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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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Taliban friend's letters to the enemy

POLITICS

Benjamin Gilmour



In the tribal areas of Pakistan, close to the Afghan border, Abdullah Khan, a friend and unashamed supporter of the Pakistani Taliban, gives me a present.

Previously his gifts to me have been fine embroidered pillows or bright dresses for my wife, stitched by Afghan refugees with mirrors and sequins. Today I am surprised when he hands me a rectangular box the size of a cigarette pack.

Slowly I open it.

Lying on a bed of shiny white fabric is a military service medal on a ribbon. Inscribed are the words; 'US Army — Afghanistan Campaign' over an etched map of the country. For a second I am confused. How did Khan come by these?

'Just 200 rupees a piece', he tells me. It's the equivalent of a few dollars. Suddenly I realise what I've been given. The Taliban have for many years been hijacking convoys of supplies arriving in Karachi and up the Khyber Pass, bound for the foreign forces in Kabul. These are, of course, the spoils of war. They are not limited to medals either.

'If you like, we have combat boots, trousers, shirts, compasses, water bottles, bed sheets, kit bags, mosquito nets, badges ... the daggers are the most expensive, really, they are very good ones.'

Tribal bazaars of the frontier are flooded with these items and 'expensive' generally means nothing over five US dollars. Entire containers are snatched on the journey up the Indus Highway on a regular basis and there's little the authorities can do about it.

With the exception of bullet-proof jackets and night vision goggles, prized among insurgents on both sides of the Durand Line, piles of American goods are heavily discounted. Abdullah Khan has amassed quite a collection.

'My favourite', he tells me, 'are the letters.'

Seeing me shake my head, he elaborates.

'Unopened mail to US soldiers from their loved ones, piles of them I see and some I read with my own eyes. Oh, those poor young men out on battle field, not knowing if girlfriends have left them for another man, how forgotten they must feel!'

For a moment Khan almost sounds sympathetic, until he gives a wicked chuckle and slaps

me on the back. Anything that demoralises the enemy, including theft of their personal letters, thrills the Afghan resistance.

Nearby in the Darra Bazaar about 40 km south of Peshawar (pictured), a town where weapons are manufactured [from scrap metal](#) and smuggled arms sold cheaply, US M4 machine guns are the most popular purchase of late.

‘They have a folding butt’, says Khan, excitedly. ‘Easily concealed.’

Looting of military convoys is nothing new in this part of the world. A few decades ago it was the Soviets who lost their AK47s, big fur hats and service medals. Pre-partition, the British were so frustrated with the Pashtun habit of looting their weapon stores, that they encouraged Afridi tribes to expand the capabilities of the Darra Bazaar. It is ironic to think the only way the colonialists could stop the enemy from stealing their weapons was to help them make their own.

Fifty years later the Pashtuns are putting up the same fight they always have. Thanks to never-ending attempts to control them, war has become their way of life. In Abdullah Khan’s gift there is a clear message, but he wants to make sure I don’t miss it.

‘My friend, tell your soldiers to stop risking their lives in Afghanistan for these medals. Here in Pakistan, we’ll give them one for free. As long as they pack up and go home, we’ll give them as many as they want.’

Swami's fiery interfaith message

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

This interview with Swami Agnivesh continues the series recorded for *Eureka Street* at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne in December 2009. He is a prominent social activist and Hindu reformer in India.

He speaks about the need for dialogue among different religious and cultural groups, overcoming narrow religiosity, and his struggle against the oppression of caste, bonded labour, and child slavery in his country.

I first met Swami Agnivesh in India in 1999. I was there making a documentary for ABC TV about the murder of Australian Christian missionary, Graham Staines, and his two young sons by Hindu extremists. A few months after the killings, Swami Agnivesh led a group of religious leaders from all the major faiths on a pilgrimage to visit Staines' widow in the east of India.

The 75-year-old swami was born Shyam Vepa Rao into a wealthy high-caste Brahmin family in the south of India. But he renounced the privilege of this elevated position in society, and took the name 'Agnivesh' which means 'embodiment of fire' (*agni* is the Hindi word for 'fire').

He studied law at university, and in the 1970s and '80s was a member of the state parliament of Haryana just south of Delhi, serving for a time as its education minister. He founded Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front) in 1981, and since then has been its chairperson.

Despite laws banning bonded labour in India, the practice is still rife, virtually enslaving millions of people (estimates range from tens of millions to over 300 million people), mainly from the impoverished low castes. As a means of paying back small loans, people pledge their labour, or the labour of family members, often children. Then they are locked into years, or even a lifetime of work under onerous conditions.

During 30 years of struggle, Agnivesh and his fellow activists have achieved the liberation of 176,000 bonded labourers, including 26,000 children, 10,000 of them from the carpet industry. They have concentrated their efforts around Delhi, and set up ten education centres for child labourers who work in the vast quarries and brick kilns that supply the booming building industry of that sprawling city.

Agnivesh has been recognised with many international awards for his efforts to abolish bonded labour in India, and for ten years, from 1994 till 2004, he was chair of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery.

His passion for social justice is fuelled by a deep spirituality that is impatient with the extravagant external trappings of Indian religion. His vision of true spirituality is summed up well by his adopted name.

‘Fire is symbolic of purity, knowledge and wisdom,’ he has said of his name. ‘All human beings have the presence of this spiritual fire, the spark. Some choose to extinguish it, but others cultivate the fire of truth, love, compassion, and the raging fire of justice. I chose this name because I always loved the symbol of fire, and my heart and mind are full of fiery spirit.’

Sympathy for an immoral Arab prophet

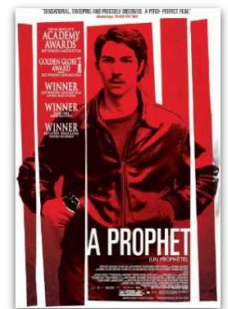
FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Un Prophète* (A Prophet) (MA). Running time: 155 minutes. Director: Jacques Audiard. Starring: Tahar Rahim, Niels Arestrup, Hichem Yacoubi**

It's no great surprise to hear the name of Jacques Audiard, writer-director of French prison drama *Un Prophète* (A Prophet), mentioned in the same sentence as American greats such as Martin Scorsese and Brian de Palma.

