## Increasing politicisation of the hijab

INTERNATIONAL  
Politics

Julian Madsen

A heated dispute arose in Egypt late last year following comments by the Culture Minister, Farouk Hosni, that the rising number of Egyptian women wearing the Islamic headscarf or *hijab* was a "regressive" trend. He told the Egyptian independent daily, *Al Masri al Youm*, "There was an age when our mothers went to university and worked without the veil. It is that spirit we grew up with. So why this regression?"

As the Culture Minister for eighteen years, Farouk's comments were contentious, particularly given that an estimated 80% of Egyptian women wear some form of Islamic dress. The comments sparked outrage amongst Muslim conservatives.

Representatives of his own party took issue with him, while the largest opposition bloc, the Muslim Brotherhood, demanded his resignation. Farouk was made to appear before two parliamentary committees to 'clarify' his position. As students took to the streets in protest, the religious establishment denounced his comments as an insult to religious leaders.

Mr Hosni defended his comments, saying "represented no more than a personal opinion", having "nothing whatsoever to do with religion" acting out of self-interest and reacting as they had to secure political gains.

What is particularly significant about the dispute is that it highlights the growth of conservative Islamic practices in Egypt. This growth is also occurring in the wider region, and among Muslims living in Western countries. At its heart are symbols and icons which are central to the struggle for the Islamic world's soul. The *hijab* is one of the most contentious symbols in the Muslim world.

Many Muslims believe wearing the *hijab* is obligatory. They cite Qur'anic verses which state women must dress modestly, though some scholars question whether this actually means covering up. For many the *hijab* has become so politicised that it has almost become impossible to discuss rationally, and without fear of being labeled a *kafir*, or unbeliever. Testimony to this was the manner in which government officials quickly distanced themselves from Farouk, asserting the right of Egyptian women to wear what they want, within the realms of decency.



Whereas the 1920s and 1930s saw the number of urban women wearing the *hijab* decline, the 1970s and 1980s marked its return. Moreover, increasing numbers of women have taken to wearing the *abaya*, the black cloak and face veil as worn in the more conservative Gulf countries (and a far cry from some of the bikini-clad women that appeared in Egyptian cinema in the 60s).

In discussing his reservations about increased *hijab*-wearing, the Minister claims that "The (culture of) *hijab*-wearing that I attacked is one imported from countries with religious attitudes different from those in Egypt."

For Egypt, the shift towards conservatism is in keeping with the changes that have taken place in the wider Muslim world. Locally, the policy of former president Anwar Sadat was to

encourage Islamic activism on university campuses, in order to curtail the influence of leftists during the 1970s. The state's close relationship with the Islamic establishment provided it with legitimacy. The government's failure to provide better economic conditions have helped create an Islamic revival.

Modern Egypt has a chequered history of repression, corrupt political patronage, nepotism, state violence and rigged elections. This has led many to lose faith in the political elite. With a population of nearly 80 million, the economy must create 700,000 jobs to deal with the yearly influx of new jobseekers, a difficult task for even the most buoyant economy. With high unemployment, many are denied access to housing, medical treatment, transportation and sufficient food, all factors that threaten the country's stability. A proud people given the country's rich heritage, Egyptians are turning to Islam for protection and guidance.



Moreover, unlike the West, which saw the separation of Church and State, in Islam, religion and politics are inextricably linked. Indeed, many Muslims (though not all) believe that political and social life can only function within Islamic (*Sharia*) law. For such believers, any deviation means rebelling against God's will.

Furthermore, the collapse of secular Arab nationalism, fostered in the wake of several humiliating defeats at the hands of Israel and continued Western domination of Arab lands, coupled with a closed political environment at home, has seen Islam become *the* vehicle for social and political protest. Thus, by putting on the *hijab* each day, women are doing a lot more than simply covering their head.



## Populate and our environment will perish

AUSTRALIA

Politics

Paul Collins



Listening to [John Howard](#) and the state premiers discussing the drought, the Murray-Darling basin and water policy is increasingly difficult, especially if you've ever given the natural world more than a passing thought. The sight of any Australian government claiming 'green credentials' leaves me gobsmacked, especially given the liberties taken with our natural environment in the last decade.

