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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

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Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

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Rudd trip repairing Australia's damaged reputation

POLITICS

Tony Kevin



The Rudd Government has not yet shown a full hand on how it wants to balance its three major international relationships – with China, the US, and the UN. But Rudd's visit to China is making things clearer.

This visit is proceeding brilliantly. To raise the subject of Tibet on the first day, during a meeting with students at China's top university (where the democracy movement that led to Tiananmen Square was born), and to use the unprovocative words he used, was a master stroke. He raised Tibet in a respectful way, and as a human rights matter internal to China. His words to journalists regarding the Olympic torch relay were similarly careful.

On trade relations, he affirmed national interest and economic interest in terms Chinese political and business leaders will understand and respect.

So far he has made no self-aggrandising claims of strategic mediation between China and the US. Such claims play better in Australia than China, where leaders look at outcomes rather than boasts.

In his earlier US visit, Rudd struck the right protocol notes. No serious business can be done with the Bush administration during its last months. Rudd observed the right courtesies as a visiting leader, to the President and to the two Democratic contenders. He positioned Australia well to initiate substantive policy dialogue with an incoming administration led by Obama, Clinton, or McCain. One could ask for no more, for now.

Finally, the United Nations. Rudd met the Secretary-General and flagged his determination to make Australia a better international citizen. Good, but I suspect that to announce Australia's interest in a Security Council candidacy for 2012 was to show his hand too soon.

I don't think Rudd – immersed in domestic politics these past ten years – understands how much Australia put the UN General Assembly offside under John Howard's rule. DFAT officials won't tell him just how bad it is.

Security Council rotating seats are decided by the global membership, most of whom are developing countries. Australia could not afford to bribe these countries to support us (nor, ethically, should we try). We have to persuade them we merit a turn. And it will take more than four years to undo the damage Howard did our reputation in the UN. Still-fresh images of Australia voting with UN pariahs, the US and Israel and a few bought failed states, and of Australian delegates taking orders from US delegates in corridors, behind the meeting rooms

and near the toilets, will not be quickly forgotten.

Australia offended the majority UN membership by the way we treated refugees in detention, by pushing refugee boats away, by anti-Muslim harassment at home, by our involvement in the Iraq invasion, by our complicity in Guantanamo renditions and torture at Abu Ghraib. We still look like a deputy sheriff in US-provoked wars.

Our media bland-out such images, but I fear they are still stark in the UN Members' Lounge. We should have waited a year to announce the Security Council bid — to get our combat troops out of Iraq, to get runs on the board in terms of our human rights, international law, and post-Kyoto votes and statements in UN fora.

Australia is now on probation at the UN. Unwise statements at home by Labor ministers on Australian values, counter-terrorism, defence, border security and indigenous rights could reawaken antipathies to us. We also require a visible change in DFAT culture, which may involve a change in DFAT's Senior Executive to pro-multilateralist new faces.

When I was in the Australian UN delegation in 1973-75, we prided ourselves on the fact that, despite our ANZUS security ties, we were not US satellites at the UN. Under both Whitlam and Fraser, we were proudly part of mainstream UN culture. We pitied our forlorn US colleagues for not being so. We would never dream of taking voting instructions from them.

Rudd needs to know that Australia has a big repair job to do at the UN, and on relevant policies at home, if we want to get onto the UN Security Council.

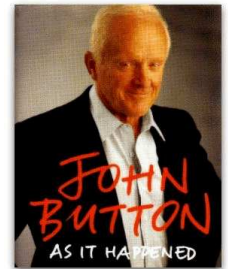
Eureka Street loses two friends

EUOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton

With the passing of John Button and Archbishop Frank Little *Eureka Street* has lost two good friends. We shall miss them. The Australian Catholic Church and public life are the poorer for their passing.

Paradoxically both John and Frank were true believers. Paradoxical, for John Button found freedom in emancipation from the Christian faith that animated Frank Little. True believers, too, are seen as enduring and faithful through good times and bad. But their popular image is also tinged with grudges long held and ideological fixity. Neither of these men was like that. But they were true believers. In carpentry, to true is to get the angles right. The gift brought by John and Frank was to true other believers. The demeanour of both men made believers reflect, if momentarily, on what matters.



We knew John as part of our extended *Eureka Street* community. He was one of our best writers. He was always generous in accepting requests for articles and reviews. He met deadlines and wrote at the right length for what he wanted to say. In his writing he prompted his readers to conversation. His judgments were always humane and respectful because he was interested in people. Certainly he always went out of his way to encourage us, and particularly our younger editors who were learning their craft.

This concern for people seemed characteristic also of John as a politician and government minister. He is known for his industry reforms, at first sight a demonstrating exercise in economic rationalism. But although he understood the large issues in adjusting industry policy to the changes introduced by globalisation, he was concerned that workers could live decently within a functioning economy. He loathed economic theory that did not look at its effect on human lives. He found aspects of political life tedious. They were the games that allowed politicians to act with less than due respect to each other or to civil servants and members of the public whom they were in a position to bully.



Archbishop Frank Little was also a friend of *Eureka Street*. He read widely and commented on what he liked in his reading. *Eureka Street* would not have been his favourite reading. His natural taste was for theology written directly for a Catholic audience. But he had a catholic taste and knew that insights were to be found in unexpected places. You did not have to agree with him to enjoy his friendship and humour.

Frank was a natural parish priest, even as Archbishop. His people were family. His ritual and preaching were about connection with God and others. He was at his best when meeting

people, and his warm interest in them commended the faith they found represented in him.

As Archbishop he never complained about the responsibilities that he bore, but it could not have been easy. He disliked confrontation and his first thought in the decisions he made was for those whom they would hurt. For him, as for John Button, retirement meant freedom. It was a time in which even more than during his time in office people looked to him as their father.

Neither John nor Frank was a liberal. They were men of strong beliefs. They believed that the context for individual freedom and for the use of power was community. They were not men for the meaner times that followed their retirement. But although they were not liberal, they were both men of liberality. They embodied respectively the best traditions of Australian society and of the Australian church.

Frank delighted in telling a story of Pope John Paul II's visit to Australia. They were travelling together to Flemington in the Popemobile. The Pope, who came to life in crowds, was dozing off between engagements. But, ever the performer, he stirred to energetic life when a group of people began to wave and shout at a street corner. Then he noticed that the crowd were calling out, 'Bishop Frank, Bishop Frank'. He shrugged and gave the Archbishop a wry look, one of those looks that say, 'You win some and lose some'.

Frank Little and John Button knew much about winning and more about losing — they passionately supported Essendon and Geelong football clubs. They differed, too, in the ways they ultimately grounded human dignity. But they believed alike that in humanity there are no winners and losers. And they treated all they met with great respect.

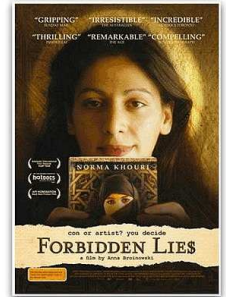
Finding humanity in the book of lies

DVD REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

**Forbidden Lies: 100 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Anna Broinowski.
Starring: Norma Khouri**

The title is apt, for this is a documentary about lies. Not just the big lies, canny 'sells' and half-truths piled up by its notorious heroine, author and confessed literary fraud Norma Khouri. It's equally concerned with more ingrained forms of lying — the way media spin facts into versions of the truth, or how writers (and documentary filmmakers, for that matter) employ artistic licence in order to carry their particular cause.