The film, a frontrunner for the 2010 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, relates the saga of a 19-year-old Arab man, Malik El Djebena's (Rahim) rise to power and influence during a three year sentence in French prison. The story of a young man balancing ambition and survival as he scales the criminal underworld resonates with classic gangster epics such as Scorsese's *Goodfellas* and de Palma's *Scarface*.



Un Prophète also shares those films' penchant for bloody chunks of violence, as well as the cultural and racial disquiet that lends further tension to the characters' already taut existence. It is an unforgettable film that, like its predecessors, evokes sympathy amid immorality.

From the moment of Malik's imprisonment for allegedly attacking police, he finds that if he is to survive, he needs to choose between conflicting evils. He is immediately enlisted by Cesar Luciani (Arestrup), kingpin of a feared Corsican gang and a figure of great influence in the prison, to murder a fellow prisoner, Reyeb (Yacoubi), a witness in an upcoming trial against the mob. If he fulfills the deed, he will win Cesar's protection. If he does not, he will be killed.

Malik does commit the murder — the ultimate crime as an ultimate act of self-preservation — but only after first wrestling his conscience to the ground. In the moments immediately preceding the murder, he inadvertently bonds with Reyeb, who, thinking the young man to be a friend, encourages Malik to use his time in prison to educate and better himself.

There is a hint that Malik has damaged his own moral compass at the moment of Reyeb's bloody execution. He embraces Reyeb's advice to educate himself, as if in this way some good can be drawn from his evil act. Reyeb appears frequently to Malik as a ghost, not to haunt but to counsel and prophesy. The advice he offers proves to be helpful. Malik's own ambition and 'smarts' thus speak through the guise of a demented conscience.

Malik increases in Cesar's esteem, as he proves to be a reliable and motivated minion. Perhaps too motivated: he's opportunistic, and begins to play his own game, to the detriment of his mentor. He sees power first as a means of survival, and later as an end in itself. Cesar arranges for Malik to take day trips outside the prison in order to run errands for the

Corsicans, but Malik uses these outings to begin building his own empire.

Malik is as much an outsider among the Corsicans as he feels among the prison's Muslim contingent. Like the Italian- and Cuban-American non-heroes of Scorsese and de Palma, Malik draws a sense of pride and resilience from his cultural otherness. His Muslim roots appear from time to time, notably during an ethereal stint in solitary. These moments, like Reyeb's ghostly visits, lend transcendence to the film, but no moral credence to Malik's actions. We may sympathise with Malik, but this is an immoral story, uninterested in repentance or redemption.

The contrast between Malik's and Cesar's character arcs works well. Malik's power and influence trend upwards. The old man Cesar's are petering into decline. His time is coming to an end, and Malik, prophet-like, is heralding a new era and a new kind of gangster. The moment when Cesar realises how far behind his former underling has left him is the most poignant in the film. Powerful performances by both Arestrup and Rahim evoke the deep humanity in the hearts of seemingly heartless characters.

Messiah Mandela's miracle moment

HUMAN RIGHTS

Catherine Marshall



I clearly remember what I was doing the day Nelson Mandela walked free from prison. I was scouring the dirt roads of the Kruger National Park for wildlife, cut off from all outside communication and woefully unaware that one of history's most significant events was unfolding in my very own country.

Later, on our way back out of the reserve, my now-husband and I stopped at a roadside café where the news stand casually informed us of the exhilarating event. Mandela's photo had been banned for my entire life; the vivid image of him leaving Victor Verster prison with his fist aloft was the first I had ever seen of this mythical person. I had missed out on his moment of deliverance, and felt utterly cheated.

But the real history was yet to unfold; though it riveted the nation, Mandela's release was no more significant as a stand-alone event than would be Aung San Suu Kyi's liberation from house arrest in Rangoon. For maximum impact, Mandela would need to be the human catalyst for superhuman change.

It was a calculated strategy, and it worked: the behemoth apartheid state shifted so thoroughly and so smoothly that even the erratic events of the past 20 years have done little to diminish South Africa's reputation as a miracle nation.

That black South Africans would follow the lead of Mandela, a Messiah-like figure who offered them the best chance of escaping decades of oppression, was a *fait accompli*. But a peaceful transition could only occur with the support of white South Africans, a group that was itself deeply divided across language and political lines and which was accustomed to the protection of a paternalistic regime.

White children of apartheid South Africa knew little more than what they were drip-fed by a manipulative, pro-censorship government: Mandela was a terrorist (he had pleaded guilty to sabotage but rejected violence), South Africa was threatened by neighbouring Marxist countries (hence its support of rebel groups like Renamo in Mozambique and Unita in Angola), and the ANC was violent, communistic and anti-white (as evidenced by the ANC-planted bombs that killed and maimed hundreds of civilians, military and police in the 1980s).

Apartheid politics was devoid not only of healthy debate and honest information, but of the nuances on which power turns. As they grappled with the notion of sharing 'their' country with all its inhabitants, how were whites to discern the real intentions of the ANC and other

liberation groups? How was the media to undo decades of subtle brainwashing and coercion? And how would society dismantle the parallel, *Truman Show*-like universe that whites had inhabited for all these years?

Clearly, the racial divide forced upon South Africans in 1948 could be bridged only by a carefully constructed policy, one that would assuage white fears while restoring dignity and full rights to blacks. It was a policy whose foundations were laid by the gradual reforms of President F. W. de Klerk in the 1980s, and whose span was hoisted by Mandela and the conciliatory impetus which drove his agenda from the moment he left prison on 11 February 1990.

Mandela's poky cell on Robben Island was not a means of punishment; it was a laboratory in which the apartheid government had unwittingly grown a solution to an unavoidable problem: how to return power to its rightful owners. By the time the majority of whites effectively voted in favour of universal suffrage in a 1992 referendum, they were truly ready for a new South Africa.