Actually, I think the premiers are worse than Howard, although his environmental credentials are hardly stellar. They talk endlessly about water shortages, citizens are harangued about saving the precious liquid, and quotas imposed and then, literally in the next sentence, the same premiers are talking about "the need to increase population," as though more people won't need more water.

Take Victoria's Steve Bracks: in one breath he talks about water shortages and dam levels being dangerously low, and in the next says Melbourne needs a million more people by 2025. Or Jon Stanhope of the ACT: he preaches jeremiads on Canberra's dire water shortage, and then announces four new Canberra suburbs full of Mac-mansions.

At present Australia is a net exporter of food, producing probably three times more than we actually consume ourselves. But at what cost to the environment? One of the unmentionable (and nowadays politically incorrect) questions in Australia is how many people the continent can sustain while retaining some respect for the integrity of the landscape. Political parties, including the Greens, scamper for cover the moment population policy is mentioned. But Australia is not infinite; there is a limit to our productive capacity, and we may well have already exceeded it.

Then there are vested interests to consider, the irrigators, the cotton and rice producers, and the people who believe that the entire purpose of the natural world is for it to be exploited. These producers talk about how they 'feed the nation' and contribute to exports. But rarely have we heard about the cost to our great rivers, like the Snowy, which are now reduced to pale imitations of their former selves, to say nothing of the salinity that besets the earth.

Then we're told the drought is the fault of global warming.

This is only partly so. It's much more the fault of farming practices totally out of sync with the landscape. Since the time of squatters, we've been abusing the continent through endless clearing, deliberate wide-scale burning, compaction of the soil by hard-hoofed animals, over-grazing, abuse of the river systems, damming, irrigation and the introduction of (feral) pests, both floral and faunal.

Drought is part of Australia's long-term weather cycle, but what we're experiencing now has much more to do with our own activities than with global warming. No, I'm not a global warming sceptic. I just think you can't move forward until you've dealt with your past.



Australia's longer-term natural history is one of dealing with fire and drought. The landscape was adapted to even periodic severe episodes of both. But it is not adapted to endless clearing, to the diversion and damming of rivers to the point where almost none run free, and to constant so-called 'preventative burning' that nowadays pretends to be ecologically friendly, but is still primarily geared to protecting property. Nor can the continent sustain endless immigration and a continually escalating standard of living.

I'll begin to take John Howard's water policies and 'new environmentalism' seriously when his government, and the premiers, begin to take some of these interconnected issues into account. As [Bruce Haigh](#) pointed out in the *Canberra Times*, the water problem has been staring our state and federal governments in the face for a decade. Billions of dollars will simply not fix the problem.

Haigh is right when he calls for a well-resourced organization that can look at all of the issues: scientific, historical, ecological, managerial. It will need to decide on its priorities: what is most important? Is it sustaining the natural world and giving it a chance to recover, or the illusion of endless economic growth in which the environment is treated merely as a resource? You can't have it both ways.

## Respect for human rights requires debt cancellation

MARGARET DOOLEY AWARD

2006

Angelica Hannan

**Angelica Hannan submitted two articles, including "[The Debt of Nations: The need for the First World's Mea Culpa](#)", to take shared second place in the 2006 Margaret Dooley Young Writers Award.**

*"Only when the last tree has died, and the last river has been poisoned, and the last fish has been caught, will we realise that we cannot eat money."*

— 19th Century Cree Indian proverb

There exists an element operating within the Western structure of culture and politics which is perhaps the single, most powerful force motivating international relations, second only to security. And this element, whose importance is imposed in a cultural imperialist style by Western ideology onto the rest of the world, is responsible for the insurmountable and threatening dilemma of the debt of nations: money. As epitomised in this Cree Indian quote above, the West is a strict adherent to the principles of financial gain, even if it means that money takes precedence over human worth, human rights and human dignity. Third World debt truly is a moral problem of enormous proportions for which the causes and solutions are equally problematic.