Khouri is a fascinating subject, whose offences are well documented. In 2001 she published a book called *Forbidden Love*, which purported to detail the case of a close Jordanian friend who was killed by her family for falling in love with a Christian. Astute journos and experts in Middle Eastern culture have long since debunked any claim to factuality that the purportedly non-fiction book made. But this was only after the compelling subject matter and Khouri's own charisma helped propel it onto international bestseller lists.

Despite the patently erroneous geographical and cultural details in the book, and the lies and half-truths Khouri has since told about her own life in order to help sell the story, she maintains to this day that the book is essentially true — that she did have a close friend who fell victim to an honour killing. She also insists that her motivation has always been to put pressure on the Jordanian government to change laws that protect the perpetrators of honour killings — an honourable cause on her part, despite dubious means.

You want to believe her. You really do. So does Broinowski, who breaks out of the director's traditional objective position and becomes a character in her own film, travelling with Khouri to Jordan to allow her the chance to prove herself on camera. Still Khouri proves elusive. The tension between her and the frustrated filmmaker is palpable.

Khouri is caught conning so often that it becomes difficult to believe anything she says. It is fascinating to listen to her subtly change her story or revise her own words in order to cover holes in her testimony. She rarely misses a beat. If she's lying, she does so eloquently. One expert talking head in the documentary suggests she's a pathological liar. She's certainly a liar — the question is, how big a liar?

Broinowski experiments with traditional documentary structure to great effect. There are the obligatory talking heads, including Khouri's nemeses such as Australian journalist Malcolm Knox, who first broke the story over her literary fraud, and feisty Jordanian

journalist Rana Husseini, who has campaigned within the Jordanian legal system for years against government complicity in honour killings.

But Broinowski also films her subjects watching each other's testimonials on television monitors and laptop computers, to capture their uncensored, real-time reactions and responses. Claims are pored over, semantics examined, and theories posited. It seems Khouri is everyone's favourite mystery, and the woman they love to hate. On the whole, this is a dynamic and surprising documentary. Every new revelation elicits another drop of the jaw — exacerbated soon after if that revelation is revealed to be another falsehood.

'Special features' on DVDs are, more often than not, merely padding to give the illusion of better value for money. In some cases, the bonus material enhances the overall package. That's the case with *Forbidden Lies*.

Two features are of particular interest. One is a video diary, which offers some insight into the kinds of mental and emotional somersaults Broinowski was performing during the 'quiet' moments between filming. The other is a feature-length commentary by Broinowski and Khouri. The director confronts her subject point-blank about her various 'porkies', and the subject provides an engaging, often heated and not always convincing defence. You'd think such a commentary might clarify matters — in truth, it frequently adds to the Khouri enigma.

Nonetheless, it is evident that the two women still like and infuriate each other a great deal. It's also evident that Broinowski sees the humanity in Khouri, in contrast with the media who demonised her, and that her purpose with this film was, at least in part, to pass that empathy on to a wider audience.

The great irony of the whole affair is that, in spite of Khouri's stated desire to bring attention to the subject of honour crimes, that particular and worthwhile subject has become all but obscured by her own larger-than-life persona and the scandal she initiated.

Time running out for Khmer Rouge justice

INTERNATIONAL

Sebastian Strangio



The crimes of the Khmer Rouge are well known. Between 1975 and 1979, Pol Pot's regime of 'Democratic Kampuchea' turned Cambodia into a 'land of blood and tears' — a vast agrarian social experiment that enslaved the population and led to the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians.

After nearly three decades of legal impunity, justice is finally catching up with the surviving Khmer Rouge leadership. Following six years of negotiations between the UN and the Cambodian government, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) was established in 2006, with the hope that 'the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge and those most responsible for serious crimes' would finally be held accountable.

But for all its noble rhetoric, the ECCC is plagued with problems. The 'mixed' (joint UN-Cambodian) tribunal is beset by ballooning budgets and the proceedings continue to crawl along at a glacial pace.

In January, the ECCC revised its budget upwards to US\$169.7 million — up from an original \$56.3 million — and pushed back its expected finishing date until the end of 2011. Meanwhile, wages for 200 Cambodian employees of the ECCC have not been guaranteed beyond the end of April.

So far, just five leading Khmer Rouge have been arraigned by the Phnom Penh court, and the proceedings have yet to move beyond a series of lengthy pre-trial appeals. The first trial, that of Khang Khak Iev — the former head of the Tuol Sleng torture prison in Phnom Penh — is scheduled to begin in July, finances pending.

On 3 April, the Australian government announced it will donate \$500,000 to the ECCC, but even after meetings with ECCC officials in New York, the major donor nations are dragging their feet. According to reports, the countries providing the primary funding for the trial — Britain, Germany, Japan and France — are hesitant to commit more money to a trial process that some fear is under the political influence of the Cambodian government and its ruling party, the Cambodian People's Party.

The ECCC presides under the auspices of Cambodia's judicial system, and some donors have cited irregularities in the hiring of key officials, with certain posts going to suspiciously under-qualified candidates.

Similar misgivings were expressed by Amnesty International after the UN-Cambodian agreement establishing the tribunal was signed in June 2003. Due to the 'precarious state of

Cambodia's judiciary', Amnesty argued, the UN General Assembly should 'make the improvements necessary to bring [the tribunal] agreement into line with international laws and standards'. For Amnesty, no trial was preferable to a 'flawed' one — a noble sentiment, but one that disregarded political constraints, not to mention the advanced age of most of the defendants.

Unless donors follow through on their commitments to the tribunal, there's every chance that the defendants will be dead before the ECCC has a chance to bring them to trial. Pol Pot — 'Brother Number One' — evaded justice by dying in mysterious circumstances at his jungle headquarters in April 1998. In 2006, the one-legged Ta Mok — nicknamed 'the Butcher' for his ruthless purges — died in prison awaiting trial.

Of the current defendants, former head of state Khieu Samphan suffered a stroke on the eve of his arrest in November last year, and Ieng Sary, former foreign minister of Democratic Kampuchea, was admitted to hospital with heart problems. Nuon Chea, Pol Pot's second-in-command and the regime's chief, is pushing 83 years of age.

Whatever the flaws of the ECCC and the Cambodian judiciary, both represent the last chance for real justice in Cambodia. The continued functioning of an already sluggish trial process is undoubtedly more important than a few minor quibbles over the court's staffing practices.

As American lawyer Gregory Stanton argued in 2003, the real 'enemy of justice' in Cambodia is a well-meaning but misdirected legal purism, which, if heeded, would only give succour to Cambodia's culture of legal impunity. Better to have justice at the expense of flawless legality than flawless legality at the expense of justice. With time and money running out, the ECCC no longer has the luxury of both.

Tribunal spokesman Helen Jarvis said in March that 'it is hard to imagine that the court can continue to function without funds'. Donor nations — if they wish to give the ECCC its greatest chance of success — should heed her warning and commit themselves financially, or else the country's culture of impunity looks set to continue.

Deflecting the war on sentiment

THEOLOGY

Andrew Hamilton

The vehemence with which appeals to sentiment are rejected in public life is constantly surprising. Symbolic gestures that involve the heart, like the apology to the Stolen Generations, are often seen as a substitute for practical action.

Critics also criticise people whose advocacy presents vividly the human reality of those suffering as a result of government policy. Speakers, for example, who substantiate their appeal for change in Australia's refugee policy by describing the trauma of detainees, are often described as 'bleeding hearts'. If they are educated, they face the added opprobrium of belonging to the elites.