Today, the Rainbow Nation is not without its storm clouds. As Mandela himself said, 'Nothing is black and white'. The country is plagued by corruption, rampant HIV infection, lingering cross-racial hatred and crime so virulent it provoked my own family to leave our beloved homeland and seek a safer existence in Australia.

While the burgeoning black middle class has redrawn the country's social landscape, millions still live below the poverty line, virtually invisible to those who swept to power — and wealth — on the 1994 elections. 'There was a huge hope that a new dawn was going to come. That sense of great optimism and hope has faded enormously,' lamented Moeletsi Mbeki of the South African Institute of International Affairs in a recent interview with AFP.

Injurious developments notwithstanding, South Africa's successes are hard to match: it has an entrenched bill of rights and a vigorous, free press in which citizens debate the issues of the day with unbridled assertiveness; it is the 27th largest economy in the world and generates two thirds of Africa's electricity; it has had three democratically elected leaders and one transitional president in the space of just 17 years, and, despite a history of hardship, its people still manage to exude a special happiness and sense of place.

As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of Mandela's release, what I remember most is the impact of his legacy on my fellow, black South Africans. But I also reflect with tremendous gratitude on the way in which he [helped shape](#) the post-apartheid psyches of white compatriots: his bold, forgiving leadership freed us from shackles we barely knew existed, permitted us to pursue friendships that might otherwise have foundered, gave us good reason to mend our fractured sense of national pride, and enabled us, at last, to live with unmitigated integrity.

Vegetarian's war on duck terror

ENVIRONMENT

Sarah McKenzie

We're all sick of the duck shooting argument aren't we? Year after year we see the same old television footage — a misty lake at the crack of dawn, tough men with beards and John Deere caps living out their Rambo fantasies on one side, and crusty-looking agitators with beards and hemp trousers on the other; one small group of extremists versus another.



This would all be fine except that in reality the people opposing duck hunting aren't the radicals that the media would have us believe. The people opposed to duck hunting are you and me and most of the people you know — in fact, according to a 2007 Roy Morgan poll, it's 87 per cent of Victorians, a figure spread fairly evenly among supporters of all political parties.

Putting aside for a moment the arguments of cruelty and conservation, it seems simply like a bad political move for the Victorian government to announce that the duck hunting season in 2010 will not only be longer than in 2009, but the daily bag limit will increase from three to eight.

Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia Labor governments have all banned recreational duck shooting, so there is a precedent to ban this activity on both animal welfare and environmental grounds. With less than 20,000 duck shooters registered in Victoria, why does the Victorian government pander to the shooting lobby at the expense of the vast majority?

Along with expected scenes of the limp and pathetic bodies of swans and freckled duck being laid out on the steps of Parliament House, we can also anticipate the same old argument from shooters — a bizarre and counter-intuitive claim that they are actually the most passionate of conservationists.

Their argument goes something like this — 'We rely on high duck populations in order to shoot them out of the skies for our own pleasure, hence we actually care the most about preserving their numbers'. They claim, maybe truthfully, to do some good work funding wetland conservation. But any such positive contribution is more than outweighed by the harm they cause.

There is also the old chestnut about hunters 'controlling' duck numbers. One could assume that without their important knowledge of 'game management' we would be dangerously overrun by out-of-control duck populations. When a family of mountain duck has moved into your garage, don't say you weren't warned!

You can only feel sorry for Professor Richard Kingsford, the scientist responsible for surveying bird numbers since 1983, whose work has unwittingly become the justification for the government's decision. Professor Kingsford's research has shown that duck populations have declined by 70 per cent in the past 25 years. Between 2007 and 2008 alone, he found a dramatic 60 per cent decrease in numbers.

Professor Kingsford has pointed out that, although his most recent surveys of Eastern Australia might have shown a slight increase in overall bird populations across Victoria, South Australia, NSW and Queensland combined, Victorian numbers have not necessarily increased at all during the past year.

He is also at pains to point out that only half of the duck species targeted by Victorian hunters migrate. We cannot rely on higher populations in other states conveniently flying in to repopulate our own diminishing stock.

Although some of the reduction in numbers can be attributed to factors such as drought and habitat loss, those gun-toting conservationists only add further to the pressure by killing not only target duck species but other endangered and non-target species as well.

Sure, this is not the intention of the shooters. Field and Game Australia (FGA) openly 'deplore' the killing of protected species and attribute such mistakes to mistaken identity and vandalism. In 1990 in an attempt to reduce the kill of non-target species, the Waterfowl Identification Test was introduced. In 1993, half the freckled duck population in Victoria was shot and killed. This is just part and parcel of the game. To accept duck shooting is to accept the needless deaths of protected species, no matter how unintentional they are.

FGA literature also claims that the ducks they shoot might actually die a less painful death than those who die at the 'cruel hand' of nature. I am sure that deep down most hunters do not want birds to unduly suffer. But studies of hit rates have shown that it takes the average shooter six shots to bring down a bird, and that for every 100 birds bagged, between 60 and 120 are wounded.

No matter how good a marksman an individual might be, the reality of duck shooting is that there are as many birds painfully crippled and wounded as there are birds that are killed and retrieved.

Perhaps the most compelling argument though is a basic one of need. Do we really need to shoot and kill wild ducks? These birds aren't needed for food (although some are eaten). Unlike other environmental debates, unemployment figures will barely be influenced by the demise of the recreational hunting industry.

In the end it comes down to the simple desire of a small number of mainly men who get a thrill from the kill. And while they do so, we are all paying the price for those few hours of bloodlust — humans and animals alike.

Losing and finding Dad

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras



I write about families; many people wish I wouldn't. But in a sense families are all we've got, even though they may be extremely problematical, either safe havens, repositories of tawdry secrets, or something in between. And yes, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

My family seemed happy enough, held together by a quite remarkable mother, a person of rare intelligence and understanding. When she died, everything changed, and eventually [my father](#) rejected his two children. My brother and I take no responsibility for this estrangement, and our father need not either, for old age, ill health, and rash decisions can alter lives irreparably. And sometimes irrevocably.