Perhaps a primary cause of Third World debt may be attributed to a Westernised—but increasingly globalised—capitalist mentality that seeks to transform us all into "consumers, customers, and competitors". This philosophy creates the potential for an impersonal environment with the capacity for ruthlessness and a lack of ethics and compassion. The suggestion that we are all "competitors" merely euphemises Darwin's theory of natural selection and survival of the fittest and appropriates it to the global economic arena. Christian de Brie once wrote that;

*There is an attempt to submit the whole of human activity to the market order and the rule of profit. No sphere can escape this process, neither the protection of privacy, nor the right to breathe unpolluted air ...| Everything can become a commodity, including spirituality, and enter the circuits of capital totalitarian control over human and biological life and development ... Not a single country, not a single market, remains untouched.*

The capitalist system currently dominating the global system is problematic for its presupposition that "the entire sphere of economic behaviour is regulated by an impersonal mechanism which is beyond the authority of morals". Furthermore, capitalism now seems to overpower the dominant religious tradition of Christianity, which condemns self-interest and materialism as moral vices.



It is this very approach that has generated a global crisis that seems to be without resolution. Arguably, the debt of the poorest nations is a condition which some claim to have been engineered by their First World creditors.

When First World nations perpetuate the argument that Third World nations are accountable to them for financial capital, it is almost unconscionable that these First World nations do not acknowledge that they are accountable to the Third World for moral and ecological capital. Biochemical and agricultural multinational corporations (MNCs) such as Sandoz, Shell and Ciba-Geigy claim patent rights over seed varieties found in developing nations. Through exploitation of the Third World's biological diversity, the US and other capitalist countries have reaped mega-profits without returning a single cent to the countries of origin, their governments or local communities.

The painful reality is that if everyone adopted a Western lifestyle, we would need five earths to support us. In 2000, the World Disasters Report proved this to be true with the fact that First World nations have accrued a debt of \$13, 000 billion which is more than five times the amount owing by Third World countries. What this realisation embodies is the searing accuracy that First World nations are responsible for the damage they are attributing to these Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC).

The problem points to a second origin: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These institutions, established after World War II to provide short-term credit to countries experiencing temporary hardship, offer a system which not only serviced the economic desires of countries who were most able to pay for them, but also ensured the best possible outcomes for these countries. In order to borrow, countries had to pay an initial membership 'quota' which held a direct correlation to their economic force. Voting rights were assigned according to the contributions made by each member state. Despite the inequality this gives rise to, some cite the importance of the preponderant nation-creditors as holding the majority of "shares" in recognition of their greater contribution to the Fund.

As another ethically reprehensible act, the IMF enshrined in its tenets a permanent and critical feature—conditionality. It may be argued that it is morally unconscionable to lend money to Third World nations with the expectation that they will repay it. This unconscionability is intensified with the imposition of rapacious clauses which make the debtor nation almost irrevocably dependent on aid. When this occurs, an inversion of priorities also takes place. Organisations such as the IMF and World Bank, purporting to have no political affiliation yet who service the needs of the most generous nations, place a higher emphasis on the contractual obligations of a debtor nation than on the consequences that this may generate. In this way, the Global South sustains the Global North because the IMF, according to Dr Henry Kissinger, has produced "a cure that is worse than the disease". In essence:



*The IMF's view of the scale of negative transfers which the debtors will be prepared to make also seems extraordinary, since it implies that they will be prepared to forgo ad infinitum the growth of living standards for which their populations are pressing.*

Finally, debt is an excellent bargaining tool: the IMF and World Bank may intervene regularly in the policy preparation of debtor nations; unequal trade and unjust trade agreements may be imposed and it has often happened that debtor nations must borrow

more money in order to pay the growing interest. In this flagrant manner, the Global North subordinates the Global South.

In many Third World countries, the incidence of debt is often accompanied by or responsible for a gross deterioration of these countries' resources and their populations. Third World citizens are not only victims of poverty but also poor sanitation and health, poor education rates and poor governance and ethical leadership. To which aspect, then, should First World countries turn their attention? What these multi-layered problems create is an uncertainty of what to aid first and by how much. Even if the Third World's civil and political rights are secured, how are they to exercise these when they have been deprived of their economic, social and cultural rights? In simpler terms, the enjoyment of basic liberties — such as the right to a name and nationality and the right to free speech — is rendered useless when there are insufficient food reserves and little or no access to safe drinking water. If "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", as the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights prescribes, the First World has failed to acknowledge this.