Proponents of drastic solutions to cultural or political crises also criticise harshly those who point out the human cost of their solutions. Reflections on the suffering caused by going to war in Iraq or on the costs to fraternity caused by cleaning out the Catholic Church or the ABC, for example, are deemed weak-minded hindrances to clear-sighted action.

If you are one of those who base their case on sentiment, it is tempting to attribute your opponents' vehemence to hard-heartedness. But there is more to it. Critics may fear their defences will be taken down by a moving story and that, as a result, they will be vulnerable to self-deceit or cheap consolation. For them, sentiment is a treacherous patina on the hard rock of reality.

I have some sympathy with this position. It resonates with my experience as a Catholic priest. Nothing discredits faith as much as to have its consolations too easily offered. To be assured, for example, that our dead child has gone to a better place, will be free from the troubles of adulthood or is privileged to die young, is intolerable. We feel that we are being led up a path by someone who has never walked it and hasn't a clue into which hell it might lead. Sentiment untested by experience is sentimentality.

After attending to the unfathomable hurt and horror we find in a person's grief, we are likely simply to listen and to offer few words. We naturally grow hostile to all symbols and words that offer sentiment without weighing the reality of human life. We hunt out sentimentality, nowhere more energetically than in hymns.

Take, for example, 'It is Well with my Soul', by Horatio G. Spafford, a Chicago businessman and a friend of the prolific hymnodists Moody and Sankey. The first verse reads:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;

Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,

It is well, it is well, with my soul.

The censorious critic asks whether the consolations of religion here don't come a little too easily. Ought we not weigh sorrows more carefully before deciding that 'It is well with my soul'? The image of sorrows rolling like sea billows is beautiful and expansive — but are not sorrows usually experienced as claustrophobic and ugly? The large view is sentimental.

But then we learn that in 1873 Spafford had sent his wife and four daughters ahead of him on a European holiday. Their ship sank. His wife was saved; his four daughters drowned. He went to his wife, saw where the ship had sunk, and afterwards wrote the hymn. To judge the hymn sentimental then seems harsh.

That led me to wonder whether we should always indulge the censorious self. Perhaps hostility to sentiment may mislead us just as much as sentimentality. The reason why sentiment is important is precisely the reason why it is criticised. It leaves us vulnerable. Vulnerable, certainly, to being misled, but vulnerable also to being led to the human reality of what we describe.

Vulnerability allows us to test our own hard-edged projects against the human reality of their implementation. It also allows us to reflect on the knotted movements of the heart that support our arguments.

It leads us finally to recognise that we share the vulnerable humanity of those for whom we plan. And if we can find symbols to enact that shared humanity, there is indeed the possibility of a new beginning.

2020 delegates an unpredictable but dynamic mix

POLITICS

John Warhurst



Most of the 2020 Summit participants have now been announced. The steering committee has selected as wide a range of people with something to say as could be expected under the circumstances.

Rather than arguing over particular individuals who might or might not have been included, it is more productive now to discuss the composition of the Summit as a whole in terms of the mix of personality types, and then to look forward to the process by which it might best be conducted. These matters seem to have been something of an afterthought for the organisers and are still being decided on the run.

It is fascinating to think about what types of people there will be among the 1000 and how they will pull together over two days. Some know one another already but many do not. Different types of expertise and experience are represented, but just as significantly there will be different types of personalities and approach to discussion. It will be important how those who are used to high-level leadership positions in business, executive government and the judiciary mix with those from academia, the NGO sector, the media and the artistic community.

Some participants will take their position as determined individuals with particular ideas they wish to present, or will come with a record of innovative thinking in their field. In each section there will be ideas merchants and advocates who, given the chance, will have plenty to say.

But to be effective in producing practical outcomes the summit must have many other types of people playing a role. There will need to be facilitators and mediators, experienced leaders, skeptics, wise heads and others.

The facilitators might include Frank Brennan and Geraldine Doogue. Among the experienced operators are the former state premiers, Geoff Gallop, Nick Greiner and Steve Bracks, and the former head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Peter Shergold.

Those of a skeptical frame of mind include Gerard Henderson of the Sydney Institute and Miranda Devine of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. And wise figures such as Sir William Deane will provide an invaluable perspective.

The ultimate productivity of the summit will come from dynamic interplay within groups, not individual performance. There are already many opportunities for individuals to make

their submissions to government anyway. This is not that sort of occasion. The tension between ideas is more important. The winnowing of those ideas presented will be as significant as the individual ideas themselves.

The process of extracting the best outcomes from the whole exercise remains the biggest problem, whatever the composition. Both the location and the organisation of time make a big difference to the outcome, as any event organiser knows. Parliament House in Canberra is the obvious venue, but does not seem to be an ideal location for ten groups of 100 people, with each group needing room for both large plenary sessions and smaller breakout meetings. There are just not that many suitable rooms in a venue designed for another purpose.

The program itself will need to be tightly organised. Even then it will be a big job to prevent it becoming the pushiest and the loudest rather than the best and the brightest. Good listeners and networkers who are not dying to speak will be a valuable commodity. There will be no way that there will be time for each participant to speak for even two minutes each in a plenary session. All weekend conferences turn out to have only one and a half days at most of useable time during which decisions can be made.

Choosing the participants from the 8000 nominations was a hard job. The individuals selected are fine but the mix is still unpredictable. Creating an effective structure and *modus operandi* for the proceedings will be even harder.

Pat Dodson chooses brand Mandela

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The struggle for freedom in Zimbabwe took a wrong turn when Robert Mugabe began to confuse the greatness of the nation with perceptions of his own might and immortality.

His strategy was one of vindictiveness: evict white landowners from the farms and replace them with black landowners.



Recently Australia's 'father of Reconciliation' Pat Dodson identified the secret of Nelson Mandela's success in building the nation of South Africa from the ruins of the apartheid regime: love your enemy.

Dodson [said](#) : '[Mandela] did achieve his freedom and he's embraced those who had him incarcerated.'

The determination to reconcile, rather than seek revenge, led Mandela to personal greatness. But more importantly, it enabled him to make great contributions to his nation and to the planet.

It's possible that history will pass harsh judgment on the Northern Territory intervention, John Howard's arm's length attempt to fix the health and social problems of indigenous Australians. When indigenous members of his audience famously turned their backs on him, popular perception had it that he never forgave them. That event came to symbolise the antipathy that appeared to exist between Howard and Australia's indigenous leaders, and arguably governed his approach to dealing with indigenous issues.

It would be churlish, and indeed wrong, to compare Howard with Mugabe. But they did share a common disdain for reconciliation. In John Howard's shoes, Nelson Mandela would have forgiven and embraced the audience members who turned their backs on him.

Pat Dodson is working with the Edmund Rice Centre to spearhead a new venture that aims to bring together a diverse group of young Australians to revisit the drafting of Australia's Constitution in 1891. It is called the Brooklyn Project, and focuses on 'Young Australians and the next 100 years'.

The Constitution drafting process comprehensively ignored indigenous Australians. The idea of the Brooklyn Project is to embrace and celebrate this process, rather than deride it.

To this end, a group of 25 young people yesterday sailed the Hawkesbury River, near Brooklyn north of Sydney, in an attempt to recreate the voyage of the *Lucinda*, the vessel on

which Australia's original Constitution was drafted in 1891.

'At a time when Australia is once again looking at Constitutional change, we want to make sure that all groups have a say in the future of our country,' Dodson said.

His optimism is well founded, taking its inspiration from Nelson Mandela, who was held in prison for 27 years, almost the 28 years Zimbabwe has been ruled by Robert Mugabe.