The kaleidoscope. Quite suddenly and recently, circumstances changed yet again. My brother went to visit our father. And then my turn came. We drove through the leafy avenues near the city, and I heard again the comforting click and chime of trams. Melbourne was baking in summer heat and dust; a strong northerly blew small eddies of rubbish and leaves along the broad streets. I felt that I had never been away. Through tunnels and along freeways we went to the nursing home.

I felt as sick as a dog and was doing a fair imitation of a cat on hot bricks; I was also jet-lagged and weary. Would Dad recognise me? It had been more than seven years, after all, and he had recently been diagnosed with dementia. If he did recognise me, what then? Would he be pleased, or would he fall into a rage and start roaring in well-remembered fashion? There was nothing for it but to find out. Like childbirth, I told myself, the only way out was through.

Some of the residents were watching a film, we were told, and Dad was one of them. We were taken through chintzy lounges to the darkened projection room. My brother moved to one side, while I stood peering into the gloom. By dint of concentrating, I eventually saw a very old man being helped to his feet. I suppose I was clearly visible. I also suppose I will never forget that moment and the moments that followed. At least not for a very long time.

Dad's jaw dropped, and then he broke into his familiar wide grin. He waved, and then came slowly towards me, pushing his walker in front of him. Once outside the door he took a couple of steps further. 'Hullo, Dad', I managed to say, although I now wonder how the words emerged from my constricted throat. He grabbed me and wept; I grabbed him back and wept, too. When we finally let each other go, I could see that my brother's dark eyes were filled with

tears.

Dad was always an emotional, volatile man, but one trained in the old school: real men do not cry. So he mopped his eyes and announced, 'Heavens, I'm stupid!'

'I suppose we all are from time to time, but so what?' I replied. His voice had not diminished in strength, and the truculent tone had not changed.

We three then sat in the guest lounge, trying as best we could to catch up, to plug the enormous gap in time, to mend the frayed connection. Dad worked his way steadily through a box of his favourite chocolates, while we attempted to prod his memory and succeeded, at least to a certain extent. I had brought some photos, not knowing at all whether this was the right thing to do. But it turned out to be. Dad knew most people from his past, predictably recognising his parents and aunts more easily than his nieces and nephews.

I wondered whether I should show him the photo of his first wedding, but I did. There they were, 65 years previously, our Mum and Dad, he laughingly proud and in uniform, she smiling sweetly, shyly, through mists of tulle, and leaning into his shoulder. At that moment, Dad's moment of sighting, I had to turn away and blink rapidly. For he said, very quietly and wonderingly, 'God, she was beautiful'.

We left soon afterwards: Dad was tired. While saying goodbye, I held his hand, feeling relieved and thankful beyond measure.

'I hope all this has not been too much of a shock, Dad', I said.

He looked at me and smiled the smile I had missed so much.

'No', he replied. 'It's not been a shock. Not at all. I've been expecting you.'

One year after Kinglake burned

POETRY

Susan Fealy

Christmas at Kinglake

This winding, up and around, bend after bend, and all around
lacy green stockings, inside each one, the black trunk of a tree.
Around the bend, all is drenched in light, in this insistently blue
sky. The mountain stretches out like a hand: muscled but still, the
flecks of black frailer than insects — only the road a firm line. Black
stumps, capped with snow — no, capped with lime, beside the road,
tree ferns, fanning their wings in the sun. A sign: *children crossing*.
The road is so large. The CFA building, those three letters almost
the three sides of a cross. Around the bend, low flying, a parrot
fleeing, red winged. Wide open fields, filled to tumbling with
summer grass: pale seed, yellow flowers and sleek cattle, tails
flicking. Piles of trees bones, white as marrow-bones sucked dry.
A billboard says *Lifeline. Are you feeling low? Don't wait. Ring
this number*. Letter boxes: one red, one green, the size of milk-
cans, one each side of the track. Behind the red, a bare patch of soil
turns up to the sky. Around the bend, a magpie: loud, full voiced
The song seems to come out of nowhere — blown along by the wind.

iPhone mums take the lead

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Drew Taylor

Gobsmacked; that's how she felt.

My 23-year-old co-worker is no stranger to consumer technology. She packs a MacBook and a touch screen mobile phone, has an iPod stacked full of music and can happily lose an entire night to FaceBook. But one morning last week, two mums and a dad — all in their 40s and 50s — put her to shame with their passion for new technology.



The moment came when my co-worker and I bumped into a woman I knew who had recently bought an iPhone. Having just acquired one myself, I asked her how she was finding it.

The woman's enthusiasm was palpable. Launching into an excitable endorsement of all the software 'apps' (applications) she'd installed, we quickly began comparing phones and app lists. Immediately, one of the women working at reception (another iPhone convert) was leaning over the counter and passionately joining in the conversation.

When I finally turned back to my co-worker, the expression on her face was unprecedented; a mixture of disbelief and displacement. Not only did she feel socially excluded for not having an iPhone, but she was also 'weirded out' by the experience.

'Older people aren't meant to be into technology like that', she pronounced over coffee.

Her comment was a turning point in my thinking. I was once again reminded of the incredible impact Apple is having on personal technology. Over the last few years, Apple has managed to combine sexy device design with simple tactile user interfaces, popularising the way people engage with technology, in a manner that feels intuitive and anything but technological. More aptly put, Apple is creating 'human' technology; changing our lives, organising them, connecting them to others.

It should come as no surprise, then, that women are one of the fastest growing consumer groups of Apple products. According to various surveys conducted in the US late last year, women now comprise 40 per cent of the iPhone user base, with 29.5 per cent of all iPhone users being 'iPhone moms'.

Next month, the iPad launches in Australia. Essentially a jumbo version of the iPhone, the device will be roughly the size of an A4 piece of paper and allow users large screen interactivity with broad-range connection to the internet.