In the face of unconquerable debt, it is difficult to visualise the possibility of a debt-free future for HIPCs. However, the global society possesses the resources to eradicate poverty. Statistics provided by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) point to the disappointing and tragically ignorant positions of First World Countries. The UNDP claims that the cost of eradicating poverty is 1 per cent of global income. Furthermore, "effective debt relief to the 20 poorest countries would cost \$5.5 billion—equivalent to the cost of building EuroDisney."

Pope John Paul II once announced:

*Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of the poor of the world, proposing the jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought ... | to reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations.*



Of the many suggested solutions to resolving Third World debt, perhaps the most well-known is that of Jubilee, which aimed to abolish all debts to HIPCs by December 2000. This movement, whose name originated from the Old Testament book of Leviticus, was founded on the Israelites' custom of releasing all debts and returning land back to its original owners every 50 years. It has been suggested, however, that the Jubilee movement itself is more morally reprehensible than the debt it proposes to abolish:

*Poor countries need to develop reputations as responsible borrowers who do not deploy the borrowed funds productively but who also repay their debts as contracted. How will debt cancellation help poor countries achieve either of these goals?*

Furthermore, most HIPCs have been governed poorly, often by a dictatorial leader. Debt cancellation would only inflame the situation and encourage recidivism and corruption.

On a more domestic level, however, ethicist Peter Singer laments the disheartening reality of the majority of citizens in affluent countries who do not contribute—sufficiently or at all—to aid. Within Australian parameters, Singer suggests that the "federal government ought to increase its overseas aid allocations, since that would spread the burden more equitably across all taxpayers". Indeed, the Australian Government's contribution in 2000 was 0.25 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP). This is grossly inadequate, in comparison to Denmark's 0.97 per cent, and does not even meet the UN's recommended target of 0.7 per cent. Australia and its fellow First World nations must meet their obligations to their Third World neighbours.

However, perhaps the most practical and most self-evident solution to debt is this: that governments, and First World citizens, need to “place the satisfaction of human needs at the heart of government policy”. Here, the primacy of the individual and human dignity is at the centre of this tenet. Poor governance, greed and cultural imperialism are at the core of the Global North’s exploitation of the South. The very fact that the world’s poorest nations, relying on their subsistence society, are being deprived of their human rights and human dignity is poor governance in itself.

Thus, despite inexhaustible arguments defending the case against debt cancellation, the luxuries enjoyed by the First World stand as testament to the fact that poverty is avoidable. Something is fundamentally wrong when Third World citizens who put food on First World tables cannot afford to put food on their own. In an ostensibly equal global system, it is unnecessary and unacceptable that the same standards of living, the same opportunities and benefits and the same human rights cannot be and are not enjoyed by all.

In its most brutal sense, the debt of the world’s poorest nations is a First World weapon used to subordinate the Global South to the whims of the Global North. However, in simpler terms, the debt of the world’s poorest nations is a debt, which, if repaid, would wantonly claim the lives of Third World citizens by channelling GNP towards already affluent countries in lieu of reinvesting it in Third World education, health and food. And therefore, it is ethically unconscionable that the First World declares the primacy of human rights in international law when it does not ensure that the world’s population in its entirety is equal before this LAW.

## Which ideas belong in the public sphere?

### THEOLOGY

Peter Douglas

An extremist Christian might gain comfort from the idea that life is a gift from God, but then use the same idea to justify the murder of a medical doctor performing abortions. An extremist Muslim might find acceptance and brotherhood in submission to the will of Allah, but then strap a bomb to his or her body, in the belief that it is pleasing to God.



Putting aside the implications of possible psychological pathologies, the difficulty in such cases arises from the lack of an obvious point of reference against which to judge the benefits and harms associated with particular ideas, and what they are used to justify.

As the lives of religious martyrs and secular heroes demonstrate, seemingly obvious criteria such as physical harm and loss of life are often inadequate. These are times thought to serve the greater good, however this be defined.