'He probably thought he would never be let out, given the fascism and racism of that government.'

But he was let out.

Zimbabwe result could open the airwaves

INTERNATIONAL

Nigel Johnson



A year after Radio Dialogue started operations in 2000, we were invaded. They locked me in my office, and attempted to replace the lock on the main doors and take over the studios.

The local state-owned newspaper reported that I had been replaced, and published a cartoon of me being kicked out of a window. From then on we have employed 24 hour security.

Two weeks later, we were raided by the riot police, police internal security, central intelligence and the national telephone corporation. The telephone people were hoping to find radio transmission equipment so that they could confiscate it, but all we had was recording equipment. The police and central intelligence were hoping to find subversive material, but there was nothing.

Two days later, we had a visit from the immigration people, who were hoping to find someone they could deport. They found one. He was given two days to leave the country.

A few months later, I was filming a Valentine's Day demonstration by a group of women, and was arrested along with them. We spent the night in jail, and next day were charged with holding an illegal demonstration, then released.

Some time later, I was filming a youth group to make a music video for them. That earned me another night in jail.

That is how it has been in Zimbabwe for the past ten years. The government is very suspicious of any independent organisation they are not in control of, especially media organisations.

Radio Dialogue was set up as a community radio station for Zimbabwe's second city, Bulawayo. But no one has ever been granted a broadcasting licence in Zimbabwe, except the state broadcaster. So, while waiting for a change, we have 'broadcast' by alternative legal means.

We make programs on CD and cassette, which are then played on public transport, in hair salons, bars and so on. We put on road shows in the suburbs, featuring local singers, dancers and drama groups. Each show contains a special message. The earliest shows got across to people the idea of community radio. The most recent ones urged people to register and then vote.

We then developed our 'Live Broadcast Meetings'. These are public meetings, organised by

our Radio Dialogue ward committees. They select a topic of local interest — mostly concerned with shortages of water, electricity or food. They then invite local officials to be questioned by the audience. The whole show is presented like a radio program, with the presenter behind a mixing desk, playing CDs and jingles between segments of the program.

The day before the meeting, we gather local news from that suburb, and present a news bulletin in the middle of the program. The meeting ends with a 'phone-in' segment, where a roving microphone is passed among the audience. Through this people get a real experience of what local community radio will be like — that they will not just be passive listeners, but will actively participate and have their voices heard.

We also do music recording and work a lot with local youth and artists.

So far, it's been difficult. We have to get police clearance for any public event, which is time consuming and makes planning difficult. Last year, the police banned the opening night of our cultural festival a few hours before it was due to start because President Mugabe was in Bulawayo.

As I write, the whole nation is anxiously waiting to hear the final results of the general election. Tight state control ensures that small amounts of information trickle through very slowly. This is made up for by the rumours that fly around via the internet or mobile phones.

Some people are despairing — 'It's been rigged ... the election's stolen ... five more years of this misery ... how can I get to South Africa, to UK, to Australia?' Others, like myself, are hopeful — 'Our time of suffering is about to end ... a new beginning ... a new dawn ... an end to the police state ... the beginning of freedom of speech ... the opening of the airwaves ... soon we'll be broadcasting.'

The next few days will prove who is right.

Necessary tolerance of religious vilification

AUSTRALIA

Peter Hodge

'Islam is the second largest and fastest growing religion in America,' says the Muslim. 'And you people should FEAR US!'

The stereotypical Arab with a great bushy beard, dressed in flowing white robes, is addressing an urbane looking Christian man. 'We expect a Muslim flag to fly over the White House by 2010,' asserts the Muslim.



The Christian patiently assumes the role of teacher, explaining to the Muslim that Allah 'was just one of the 360 idols in the Kabah in Mecca'.

Surprisingly, the Muslim accepts the indisputable logic that his religion is a sham. 'Come into my heart, Lord Jesus,' pleads the sobbing ex-Muslim, now being comforted by the compassionate Christian.

I found the comic *Allah Had No Son* abandoned on a seat near a busy shopping strip in Coburg — a Melbourne suburb that has one of the city's largest Muslim populations.

The depiction of Muhammad in one panel, bowing low and engulfed in flames, is eerily reminiscent of the Danish cartoons that sparked a ruckus in 2006.

Putting this aside for a moment, the booklet is quite hilarious. Particularly the footnotes attached to the numerous claims, as if in some pseudo-academic sense, it makes them all true.

Then, there's a breathtaking switch from the application of reason to attack the foundations of Islam, to pure dogma, as the Christian imposes his faith on the chastened Muslim.

Material of this nature cuts to the heart of what constitutes 'religious vilification' and, conversely, 'freedom of religious expression' in public forums. In a pluralistic society, religious groupings cannot have total freedom from vilification (perceived or not) and an unfettered right to publicly assert the absolutist consequences of their faith.

Most Western societies have settled on a balance between these two extremes, otherwise known as 'tolerance'. The position of the fulcrum varies across time, and from country to country. Shifts may occur in response to pressure groups lobbying for greater freedom of expression and less 'political correctness'. A wave of anti-Semitic attacks, for example, could lead to a push in the opposite direction.

Since 9/11, the morale of beleaguered and stereotyped Muslim communities across the Western world has been in freefall. Material such as the *Allah Has No Son* comic certainly does not contribute to social harmony. The question of whether or not it constitutes religious

vilification is less clear.

That's not always the case. In 2004 the Islamic Council of Victoria won the first ruling based on Victoria's Racial and Religious Tolerance Act of 2001.

The Act was designed to 'promote racial and religious tolerance by prohibiting certain conduct involving the vilification of persons on the grounds of race or religious belief'. The evangelical Christian group Catch the Fire Ministries had sponsored a seminar on Islam, attended by three Muslims. It was later found that two of the speakers, Daniel Scot and Danny Nalliah, intended to vilify Muslims, not simply discuss Islam.

To classify the anti-Muslim comic along the same lines could be extreme. Where would we stop? In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins describes religious faith as an 'evil', and asks: 'Isn't it always a form of child abuse to label children as possessors of beliefs that they are too young to have thought about?' Is Dawkins guilty of religious vilification? At least, in his defence, Dawkins could argue that he vilifies all religions equally!

'Not all behaviour that offends religious feelings or beliefs necessarily constitutes advocacy of religious hatred,' notes the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. However, when freedom of expression results in unambiguous incitement to religious hatred, and particularly when violence is a likely short- or long-term consequence, a line in the sand has been crossed and action must be taken.

Short of such extreme situations, it is usually better to err on the side of freedom of expression; to foster tolerance by allowing mature, pluralistic societies such as ours to find, as much as possible, their own balance between freedom of speech and freedom from vilification. It is their choice to make, but I hope any Muslims exposed to the booklet I picked up simply laugh it off then toss it into the recycling bin.

Transforming victims into victors

ES CLASSIC

Michele Gierck



On 28 April 1990, a letter bomb mailed to Michael Lapsley's Harare home destroyed both of his hands and one of his eyes. Years of anti-apartheid involvement and active African National Congress (ANC) support had come at a price.

Like so many other anti-apartheid activists, New Zealand-born Anglican priest Father Michael Lapsley SSM, based mostly in South Africa, was on a hit list. That letter bomb was designed to kill. The price paid in burnt skin and missing body parts was high, but during the hospitalisation and healing process, Lapsley had to deal as much with the premeditated and systematic nature of the violence as the physical wounds. The bomb had been packaged between religious magazines.