Think of it this way: this is the laptop that's not a computer, and at your fingertips (literally)

will be the ability to watch videos, read the latest novels (even physically flip the page), play games, sell things on eBay, write emails, track your daily calorie intake, check your FaceBook profile or use any one of the 100,000 apps already available for the iPod or iPhone.

The techno-elite are still picking apart the details, focusing on the device's limitations, but I believe, in time, the iPad will redefine how people in the home interact with technology. This is especially true of people like my wife, who 'hates computers' but can already see herself with an iPad in her hands.

It's the beginning of true couch-based computing. With an iPad, the internet will be just two button presses away; the family budget will be an app, fully integrated with online banking services; the bookshelf will become digital, as will the daily newspaper or latest issue of *Who Weekly*; shopping lists will be created, sourcing what's on special at the local supermarket; family photos will be sorted and shared (in between television ad breaks); take-away meals will be ordered through a free app, updated with the latest menu and deals.

Where this ultimately leads us is both frightening and exciting.

On the one hand, Apple is creating a framework for the meshing of technology and the home in a way no other company has so far been able to. And, if the iPad becomes the success I believe it's capable of, we open our families and homes to being governed by a proprietary-driven structure. In the short term, at least, Apple may become to families what Microsoft is to businesses.

The flip side is a potentially radical change in audience mix and a new direction for technology. With the iPad's accessibility it's likely that women will make up an even larger percentage of the user base. The result will be more apps and programs written with them in mind and, as a consequence, women will, more than ever before, steer future technology along new paths. Applications might be much more about the family, day-to-day life, connecting services to the household and empowering and entertaining the entire household.

Apple has proven with the iPhone that they can turn middle-aged mums and dads into app-toting techno-evangelists. With the iPad, that potential is even greater.

Perhaps, a glimpse of that future comes from my own wife.

'What I want', she tells me, while we're watching TV, 'is an app that would let me enter something into a calendar on the iPad, which would then automatically show up on your iPhone calendar. That way you could never forget anything I need you to do.'

Hmmm ... on second thought, maybe we should hold off buying that iPad next month.

Rescuing altruism from the Barnaby rubble

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins



Last week Federal Opposition finance spokesperson Senator Barnaby Joyce caused a stir when he argued for cuts to Australia's foreign aid.

It was a case of populist politics at its worst. He was appealing to base self-interest.

Addressing the National Press Club on Wednesday, Joyce said we should not be sending money to feed the hungry in developing countries because we have the highest food inflation in the Western world.

That his arguments made little sense does not stop them from winning popular support. Many voters decide on the basis of emotion rather than rationality. And tapping voter greed is likely to be a more successful strategy than appealing to voter altruism.

But it's a poor reflection on the moral character of Australians and of Senator Joyce's estimation of it, that he should not even try to make us better world citizens.

Already Australia gives less than 40 cents for every \$100 earned across the economy to foreign aid, compared to 60 cents in the UK and almost 80 cents in Denmark and Belgium.

Moreover, enlightened self-interest is the basis for much of Australia's existing aid effort. AusAID [specifies](#) that the program aims to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development 'in line with Australia's national interest'. So we provide assistance to East Timor, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands in order to avoid having failed nations on our doorstep.

Australia remains a signatory to the 2000 Millennium Declaration that aimed to halve world poverty by 2015, whether or not it is consistent with our national interest. From this declaration came the eight [Millennium Development Goals](#), which specify targets in areas such as poverty and hunger, education, the empowerment of women, and reduction of child mortality.

Labor backbencher Julie Owens is co-convenor of the Parliamentary Friends of the Millennium Development Goals. She [reported](#) to Parliament in October of the significant progress that has been made towards achieving the goals, but made it clear that continued progress requires Australia to maintain its level of foreign aid, especially in the context of the Global Financial Crisis.

But it would be out of character for most politicians to promote an altruistic cause such as

the Millennium Development Goals. This is significant because ordinary people are inspired by the rhetoric and actions of their leaders. Gandhi and Mandela were two politicians of the 20th century who were also leaders of humanity. They were successful in their appeal to the voters' sense of altruism and they showed it could be done.

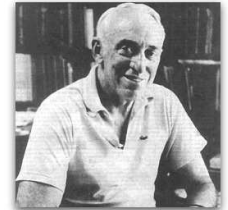
President Obama is attempting to do the same. He may be struggling, but he's not ready to give up the fight. Some of our would-be leaders are not even prepared to begin the fight.

Smart taxing solutions to global warming

ENVIRONMENT

Peter Hodge

Between the Rudd Government's 'friendless' ETS and the Federal Opposition's 'climate con job', Australians concerned about global warming have little to cheer about. One consolation, however, is that the debate opens the door to further discussion of a Tobin Tax, mooted by some significant players in the lead-up to and during the Copenhagen climate summit as part of a possible mix of solutions.



Named after the Nobel Prize winning (in 1981) economist James Tobin (pictured), a Tobin Tax is a tax on foreign currency transactions. John Maynard Keynes proposed a similar tax during the Great Depression. Such a tax was last on the public radar in the late 1990s, when social justice organisations such as the broad-based Jubilee 2000 movement made a serious assault on the global financial architecture.

A growing acceptance of the failings of our market based economy, linked to both global warming and the Global Financial Crisis, has put wind in the sails of an idea becalmed for a decade. With powerful backers such as Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy, Warren Buffett and George Soros, a tax of this nature is a serious proposition.

Set at a tiny 0.005 per cent (the most commonly cited rate), the tax could collect around \$76 billion each year, although estimates vary significantly. The funds could assist developing countries cope with the effects of climate change and finance the necessary technological adaptations; it is unlikely any legally binding climate agreement that includes most developing countries will be signed without such commitments.

The money can also be used to finance poverty reduction measures and, hence, make progress on the UN's ailing Millennium Development Goals.