In the case of religious ideas this difficulty is compounded by the horizon of possible benefits and harms extending beyond the empirical concerns of this life, and this world.

Modern secular democracies have attempted to circumvent this difficulty by organising themselves in accordance with the Enlightenment idea of the separation of church and state.

Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Kant and Hume argued that the 'light of reason' should replace the authority of the Bible, and that a willingness to think for ourselves should supplant a passive acceptance of tradition.

The price paid for the religious tolerance that spread throughout Europe in the post-Enlightenment period was the confinement of religious ideas to the private sphere of faith and conscience, while the public sphere of politics, economics and education was to be guided by ideas that could be rationally justified or substantiated on empirical grounds.

The secular heirs to the Enlightenment's emphasis on the rational control of the public sphere may have the benefit of an intellectual ethic that requires all claims to be rationally tested, but the 'this worldly' focus of these claims is restrictive in its own way.

In seeking to organise the public sphere in accordance with ideas that can be justified empirically, modern secular societies have relied upon a broadly utilitarian approach to seeking the "greatest good for the greatest number".

Exactly how this should be understood and calculated remains a matter of debate, however the underlying aspiration is that the best interests of individuals and communities should be understood in terms of the benefits and harms that accrue in ways that are effectively quantifiable.

This approach has led to substantial increases in the standard of health, education and housing for large sections of the population of wealthy Western democracies.

In the face of indicators such as these, the promise of further progress, and the slide in support for the mainstream Churches in the West that have evolved to fit comfortably within the post-Enlightenment model of the privatisation of religion, we must ask why the uncritical attitude towards religious ideas that characterise religious fundamentalism has



garnered so much support?.

One of the most commonly cited answers is that in a world in which the old certainties have slipped away, people are looking for simple answers to complex problems.

But why this growth in uncritical and often irrational religious fundamentalist movements, when a host of secular options would do just as well?

When this question is addressed in the broader context of the West's growing fascination with often poorly understood Eastern spiritual traditions which do not sit easily within the secular frame, it is reasonable to suggest that the 'this-worldly' focus of the secular approach might be blind to the needs of people for a different kind of engagement with that 'something more' that transcends our empirical concerns.

The typical response in secular circles to religious fundamentalism and non-mainstream spiritual paths is a kind of disdainful dismissal that fails to recognise that these may well have something legitimate to offer.

The arrogance of the secular response leads one to suspect the presence of a secular fundamentalism too-wedded to its own ideas to be willing to consider such possibilities.



And in the face of unacceptably high rates of drug addiction, suicide and mental illness, escalating environmental degradation, security concerns and increasing disparity in levels of wealth, this is a hubris we could well do without.

Certainly the post-Enlightenment commitment to the rational testing of claims is important if we are to avoid the excesses that follow from uncritically held ideas.

But we might also have to accept that the demystification of ourselves and the world that has accompanied the secular approach may be too restrictive.

One possible compromise is to sanction a greater range of ideas in the public sphere. This approach might ensure that the ideas we test remain guides rather than dictates. Thus, the unfortunate consequences of individuals and groups unable or unwilling to think outside their own concerns could be forestalled.

In situations where ideas are held uncritically, not only secularists, but all reasonable individuals have a right to be concerned.

## Palestinian family facing years of upside-down politics

TRAVEL

Jan Forrester

After a long absence, I returned to Israel/Palestine. This June will mark the fortieth anniversary of the Israeli military victory in the Six Day War, and occupation of The Palestinian Territories — in breach of UN Resolution 242.



“You will have to find the visa for him, they can never find it themselves.” I hand my passport to a young Israeli soldier with acne who, sure enough, asks me to find the visa. I’m on a bus on the West Bank heading for Jerusalem with a Muslim friend whom I’m visiting for the first time in thirty years. The other commuters, mostly women and kids, lift their identity cards in unison. The drive once took minutes. Now, because of the concrete wall that snakes between Palestinian and Israeli settlements, it is a long ride.

The wall, which has created a series of semi-connected bantustans, and the unpredictable time one can spend negotiating checkpoints, are the real drama of Palestinian life little reported in the West. Built to stop Palestinian suicide bombers ravaging everyday Israeli life, the vertical concrete slabs crash through Palestinian communities, partition families in the same street, slow everyday life to a trickle, strangle Palestinian attempts to make a living — and bolster extremists.