When we meet, Lapsley puts out his arms, with their prosthetic hands, and hugs me. He asks me to sit on his left — his vision is better on that side. I position my back support (the consequence of a prolonged injury) in the chair and within minutes we are joking about disability, as only those so often boxed in this category can do.

Michael Lapsley is director of the Institute for Healing of Memories in South Africa. He is in Australia at the invitation of Bishop Freier from the Northern Territory. Lapsley explains he has been asked to use his 'Healing of Memories' approach in meeting the spiritual pain of Stolen Generation members. He offered two workshops in Alice Springs: the first to a group of Aboriginal women, the second to a mix of indigenous and non-indigenous people.

'In some ways Alice Springs was the most challenging assignment I've ever had,' says Lapsley. 'I've been interacting with this country since 1967 in different ways for different lengths of time. I was conscious ... that indigenous people are such a minority, are so oppressed, and have such a level of dysfunctionality as a consequence.'

Indigenous and non-indigenous cultures are dramatically different, he says. 'In some ways it's an apartheid society. There are two different worlds which don't often meet.'

The two-day workshop took place at the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre. On the first day, 13 Arrente women attended. As an ice-breaker, Lapsley described his experiences, then asked each woman to draw her story. 'I'd hardly got the words out and everyone was busy drawing.'

The participants were also given clay to work with. Once more Lapsley was amazed. 'We

hadn't actually got to the exercise with the clay and they were all busy moulding. It was wonderful.'

The women must have thought so too, because there were more people on the second day than on the first. Not the usual procedure, but in this case most welcome. Lapsley plans to return soon. The hope is that Aboriginal Christian leaders might participate, and perhaps train as facilitators.

The 'Healing of Memories' methodology does not presuppose any particular belief system. Lapsley has worked with people around the world, including Buddhists in Sri Lanka, doctors, NGO workers and those affected by war. He keeps being invited back.

Lapsley visited Xanana Gusmão in prison, a meeting that made a deep impression on the East Timorese leader. In the lead-up to independence, Gusmão invited Lapsley to share his experiences with the future leaders of East Timor.

Lapsley recalls that the seeds for this work were first sown in tough terrain.

'First of all it was my own healing after I was bombed. A key part of that was that my own journey was acknowledged and recognised by people around the world. It was given a moral context; people saying that what had happened (to me) was wrong. That's the context in which God enabled me to make my body redemptive ... and move from being victim to survivor to victor.'

Lapsley also realised he was not the only one dealing with the wounds of apartheid. 'When I returned to South Africa I noticed just how many people were damaged, in their humanity, damaged by what we had done, by what had been done to us, and by what we had failed to do. It seemed to me we all had a story to tell. We all carried within us feelings about the past, the guilt, the shame, the bitterness, the anger, the frustration and hatred as well as the joyful stuff, the strength and endurance.'

'Healing of Memories' was conceived as a parallel process to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Only some were invited to tell their stories to the Commission, and Lapsley saw a need for all those who wanted to come forward to deal with their past — an issue he impressed upon Gusmão at their first meeting.

The workshops developed over time. Lapsley stresses that they are not quick fixes. There is no magical solution. But often the first step is the most difficult to take. While Lapsley began his work through the Trauma Centre of Violence and Torture in Cape Town, the Institute for Healing of Memories is now a separate entity. 'We have always sought to create a network of relationships across the world and to train people.'

The transformation from 'victim' to 'victor' is an enormous challenge. Michael Lapsley does not say the process is simple, but his life proves it is possible.

Amplifying the 'still, small voice' of indigenous rights

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan

In the dying days of the Howard Government the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. John Howard personally intervened to convince the new Canadian government to join the US, New Zealand and Australia as the only governments to register outright opposition to the adoption of the declaration.



The Rudd Government is presently engaged in consultations before announcing its final decision whether to register an affirmative vote for the declaration.

The declaration is not a treaty or international covenant. It does not require nation states to be signatories. It does not become part of the domestic law of any country voting for its adoption, carry with it any conditions requiring supportive governments to report periodically on compliance, or permit supportive governments to report violations by other governments.

It is a largely symbolic document expressing the finest aspirations of and for indigenous peoples.

We are now marking the 60th anniversary of the finest aspirational declaration of rights ever made by the UN General Assembly — the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which was backed up two decades later with covenants on civil and political rights and on economic and social rights.

Last month, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney published an evocative tribute to that declaration. He wrote in *The Irish Times* that 'the Declaration has succeeded in creating an international moral consensus. It is always there as a means of highlighting abuse if not always as a remedy: it exists instead in the moral imagination as an equivalent of the gold standard in the monetary system ...

'Even if its Articles are ignored or flouted — in many cases by governments who have signed up to them — it provides a worldwide amplification system for the 'still, small voice'.'

Opponents of the indigenous declaration point out that it differs markedly from the 1948 universal declaration. The indigenous declaration was worked on primarily by indigenous groups and not by national governments. Its strength and its weakness is that it lists the aspirations of politically active indigenous groups and not necessarily the aspirations of governments of nation states.

It applies to indigenous peoples only but does not define who indigenous peoples are. And it places heavy emphasis on self-determination, a politically evocative but legally undefined term.

A more tightly worded declaration would have done more to forge a moral consensus and to highlight real abuses. But even this loosely worded declaration could provide some amplification system for the still small voice.

The four nation states that opposed the adoption of the declaration are post-colonial societies with indigenous populations. They pride themselves on being developed countries with a strong commitment to honouring the letter and spirit of any international instrument they sign.

Their governments were worried that an unqualified right of self-determination for undefined indigenous peoples within their national borders could upset national cohesion and even threaten national sovereignty.

Back in 1988, the Hawke Labor Government was happy to sponsor a resolution acknowledging the right of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to self-determination subject to the laws of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Coalition parties in opposition would not agree to such a resolution unless the right of self-determination was further qualified by the rider 'in common with all other Australians'.

Twenty years on, this is still the sticking point. Should the Australian government agree to an aspirational document with an open-ended recognition of the right of self-determination, which some think could lead to separatism or a capacity for one section of the community to act outside the mainstream legal system?

Even if there not be such a broad based right of self-determination, should there be even an acknowledgment of the indigenous aspiration for self-determination? Or should the legitimacy of the aspiration, as well as the right, be circumscribed?

The Rudd Government is presently reviewing the federal intervention on Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Some of those measures breach the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to which Australia is a signatory. Many more of those measures also fly in the face of the new declaration, which provides:

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

When pressed by the Opposition to state the Rudd Government's position, Senator John Faulkner told Parliament: 'While the government is still considering the implications of the declaration, including in the context of the emergency response, we do support the importance

of consultation and discussion with indigenous peoples and have significantly increased our engagement.'

Whether or not we change our vote at the UN, it is imperative that our post-apology government and parliament do more to work in partnership with indigenous Australians. The symbolism of reversing Australia's vote against the declaration needs to be matched by consultation, cooperation and agreement on any extension or maintenance of special measures in the name of intervention.

Reinterpreting Islam

INTERNATIONAL

Shahram Akbarzadeh



Is Islamic law compatible with secular law? Can Muslims remain true to the precepts of their faith under non-Muslim rule? These seem to be recurring questions. The recent controversy following the public announcement of the Archbishop of Canterbury regarding the possibility of incorporating aspects of Islamic law in the British legal system has brought them up again.

The Archbishop argued that 'a constructive accommodation with some aspects of Muslim law' may be possible. This is a well-meaning and accommodating position. It is also a brave one, as the backlash against the Archbishop illustrated. But there is an inherent problem with this position: it takes a literalist reading of Islam.