A global financial transactions tax is also being posited as a means of insuring the global financial system against future shocks. A tax at the rate nominated above cannot alone address all these needs, but it can make a substantial contribution. And a more ambitious rate is possible.

Predictably, the European Union is leading the push for a Tobin-type tax; the International Monetary Fund and US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner are less enthusiastic.

Developing countries will not line up in support of the proposed tax. S. Venkitaramanan of *The Hindu* cited the IMF argument that the tax 'would interfere with the flow of liquidity between markets', in contrast to the alternative view that such a tax would stabilise economies by slowing the speculative movement of capital. 'Countries like India may not support a Tobin

Tax because they have become dependent on capital flows for supporting their external account.'

Australian Greens leader Bob Brown has been a strong advocate for a global financial transactions tax. But Kevin Rudd rejected the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi's call for the tax when they met in Copenhagen.

Of course any new tax, especially one that could see a transfer of wealth from the developed world to developing nations is anathema to Tories, including Barnaby Joyce it seems. Tony Abbott elevates the volume of his rhetoric, like a television commercial, every time he describes the ALP's proposed ETS as a giant new TAX! 'Beware the UN's Copenhagen Plot' was the headline of a Janet Albrechtsen blog posting for *The Australian*.

In the conservative mode of thought 'morality is obedience to an authority ... it requires personal responsibility and discipline ... enforced through punishment', writes cognitive scientist George Lakoff. The market is one such legitimate authority; wealth is viewed as a mark of discipline, hence poverty is deserved. Any interference with the market and the freedom to make money in business 'any way you can' is immoral.

For progressives 'empathy is the basis for the concept of a fair and responsible market', claims Lakoff. However, a fearful ALP dodges hot-button issues like taxation and immigration as much as they can. This leaves the field open for conservatives to frame these issues as they choose.

Poverty alleviation, tackling Global Warming and preserving the world's ecosystems — these are the pressing moral issues of our age. Describing a tax on financial transactions in these terms is not just spin. 'Framing the truth, so that it can be understood, is ... central to honest, effective politics,' Lakoff argues.

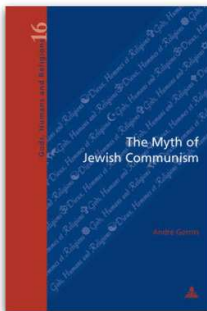
Hard-core conservatives will never be convinced. But activating progressive modes of thought in a critical mass of citizens, by focusing on the moral dimensions of these issues, is crucial to building support for measures such as the proposed tax. How can the global community make progress on crises like global warming without such a dialogue?

Debunking the myth of Jewish communism

BOOKS

Philip Mendes

Gerrits, Andre: *The Myth of Jewish Communism*. Bruxelles, 2009. ISBN 978-90-5201-465-4



The myth of an international Jewish communist conspiracy has long been a central diet of anti-Semitic agendas, most notably in Hitler's program of ideological genocide. But equally many authors not influenced by anti-Jewish agendas have suggested that conservative fears of Jewish Bolshevism possessed some legitimacy. The Dutch academic Andre Gerrits provides a dispassionate and balanced account of this contentious topic.

Gerrits acknowledges that the equation of Jews with Communism contains a small element of truth. From about 1870 till at least 1970, Jews were conspicuous for their involvement in socialist and communist parties and movements. The Jewish alliance with the Left reflected a number of complex historical and political factors including the class oppression of Jews who were mostly poor and working-class, the ethnic/national oppression of Jews by various European right-wing governments and movements, and the defence of Jewish claims to equality by most left-wing European parties and movements.

But equally many of the Eastern and Central European communist movements to which Jews belonged in disproportionate numbers were very small movements. The small minority of Jews involved were not representative of Jews as a whole.

The Jewish contribution to Communism fuelled anti-Semitic conspiracy theories such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion alleging that Jews control or manipulate the international communist movement in order to rule the world. But as with other racist frameworks, the Judeo-Communist myth is based on an anti-Semitic construction that exists independently of any objective reality.

It is not about what Jews actually say or do, but rather about what anti-Semites falsely and malevolently attribute to them. The myth reflected a notion of collective Jewish guilt similar to that of the blood libel.

Gerrits attempts to separate the myth from the reality. He considers the lack of reliable empirical data on Jewish Communism, and raises four key observations. Firstly, Jews were not the only ethnic minority over-represented in European Communist parties between the two world wars. So too were Georgians, Armenians and Latvians.

Secondly, Jewish participation in Communist parties varied from country to country, and was not universally significant. For example, there were few Jews in positions of influence in

the German Communist Party.

Thirdly, it was not only the number of Jews but also the prominence of some Jews in leadership positions including state security organs that captured popular attention. And finally, the prominence of Jews in Communist parties tended to decline quickly once Communist rule was established.

Gerrits notes that the Judeo-Communist myth was strongest in those European countries — Poland, Hungary and Romania — which had large Jewish minorities, strong traditions of popular anti-Semitism, and a credible fear of Russian expansionism associated with an alleged potential for Jewish collaboration with Russian aggression.

He identifies two key historical periods in the development of the myth. The first was immediately following World War One when the visible rise of the Jews from the margins to a prominent role in professional and business life coincided with rapid social and political changes and upheaval. The prominent role of individual Jews such as Trotsky and Bela Kun in the Russian Revolution and other radical uprisings was widely noted.

The second was the arguably key role played by a number of Jewish Communists known as the 'Muscovites' in the Soviet takeover of Poland and Hungary following World War Two. Gerrits rejects conspiracy theories that Stalin deliberately placed Jews in leading positions to serve as scapegoats for any public backlash against Communist rule. Instead, he argues that they were chosen not because of their Jewish background, but solely due to their political reliability.

Gerrits also addresses other major issues such as the later purging of most of the Eastern European Jewish Communists by Stalin, and the associated emergence of Communist anti-Semitism as a political tool in the Soviet satellites including the tragic 1968 expulsion of over 20,000 Jews from Poland. He also comments that the Judeo-Communist myth had little impact in post-1945 Western Europe or the USA despite the prominence of some Jews such as the Rosenbergs in the Cold War spy trials.