A young cleaner from the northern West Bank tells me he rents in Jerusalem because the short trip home could take hours depending on the time of day and the humour of the checkpoint soldiers. He’s lucky: If he lived in Nablus or Jericho he would need a special permit to leave home, but wouldn’t necessarily get it.

Regulations stray into the Kafkaesque. Last year, the Israeli military added a local staple, salad herb *za’atar* (hyssop) to its list of protected wild plants, confiscating bunches at checkpoints from astonished Palestinians.

At home the first meal my friend cooks is *makloubé*. It means ‘upside down’ in Arabic - steaming hot cauliflower, eggplant and meat are upended on a bed of rice and we tuck in. I have been pining for this meal: Its an evocation of this place and my Palestinian family in another time. *Makloubé* is also a pretty good description of how I felt most of the time I was there.



Gangs of boys hang out on corners and wander the streets with a suspicion of strangers that wasn’t there before. They should be in school, technical college, university. If there were jobs for them. A hospital executive tells me eight out of ten Palestinians live under the poverty line and there is sixty percent unemployment.

In the 1970s, at the height of European sympathy for Palestinians, they were called the Jews of the Arab world, highly-educated and exiled. “We will never have a democratic Palestine until the whole Middle East is democratic and free”, Palestinian friends told me then.

I don’t hear much about democracy now, except in cynical jokes. Many locals have not

seen a wage or pension since Hamas convincingly won the Palestinian parliamentary election in 2006 against a corrupt Fatah and foreign donors cut funds to the Palestinian Authority.

Weeks ago Hamas leader, Ismail Haniya, returned to the West Bank with suitcases full of 'solidarity funds' from Iran and elsewhere. Now Condoleeza Rice says she will request financial support from the US Congress to fund the Palestinian security forces run by Fatah.

In the backyard I play with the gorgeous kids who are the third generation of my Palestinian family — they don't respond at all to overhead helicopter gunships - and it is bitter sweet as I consider the future that awaits them and Israeli children on the other side of the wall.

Refreshingly, unlike many diaspora Jews who robotically defend Israel's every action, Israelis on the other side will discuss and argue anything - especially in their robust media.



Israeli demographics, the cultural revival of Jewish communities in Europe and the US, the resurgence of local Jewish identities, and the shifting international view of Israel will play a part in the future shape of this place.

But not as much as a confident Hamas bolstered by Iran, the strategic reshaping of the Middle East after the war in Lebanon last year and the ramifications for many countries should Iraq implode, especially Syria and particularly Jordan next door.

I fear the third generation of my Palestinian family — and maybe the one after - will be locked in the makloubé politics of the so-called Holy Land for innumerable years to come.

## Explaining anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia

BOOK REVIEW

Non-Fiction

Dewi Anggraeni

***Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996-1999.* By Jemma Purdey. Published by Asian Studies Association of Australia, Southern Asia Publication Series, 2006. ISBN 9971-69-332-1. \$35.00 [website](#)**

The ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have been the source of a number of sociological and political academic writings in Australia, but time and time again we see that only when an issue hits the mainstream media does it enter the consciousness of the community at large.

Early in 1999 the issue of ethnic Chinese began to feature in the international news when local non-governmental organisations broke the silence on the rapes of mostly ethnic Chinese women during the May 1998 riots, riots initially widely reported for human fatalities among demonstrating students, and for the devastation of business districts in some Indonesian cities.

The issue then took on a life of its own. In Australia, however, it did not spread far beyond Indonesian-interest groups, though enough for some people to believe that ethnic Chinese were being murdered, or at least victimised and chased out of the country. These people tended to become confused when they went to visit Jakarta and found Chinese-looking people going about their business, seemingly without fear.

Jemma Purdey's book, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996-1999*, goes a long way towards placing the events in their correct social and political context.

To begin with, ethnic Chinese in Indonesia are not an homogenous entity. While it is a fact that most came from the southern regions of China, these regions are sufficiently diverse in culture that they each have their own languages, tastes in cuisine, prominence in collective skills, and perhaps even collective ethos and temperament.