The literalist reading is widely assumed to be correct, by people on both sides of the argument. This reading presents Islamic law as fixed and static. In the best case scenario, as presented by the Archbishop, some aspects may be palatable and reconcilable with United Kingdom or Australian laws, while others are not. In the worst case scenario, all aspects of Islamic law are antiquated and unpalatable to secular democratic societies.

This is a very simplistic depiction of Islam, and ignores its profound internal dynamics.

Some Muslim intellectuals, notably Tariq Ramadan in United Kingdom, have rejected the literalist approach. Instead Ramadan points to the essence of Islam. If Islam is a living religion, as Muslims believe it to be, then its laws and dictums need to evolve and keep up with the contemporary issues that face Muslims. If Islam is a religion for all times, it needs to have a real and organic relevance to all times. It needs to be evolutionary and adaptive.

This line of reasoning has led reformist-minded Islamic thinkers to emphasise the spirit, as opposed to the letter, of Islam. Notions of unity between the Creator and the created and justice, for example, are timeless and guiding principles which can be codified differently at different times. In other words, the essence remains true for all times, but not its codification in Islamic law.

As a result, Ramadan, who recently visited Australia, has challenged the conventional wisdom that British law is un-Islamic. Why would British, Australian or EU laws be un-Islamic if they are governed by the same notions of justice that reign supreme in Islam?

Suggesting that secular democratic laws may be called 'Islamic' is, of course, not easy to digest when conventional wisdom has treated them as inherently contradictory. Least of all for the many Muslims who subscribe to the literalist reading and are sceptical of any 'reform' as a

form of intellectual capitulation to Western hegemony.

This is a serious challenge. But it can be met. And the best way to meet it is to keep going back to the essence of Islam and what it once stood for. Muslims are proud of what Islam achieved in the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century because it brought a more just system to the region. The essence of that experience, and what Islam stood for, is important today.

Work has already begun. The Turkish religious authorities announced recently a major project to re-interpret existing records of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and deeds (known as Hadith), to discern what they mean in the contemporary setting. This is promising, as Muslims are taking responsibility for trying to grasp what Islam means in the 21st Century.

Progressive evangelicals succeeding US religious right

INTERNATIONAL

Binoy Kampmark

The religious right is losing ground in the US. But this phenomenon could be framed another way: some of its members are moving with some speed to the political left.

Progressives tend to range, according to *The Washington Post*, between 11 to 36 per cent of the evangelical spectrum. But the evangelical left is gradually chipping away at the conservative leviathan, a process that began after George Bush's re-election in 2004.



Their success comes along with the erosion of the Reagan consensus which in the 1980s witnessed a curious alignment of forces: fierce individualists shared the political ground with keen evangelicals and old-school conservatives. Since the 1980s, they became formidable, a force that could not be ignored. But, while a candidate like John McCain can't ignore the evangelical vote (historically it is they, more than registered Democrats, who march out on election days), their uniformity is no longer apparent.

Evangelical authors and activists such as Brian D. McLaren of Lauren, founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church in upper Montgomery County, preach with a set of revised priorities. Climate change, still unmentionable — and plausibly deniable — in many parts of the conservative movement, figures prominently. Efforts at achieving social justice are underlined with vigour. A work like *The Secret Message of Jesus*, released in 2006, pushes for earthly labours that refocus the religious message to the just and good life.

An entry on the progressive website Pomomusings jots down McLaren's main views. The message of the 'Kingdom of God' is not, as he puts it, 'life in heaven after you die', but an active, living project Christians must undertake on earth. For Jesus, it was 'good news for the poor'; for McLaren, the Kingdom of God suggests a 'social dimension', one that confronts believers' assumptions 'about peace, war, prosperity, poverty, privilege, responsibility, religion, and God'.

The world of the afterlife diminishes in the rhetoric, as does that of a righteous, anti-welfare, nuke-loving Christ. McLaren cringes at the staple portrayal of Jesus among conservative evangelicals as a 'pro-war, anti-poor, anti-homosexual, anti-environment, pro-nuclear weapons authority figure draped in an American flag'. While his theological base has raised eyebrows among some theologians, McLaren's politics have kept him afloat. Consuming, inclusive love, rather than militant, repellent hate, drives his activism.

There are others who are hewing away at the religious assumptions of the evangelical right,

suggesting its imminent demise. Detroit-raised Rev. Jim Wallis, who has put his energies into political consultancy (witness his presence at the Democratic forum on faith on CNN), argues that America has entered the era of a 'post-religious right'. *The Great Awakening*, published only at the start of this year, sketches such an America, one which pushes poverty to the centre of political discussion and sees fewer names on the member lists of the religious right.

America's young evangelicals, argues Wallis, are indignant at the 30,000 daily deaths from, in the words of U2's front man Bono, 'stupid poverty'. To this can be added pandemics, environmental conservation, trafficking, human rights, war and peace. This, not 'gay marriage amendments in Ohio', is what counts.

Wallis does not stop there. He cites the views of some seasoned religious activists, with Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church claiming an interest in poverty, racial reconciliation, global poverty, AIDS and 'the plight of women in the developing world'. Another pastor, Adam Hamilton of the United Methodist Church of Resurrection, suggests fanning 'the flames of the 21st century revival within American Christianity'.

Wallis also sees a crucial transformation among the Republican's opponents, a 'levelling of the praying field'. Democrats are now seeking to shed their battle-weary secularism, promoting messages of faith. They are, as he puts in, 'coming out of the closet as people of faith'.

On the back of these progressive thinkers come organisations and centres that are marching to a similar tune. Groups such as the Centre for Progressive Christianity, based near Seattle in Washington State, regard the views of McLaren and the rising strain of progressive evangelism as healthy. One of the points of their mission stands out: developing 'strategies for evangelism that do not assume the absolute superiority of Christianity'. This is done simply to avoid contributing 'to the world's tragic divisions'.

Wallis may be overly optimistic in his prognoses. But there is little doubt that the evangelical progressives are making headway. The religious right has stalled, itself numbed by the promotional mantra of 'change'. The success of Mike Huckabee in some of the primaries was not merely a testament to evangelist suspicions of McCain, but his insistence on putting poverty reduction back into America's political conversation..

Blessed are the messmakers

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Wendy Harmer's TV series *Stuff* (ABC1, Tuesdays 8pm), makes light of our tendency to hoard. But it does remind us that unchecked possession of material objects can destroy lives and relationships.

The series prompted one of our correspondents to write of a partner's obsessive hoarding, which is clearly damaging a relationship.

The hoarding partner collects objects including plastic bags and containers, old newspapers, magazines and books, pots, crockery, kitchen appliances and cast-off furniture.

The other is angry about the mess.

'For a long time their house became so cluttered that it was a struggle to eat together, and simply out of the question to have anyone else inside for a visit.'

The correspondent writes that the couple 'argued constantly about the problem and grew distant because of it'.

But at the same time, the aggrieved was able to look upon the partner as fellow victim, rather than the perpetrator of the family's misery. Our correspondent described what he could see as a form of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, an anxiety condition that causes its sufferers to act in ways they may know to be senseless but still find irresistible.

'Hoarders, for instance, are unable to categorise items in ways the rest of us can do ('this is useful; this is rubbish'). Once they have acquired something they are loathe to throw it out for fear that it might some day prove useful.'