Today, the Judeo-Communist myth is fortunately dead except for tiny groups on the paranoid far Right. But its long-standing destructive and genocidal impact should serve as a universal warning of the dangers of demonising or essentialising whole peoples or groups whatever the actions of individual members.

Haiti needs to be free

POLITICS

Aurelien Mondon

In January, in the wake of the Haitian earthquake, *The Age* published a piece by Chris Berg, from the Right-wing think-tank Institute of Public Affairs. Berg argued that the only thing Haitians need now is to 'get away from Haiti'. For Berg, Haiti is a lost cause, and intrinsically unable to develop.



To prove his point, Berg cited the amount of aid wasted on Haiti and quoted the World Bank on the impossibility of making any progress due to the endemic political instability. The only solution is for Haitians to come and work (read: be exploited) in Western countries, learn our civilised ways and send money back home.

Of course, Berg is somewhat of a caricature. Most journalists did not express such narrow views. There were also notable exceptions, those who gave an informed picture of Haiti and its tragic history. Yet under the veneer of progressivism, many journalists and commentators reiterated the arguments Berg had put forth. Haiti was a failure, a doomed country that had been unable to lift itself out of poverty and perpetual political crisis.

A neo-colonial veil has settled on our Western media and brought back the pessimistic view regarding the ability of the 'barbarian' to ever civilise. Since Haiti became independent in 1804, the country has never been at peace and has never managed to survive without our assistance. Luckily, Haiti could rely on us. Not only are we giving money to the Haitians, but UN and US troops will implement peace in a country apparently prone to the most horrific looting. The earthquake was our chance to start anew and this time we 'would get Haiti right!' We would implement democracy, restore order, bring stability, peace and prosperity.

It was not the first time someone would try to 'get Haiti right'. The US claimed such a target after the 2004 coup against democratically elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Moreover, this episode was only the latest Western interference in Haiti's destiny, all of which have left Haiti ever poorer and dependent on our 'generosity'.

Yet Haiti had not always been poor. Before the small country became independent in 1804, it was the most profitable colony in the world. After a decade fighting the French, the British and the Spanish, Haiti was left in shambles and forced to divert most of its resources towards its military protection.

For freeing themselves, the Haitians were also found guilty of theft and were condemned to repay the French for the loss of their slaves. The debt crippled the economy of the war-ravaged country until its last repayment in 1947. It has been argued that France now owes

Haiti up to US\$21 billion.

By the time Haiti was free from its debt to France, the US had invaded in order to restore order. After 22 years of occupation, the deregulation of the economy, the strengthening of the army and the death of up to 30,000 Haitians, the US withdrew and left the country up for grabs by corrupted elitist generals.

Coups followed, the elite thrived and the population suffered. In 1957 François Duvalier took power and installed an extremely violent dictatorship which cost the lives of up to 50,000 Haitians. His strong anti-communism and Haiti's proximity to Cuba guaranteed him the tacit support of the US.

When his son took over in 1971, his policies of deregulation granted him the unconditional support of the Americans who found in Haiti extremely cheap labour. For the second time, the Haitian population rose in the face of incommensurable adversity and overthrew the dictator. Reagan's Air Force escorted Duvalier to his villa on the French Riviera; 'Baby Doc' left behind a colossal debt.

In 1990, popular uprisings forced the junta to organise legitimate elections and Aristide was elected in a landslide by the poor majority. He was ousted after only seven months by the Haitian elite ultra-minority. Many of his supporters were killed in the repression that ensued.

Eventually, Clinton agreed to 'help' Aristide — both to ease the recent Somali fiasco and to stop the flow of Haitian refugees into the US. In exchange, Aristide was requested to amnesty the coup-leaders, share power with them and bow to the IMF's drastic recommendations. Aristide had no choice but to accept, as 70 per cent of the country's operating budget came from foreign aid and loans.

The 'benefits' of globalisation and Haiti's dependence on the IMF brought 'real' democracy to Haiti. According to Oxfam, as a result of international pressures, Haiti became 'one of the most liberal trade regimes in the world'. With tariff cuts, Haiti, which had once been self-sufficient in rice, was flooded with subsidised American rice.

The poultry sector underwent the same changes at the cost of 10,000 jobs. The agrarian sector was dismantled to be replaced by an arguably stronger industrial one. Many American corporations were able to enjoy the lowest wages in the hemisphere and incredibly lenient business regulations. But by the turn of the century, unemployment had exploded as many corporations had left, finding better opportunities in Asia.

Yet the Aristide government managed to pursue some progressive reforms and in a few years build more schools than in the whole history of the country. Health programs were also improved, and the government planned to double the minimum wage.

Aristide's reforms were brought to a stop in 2003, following complaints formulated by the minority elite opposition and the suspension of American aid until Aristide agreed to become

more amenable, less 'dictatorial'. Again, Aristide was forced to make unjust concessions. It proved insufficient, and bloody attacks were organised by militias hired by Aristide's democratically defeated opponents.

The wave of violence soon 'forced' the United States and France, under Security Council approval, to invade Haiti on 29 February 2004. According to the United Nations report of the Secretary-General on Haiti, Aristide was exiled in order to provide Haitians with 'a peaceful, democratic and locally-owned future'.

An earthquake the strength of that of 12 January would have caused severe damage in the richest countries on this planet; Haiti's economic and political situation make it much worse. 300,000 people might have died in the event, and yet what remains most haunting is our oblivion as to our responsibility in such a death toll.

Far be it from me to deter individuals from offering their help after such a disaster. However, the media coverage and lack of objective reporting on Haiti's past have led many to react unconsciously in a neo-colonialist, borderline racist, manner.

Yes, the Haitians need help, but they are not a failed people, nor are they worse people than their Dominican neighbours. Nor are they a lawless primitive people who have turned to looting corpses and destroyed houses. At the present time, many trustworthy reports have highlighted the low level of insecurity in Port-Au-Prince following the dramatic events of 12 January.