And they did not migrate to Indonesia at the same time, to the same place, or for the same purpose. Generations of Chinese-descended people can be found in the poorer areas on the outskirts of Jakarta for example. In the meantime, there have been families, some descendants of Dutch-appointed Chinese Captains, living comfortably in various parts of Java. They are not all actively involved in business as is popularly stereotyped, either. And inevitably, there are widely-differing degrees of integration into local communities.

While she focuses on events occurring between 1996-1999, Purdey also takes the reader back to instances of violence in earlier periods, providing context. In fact, each incident or explosion of violence is placed in a social-political background, though without always providing a clear-cut explanation as to why it happened.

There are instances documented where flare-ups had nothing to do with the ethnic Chinese, yet eventually angry crowds turned to shops and businesses owned by the ethnic Chinese to loot and destroy. This often happened, particularly during Soeharto's New Order government, where the opportunities for ethnic Chinese to move and develop had been



effectively narrowed to the fields of trade and business, where they were forced to pay exorbitant fees for various services and higher-than-average interest for any business loans.



Purdey describes how Soeharto and his ministers, while renting their power to the ethnic Chinese ostensibly for their protection, continually portrayed these people as indiscriminate in their desires, uncaring about indigenous communities, and corrupt - thus isolating them, and marking them out as people to be despised and resented. So while the masses were unable to show their anger at corrupt officials, they were able to transpose this shifted their targets to those associated with them, knowing that they could do that with a fair degree of impunity. This resentment of economic success may explain why it was mostly the properties of ethnic Chinese which were often the focus of destruction, rather than people.

Purdey says, however, that the May 1998 violence was outside the usual pattern. Eye-witness testimonies indicate that it was coordinated and carried out with almost military-precision, and just as important to note, the number of indigenous people who died in the fires that engulfed the shops which they had been 'encouraged' to invade and loot, is most likely far greater than that of the women raped during the ensuing chaos. The number of rape victims is still being debated.

Other scholars and observers have argued that anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia is not a fact of ethnicity, but rather of economic privilege, for example. Purdey insists that it is. While other contributing factors such as religion (very few ethnic Chinese are adherents of Islam, the religion of the majority of the population), cultural traits, ethos and economic advantage of some may have marked them out, ethnicity is (obviously) shared by all ethnic Chinese. Many who had properties destroyed in various riots had lived in Indonesia for generations, but this fact was overlooked by the rioters.

Of course not all indigenous Indonesians wish destruction on the ethnic Chinese. There have been numerous instances where, seeing the angry crowds coming toward their homes, the ethnic Chinese rushed to their indigenous neighbours seeking protection, which was generously given.

Considering the widespread prejudice, and the implied message of relative impunity, it is credit to the humanity of the indigenous population that only a minority gave in to their lower urges and took part in the violence. Unfortunately this minority had the capacity, as has been proven, to cause untold grief and damage. Purdey's book is an important account of what is, to this day, an issue that will not go away.

## Harsh lighting exposes moral wrinkles

FILM REVIEW

Drama

Tim Kroenert

**Little Children, 136 minutes. Rating: MA. Director: Todd Field. Starring: Kate Winslett, Patrick Wilson, Jennifer Connelly [website](#)**

At first glance, it's easy to draw comparisons between the sexual drama *Little Children* and films such as Todd Solondz's *Happiness*, or David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, for that matter; films that skulk menacingly through suburban dystopias, drawing out the darkest of dark secrets as they go.



Like *Happiness*, *Little Children* parallels the interconnected stories of a range of troubled suburbanites, and even includes a subplot about a paedophile—although co-writer/director Todd Field is more interested in humanising than demonising this particular social outcast (played by former child star Jackie Earle Haley).

In fact, humanity—with all its faults and foibles—is at the heart of Field's film (adapted from the eponymous novel by co-screenwriter Tom Perrotta), and it's this that sets it apart most vividly from Solondz's more subversive film.