According to the Obsessive Compulsive Foundation in the United States, between 700,000 and 1.4 million Americans are obsessive hoarders. There is no readily available figure for this country, but Sane Australia calculates that 450,000 Australians will manifest some form of OCD behaviour at some time in their lives. There is also no support group for partners and families of obsessive hoarders, neither online nor physical. Perhaps there should be.

The US Jesuit consumerism analyst John F. Kavanaugh reflects that the culture which 'enthrones things, products, objects as its most cherished realities' is ultimately 'in flight from the vulnerability of the human person'.

Our correspondent observes that people with certain mental illnesses play a role not unlike that which canaries once played down mine shafts. He suggests their illness causes them to exaggerate aspects of everyday behaviour in ways that can alert us to impending disaster.

Perhaps the hoarders point to a deeply ingrained, and anything but funny, pathology that is developing in our society, in which each of us is starting to value things more than people. It is becoming a given that having is more important than simply being.

Mess is not an absolute, it's relative to the person's vulnerability, humanity, and — dare we suggest — beauty. The paradox is that it's the vulnerability associated with the compulsive behaviour of the hoarder that can enable us to tap into the deeper humanity required to simply *be*.

Bars not always made of iron

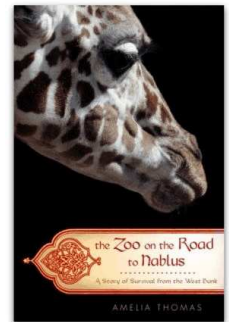
BOOK REVIEW

Jen Vuk

***The Zoo on the Road to Nablus: A Story of Survival From the West Bank*, Amelia Thomas, Pan Macmillian Australia, RRP \$32.95**

By their very nature, zoos are perverse places. No amount of clever and humane design can totally appease the unease of watching a wild animal pacing up and down a well-trodden path. Perhaps this is why zoos seem to somehow belong to another time and place.

Yet when UK journalist and Middle East correspondent Amelia Thomas found herself at the forlorn gates of a West Bank zoo where 'the air was still and smelled of petrol and spoiled hay', she stumbled upon something more than an anachronistic curiosity — the promise of a good story.



'The main gates were padlocked; a side door stood ajar,' she writes in her debut novel *The Zoo on the Road to Nablus*. 'Mosquitoes whined in the hot September sun. Inside the ticket booth, a toothless old zookeeper snoozed on a plastic chair ...'

For a period of 18 months Thomas shadowed Qalqilya Zoo's resident vet Dr Sami Khader as he tried valiantly to transform the crumbling zoo into an international attraction. A mammoth task at the best of times let alone in the face of endless red tape, a disinterested government and the not-so-distant din of dissidence.

In Dr Sami, Thomas has found an energetic and empathetic protagonist. Expert vet, family man and taxidermist, Dr Sami is a benevolent overseer who dispenses makeshift medicine and philosophy in equal measure.

'If something will happen, it will happen,' he would remark, time and again, as his preface to a retelling of the day's events. 'If you try to escape it, it will come for you again. This is a very important point.'

It's a theme as old as the sand that blows through Qalqilya. This is 'A Story of Survival from the West Bank' where years of conflict have turned the once prosperous West Bank farming community of 50,000 into a derelict zone, and the book is as much about a scarred community clinging to normality as it is about Dr Sami and his endeavours.

Considering her journalistic background Thomas shows admirable restraint in resisting a *Lateline*-type realism and, instead, delves into the annals of history. As well as informing the narrative, the conceit, if you can call it that, acts as a kind of chronological counterweight to what is essentially about a group of animals and people in freefall.

Sharply drawn and achingly lyrical, Thomas strikes the right balance between genuine affection and professional detachment, fashioning a novel in which 'under every grief and pine/runs a joy with silken twine' (William Blake).

'But how can you call that place your home, when you are trapped inside it, like a cage?' asks a character of Sami.

'The meaning of home,' Sami replied, 'is the place where you have everything you need. In Qalqilya, for me,' he drew deeply on his narghile, 'I believe this is so.'

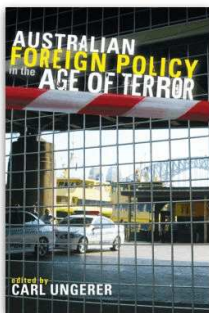
Perhaps, then we can find comfort in the thought that for animals, as for us, home is truly where the heart is; after all, as *The Zoo on the Road to Nablus* so eloquently illustrates, the most impenetrable bars are not always made of iron.

Purging Howard's national insecurity

BOOK REVIEW

Tony Kevin

**Ungerer, Carl (Ed.), *Australian Foreign Policy in an Age of Terror*. UNSW Press, 2008.
RRP: \$49.95. ISBN: 9780868408156**



At first sight this book is more about national security than foreign policy. The collection of essays by defence and international relations scholars examines the central claim: 'After 9/11, terrorism became a central and defining issue in Australia's domestic policies and foreign relations.'

The first half of the book considers global and strategic dimensions. Carl Ungerer looks at Australia's place in the international system. Rod Lyon addresses Australia-US relations and ANZUS. Andrew O'Neil, non-proliferation strategy. Richard Leaver, trade. Melissa Curley, new threats to security such as unregulated migration and pandemic diseases.

The second half addresses regional dimensions. David Martin Jones and Ungerer review the Australian intelligence community. Martin Jones, China. Andrea Benvenuti, South Asia. Christian Hirst, the South Pacific.

It is claimed the book 'will provide students with an up-to-date analysis of the issues and concerns which are driving contemporary Australian foreign policy'. But the agenda is unbalanced. No chapters on climate change, energy and peak oil, human rights, the UN, Australian aid programs, our relations with ASEAN (whose leading member country is the world's most populous Islamic country and our closest neighbour), or with the Middle East (the major source of our oil, buyer of our wheat, and where our troops are engaged).

The world evoked in this book is one of selected bilateral friends and general threats — mostly from Islamic terrorism. It is an 'us and them' world. If the terrorists don't get us, illegal immigrants, pandemics or disease-carrying migratory birds will.

It is John Howard's fearful world. Not surprising, because the book grew out of a workshop held in 2006, when Howard's power over Australian perceptions of the world seemed unassailable, and his fears had become Australia's fears. It is a pity it took so long to publish this book — under the Rudd Labor Government, the international agenda is moving in less fearful directions. For Australia to be a good international citizen is once again a major aim of foreign policy.

The book does have instructive value. First, it reminds us how domestic politics and the Coalition's neo-conservative ideology unbalanced foreign policy discussions in Australia over the past 12 years.

The most profound shock to Australian foreign policy was not 9/11 but our change of government in 1996. Multilateralism, good international citizen language and honouring UN obligations were out. Bilateralism, assertive coalitions of the willing, and a more proactive approach to the US alliance were in. Foreign policy was now about national interest and power. Security agencies were to play a much bigger role, and DFAT had to learn to talk their language. The Australian Federal Police became an active arm of foreign policy implementation.

This new form of foreign policy was well entrenched by September 2001. Tampa, Operation Relex, the people smuggling disruption program and the Pacific Solution all preceded 9/11, and all had a national security focus. Australia's anti-UN rhetoric, singing from Washington's songbook, was underway well before 9/11. The book's main thesis is wrong.

Second, this book reminds us that there is a generational issue in Australia's foreign policy discussion. Our multilateralists are ageing. Younger people who have become used to working in Howard's neo-conservative policy environment still have years of teaching and writing ahead of them.

Where will the Rudd Government find its foreign policy advisers? In the generation of Bruce Grant, John Langmore, Carmen Lawrence and Dick Woolcott? Or in the generation of David Martin Jones, Carl Ungerer and Michael Wesley? Are 'young fogeys' taking command of the heights?