After all, it's not simply moral weakness that drives end-of-her-tether housewife Sarah (Winslett) into the arms of another man. She's an academic who feels suffocated by her role as housewife to her business exec husband Richard (Gregg Edelman) and their young daughter, with whom Sarah simply can't bond.

True, Richard is, of late, up to his ankles in internet porn, but Sarah's dissatisfaction has been brewing for some time, and her decision to embark on an affair with local house-husband and father Brad (Wilson) reeks of childlike self-indulgence.

Speaking of adult 'children', prospective lawyer Brad has also been yearning for the carefree days of his youth. His beautiful, successful but emasculating filmmaker wife (Connelly) thinks he's been studying for his bar exam (failed twice already), when in fact he's been spending his study time watching a group of local teens skateboarding.



Needless to say Brad and Sarah's respective home lives are not foremost on their minds as they proceed to meet regularly during the day, using their children's budding friendship as a cover for each illicit rendezvous.

Of course, guilt has a way of catching up with people, just as lies have a habit of being found out in the end—ultimately, Brad and Sarah need to make a choice regarding where they will seek their happiness.

The saga is a tad too lengthy, and its resolution somewhat overwrought; still, the film's strength lies in its comprehensively drawn characters, convincingly inhabited by the film's stars. Both Winslett and Wilson give career highlight performances, bravely 'nuding up' both physically and emotionally, while Field allows them to be shot close up under harsh lighting that highlights every blemish and wrinkle.

It's humanity Field's after, and humanity he gets: his leads render sympathetic, three-dimensional characters, even if you condemn their behaviour.



## **Fluttering locusts stripping the paddocks bare**

POETRY

Brendan Ryan

### **Locust Years**

Everywhere I step there are locusts  
flittering over squashed thistles,  
a scraggy laneway.

Their flickering rises to a crescendo  
unsettling, like a threat the ground  
moves beneath me.

The longer I walk the paddocks  
the more I become a part of them.  
Miles from anywhere yet closer to memory  
the ditch where our rubbish tip used to be  
a bush wind scuttling leaves  
like a stranger visiting to say the rosary  
the rhythms of Hail Mary's  
ascending across a kitchen floor  
the muttering of intentions  
before she leaves for another house call.

Her prayers for the departed hanging in the air  
fluttering locusts stripping the paddocks bare.

### **Penitent**

He was a small man who holidayed in Manila.  
Each night he unlocked his door to quiet fury.

He ran the 100 metres in record time.

Hot water soothed his knuckles in the dairy.

In the grand final photos  
he is the one falling backwards, stubby in hand.

He was a lover to routine  
cigarettes, the same faded jeans.

He had a hard time keeping a girlfriend.

Sometimes I would catch him, alone,  
necking a bottle on his verandah.

He understood the look of a cow  
yet a swish of a tail and he moved into town.  
A bachelor town where the churches had been sold  
and an avenue of cypress trees offered respite from the glare.  
They say an early death takes the focus from your self.

### **Back Streets**

Not the zoned stares of toll ways, freeway art and variable speed limits.  
Not the avenues of discount warehouses, superstores and car yards  
but the back street short cuts between suburbs,  
where children kick footballs between approaching cars  
and decorate the road with hop-scotch squares on Sunday afternoons,  
where architecture reflects a clash of cultures, new generations  
stringing prayer flags across verandahs, smoking on front door steps  
mesmerized by pigeons on antennas, neighbours fighting for car spaces,  
where the idea of home becomes the graffiti on a corrugated iron wall

the Gipps street dog leg that takes you past Nike and The Salvos  
into the clutter of Richmond, the High Rises, tyres slipping on the tram tracks  
in the eternal quest to avoid Punt Road traffic: a daily Purgatory  
your fantasies idling through a gridlock —  
the sound of tyres on bluestone cobbles  
or the scrape of a number plate in the gutter  
as you nose-dive into an alley between backyards,  
searching for an escape from one way streets that take you closer  
to junk mail in letter boxes,  
an empty stubbie outside the stairwell to a block of flats.

The suburban street doesn't need to flood  
or be pummelled by road trains to be memorable.  
A distinctive house on a corner, a moment's drift at the lights,  
the pilgrimage of men to the shop for the Sunday papers

will keep returning years later.