Ungerer writes, 'The new international environment will also require a greater degree of interoperability between diplomats and security forces.' We saw this in Indonesia and the Solomons, where AFP and ADF became the operational arms of foreign policy, and DFAT diplomats merely its presentational face. Increasingly, Australian police and soldiers are doing the kind of work abroad that diplomats used to do.

How long will it take for Rudd to turn this kind of thinking around? Does Rudd really want to, or have he and his ministers got used to national security agencies' dominance of Australia's foreign policy?

It won't be so easy to restore an open foreign policy debate in Australia. Sadly, we have become used to operating in ideologically defined silos.

Good grief

FILM REVIEW

Tim Kroenert

***After Him*: 93 minutes. Rated: M. Director: Gaël Morel. Starring: Catherine Deneuve, Thomas Dumerchez, Adrien Jolivet**



Grief is a raw and complex emotion, and this French film evokes it beautifully. Anyone who has ever lost someone close to them — in particular, any parent who has lost a child — will empathise with middle-aged divorcee Camille (Deneuve) as she comes to terms with the death of her teenage son, Mathieu (Jolivet) in a high-speed car accident. Her needle flicks back and forth from numbness to emotional outpouring.

After Him is a character study of Camille, but at its heart is a relationship. Camille forms a bond with Franck (Dumerchez), Mathieu's best friend and the driver of the car on the night of the accident. Initially, the ease with which Camille shows grace is surprising and moving. A wordless embrace comprises her first encounter with Franck after the accident. She understands his grief, mirrored in her own experience and exacerbated by guilt.

Subsequently, she insists he attend Mathieu's wake. He is reluctant, suspecting he will not be welcomed by the other guests. Sure enough, Franck's presence invokes discomfort and even outright hostility among Mathieu's grieving family and friends.

Again, Camille's attitude of forgiveness towards Franck provides a profound contrast. But it's at this point that the magnanimity of her actions starts to come under scrutiny. It seems the apparently selfless act does little good for anyone, least of all Franck, who knew his presence at the wake would cause disruption, and endured the experience only upon Camille's insistence. Clearly it is primarily her own needs that she has in mind.

As the film progresses, her relationship with Franck develops an unsavoury edge. It seems she hopes he will fill the void left by Mathieu's death — a reasonable and natural hope. But her increasing obsessiveness takes on an unintended, almost sinister air that is anything but motherly.

She never confronts Franck outright about the active — albeit accidental — role he played in Mathieu's death. But her suffocating manner becomes something of a passive act of punishment against the guilt-ridden boy. Unfortunately the character becomes increasingly inscrutable, and for the viewer Camille's motives for and awareness of the implications of her behaviour become obscured.

This inscrutability and the unresolved nature of the narrative mean that this is ultimately an alienating film. As a reflection on the nature of grief, that is appropriate. Grief is something we

carry with us, in one form or another, throughout our lives, for better or worse. It doesn't have a neat ending, nor does it supply easy answers. In many cases, it goes hand in hand with a sense of aloneness.

The lack of not only a resolution, but also a dramatic pay-off, may be appropriate to a reflection on grief, but it makes for unsatisfying storytelling. *After Him* will leave many people knowing more, but understanding less, about the experience of grief than they did before they watched it.

Life of the Party

POETRY

Les Wicks

Life of the Party

I took colour

as all music was plastic, wood and guts.

It was a kind of marriage

as all our paper is solvent-soaked trees.

This Green does not bleach under sun

or shrink at turpentine ... I

so I affirm.

It is a question of your weight in oath, our hope

is a foolish thing, footpath weed;

a scrappy, staunch verdure.

You download a membership form

it is a small, pay-by-Visa contract

that required a globe of years.

My first meeting greeting is almost hummed, vestment of thongs,

rough hands shake across meeting room circles of disposable chairs.

Avocado oils, unleavened bread and cheap coffee —

we are the sum of our pacts.

It was children, work and disease

the bravery of enough

a small sense of festivity at the local bowling club.

Each sandbar is cracking treaty, apricot prayers

beneath the acclamations of mangrove.
The word forest is wrapped in awe
something stands yet
above a world laid flat
in a simulacrum of obeisance.
We are not mountains
and our fundraising stall promises just this.
I vote for moss, mulga ... I
balms in the fall
the promise of high tide
and day spent with my feet.
Brown, Milne, Rhiannon:
the glint in slurry, flares,
silver-lorikeets above trammelled stone blocks.
It is some small thing
to pledge to oxygen.
Remnants remain
their busy immobility
turns our eyes
and bankrolls the world.
Greedy leaves bend the sun, we sleep
in eucalypt shadow.
Maps obfuscate with blue —
blistered roads are gold and silver tinted ordure which take us
nowhere (gleeless s-bend),
new necessity of the struggled middle class.
Scatter the ashes of foolish want

my name is my injury
phosphor collage
scowl and mindshell
that sinuses up our dirty power-in-a-bucket boss flips.

We drink rivers, seas ... | strange,
strong air.

Attain power, mortgages, partners and pale
with grief, almost whispered
tamed malls, greybell hats. We are fire-folk.

The nesting magpies of our lips
smouldered hope strawberry breast, the stairs of despair.

Healing by the rage of belts
poisoned feasts burn in new deserts.

Palms are not menorahs; the X of sunlight through a squint is no cross.

Our kind of faith will fail if humans crash
busy big think
played out in municipal plans and roadside bluster.

We are yet to know its seasons
you joke about everGreens
but ideas are febrile things
that rarely live to see the frost.

We pay by our hands
invest in future futures
clip the hedge funds
and letterbox fans of pamphlets
to the covenant of next days.

Bay

San Francisco does not disappoint,
except in larger ways. The harbour does Tai Chi as
ragged eucalypts occupy each line of defence.
Pagans and denim lotharios called 'Dick',
waiters under the lamps of look,
radioactive
cowboy hats gargle —
a boisterous new Jesus and Beige.
San Francisco does not night, she ducks ... |
behaviour is not shutting down.
On Haight I see him,
drizzling grey ponytail, blade shades
babyboom — cool —
his electric wheelchair modified with chopper handles.
Tax deductions.
Donate your car to St Vinnies.
Homeless guy reading Home
 at the Tenderloin, homeless gal shaves her legs
 homeless guy changing a into smart blue uniform ... |
everyone has a Plan.

Mutual charities between saints and beasts

POETRY

Peter Steele

Comrades

(for Bill Uren)

'Mutual charities' she called them, 'between
saints and beasts', a wandering scholar
herself, with Japan and Bodley up her sleeve,
a bathed eye on our mute comrades
and half a mind to credit their affections.
Hence Macarius healing a whelped hyaena
and praising God for the mother's pleasure,
Cuthbert blessed between prayer and prayer by otters
in his beach vigil, and Benno the fair,
conceding croak-rights to frogs by a hallowed marsh:
and hence Columban, his clothes touched by the muzzles
of a round dozen of placid wolves,
and Brendan chanting office out on the deep,
ray and pollock exulting, and Kevin,
a harried boar at peace in the osier chapel.
Did Colman's mouse, nibbling his ear, provoke him
indeed to worship? And did the fly
do sentry-go on his codex, and keep his place
at interruption? I should be glad
to think so, as of the grasshopper who came
to a snowbound church, and *faute de mieux* sang out

the midnight praises, the brethren snoring:
or of the lions who buried Paul the Hermit,
and weep in stone at Vezalay:
or of those tales that make a sound like the sea.