Two hundred years ago, Haiti became a beacon of light and freedom for all oppressed people. For the first time, human rights had a universal value. For the first time, colonialism was defeated and complete equality made possible. As Peter Hallward pointed out, this declaration 'dealt the myth of white supremacy a mortal and thus unforgivable blow'. For this, the little country would pay, even up to the present day.

Only a deep introspection in our system and its inegalitarian, intrinsically racist basis could allow Haiti to be recognised as the symbol of equality and emancipation that it is. Haiti might need our help after the earthquake, but most importantly Haiti needs to be free.

Martyrdom and other revolutionary miracles

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



Mary MacKillop's prospective sainthood has brought miracles into public discussion. Reports of contemporary local miracles make interesting human stories. But they also provoke the ire of those who see them as mumbo jumbo and further evidence of the irrational character of religious faith.

The points and counterpoints in this debate are predictable. But another angle may be found in an apparent oddity in the processes of saint making.

Martyrs do not require miracles to qualify for inclusion in the public worship of the Catholic Church. They need only evidence that they died for their Christian faith. But other candidates for sainthood do need miracles, as well as evidence that they have lived lives consistent with deep faith. Miracles are broadly understood as events that are associated with prayer and are not susceptible of a natural explanation.

This intriguing difference between martyrs and other saints illuminates the place of miracles in the Catholic tradition. In it the martyr's death is equivalent to miracles worked through the saint. Both point to a rent in a world that is declared to be self-enclosed.

The Roman world of the first Christian martyrs was politically enclosed. The sacred and the political were joined in the worship of the Emperor. The Roman imaginative world was one in which the public welfare depended on the tight union between the empire and religion.

Christianity, like Judaism, challenged this with its faith in a God whose claims and favour could not be locked into Imperial institutions. The central story of Jesus Christ was of a death at the hands of the Imperial authorities and a Resurrection that made his scattered followers the kernel of God's people. They represented the new way of living that God had opened through Christ's death and rising.

To the Roman authorities this faith located Christians as a set of outsiders who gave communal allegiance to a God beyond the Empire and so tore the tent that housed the sacred.

This view led the Roman authorities to persecute Christians, offering them the choice of recanting their allegiance to Christ or face torture and death designed to destroy their dignity and their humanity. Christians saw the death of martyrs as a demonstration of the power of their God who gave martyrs strength to endure being hacked to bits. They saw it as a vindication of the Church in its belief in a God whose claims and ways of acting lay beyond the control of the State. The martyrs by their death symbolised that rent in an apparently sealed world.

The miracles associated with faith and prayer also tear open a world that is seen as self-enclosed and whose possibilities are narrowly defined. In daily experience the world is enclosed by the forces of fate, like plague, famine and the contingencies of sickness and health. These tend to restrict our hope and sense of what is possible. Our world can also be limited by imaginative frameworks that limit reality to what we can perceive, and restrict our hopes to the ways in which we can make the visible world work for us.

Miracles open a gap in the canopy that we build over our world. They point to a more mysterious reality and to incalculable possibilities that arise from the recognition of a God on whom the world depends. The lives of saints, miracles and all, point to that deeper reality of a God who transcends the world and analysis of it. Miracles associated with faith are symbols of God's presence and power within the world.

Seen from this perspective both miracles and the deaths of martyrs are symbols. They point to something beyond themselves. The twin qualities of miracles are that they are human events that are out of the ordinary and that they occur within the context of faith. For Christians who accept that faith they disclose a God who is intimately active in the world. Miracles do not demand that others believe in their God, although they do invite them to reflect whether their imagination of the world may be too circumscribed.

If miracles are seen as symbols, the questions about whether they really exceed the powers of nature will appear tired. Their verification demands simply that healings should be beyond our present power to analyse or to replicate. It does not demand that scientific reflection will never be able to explain or replicate them.

Central to the miracle is the context of faith within which the extraordinary healing is situated. Without that they are no more than an unusual event. But even unusual events lead us to ask questions.

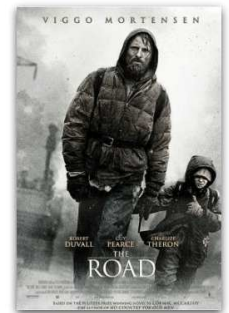
Fatherhood after the apocalypse

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Road* (MA), 111 minutes. Director: John Hillcoat. Starring: Viggo Mortensen, Kodi Smit-McPhee**

Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Road* is a bleak, beautiful meditation on human existence. Set in a wasted, post-apocalyptic United States, it is horrific — almost a horror novel, though certainly also very 'literary'. McCarthy's icy poetic language makes a bittersweet song of his protagonists' (a Man and his son) helpless, distantly hopeful ramble south.



Australian director John Hillcoat catches both beauty and bleakness in his faithful film adaptation. The haggard grey face of the landscape is reflected in the bristling, decrepit debris of the Man's features, where hope and love dwell against all reason. The problem with the film *The Road* is that it does not succeed in getting far beyond the surface strata.

This difficulty lies in the shift from book to film. Much of the beauty in the novel hums in the sentence gaps of the Man's internal monologue. It's not just the language, or the vivid evocation of a desolated civilisation and encroaching, deadened wilderness. It's the evidence of the depth of the love and the fear that the Man has for the Boy. And how love and fear morph into something close to awe for his son, the one good thing still blooming amid the waste.

Inhabiting a visual medium, and with sparse dialogue at their disposal, Viggo Mortensen (as the Man) and Kodi Smit-McPhee (the Boy) provide authentic performances that are nonetheless inscrutable. Relieved of depth, the characters' pilgrimage, a quest of mythic proportions in the novel, is reduced to a mere dramatic thriller on film; compelling, but cold.

Hillcoat has previously provided cinematic reflections on the violence in humanity, in *Ghosts ... of the Civil Dead* (1988) and *The Proposition* (2005). In *The Road* he handles the horror elements well, recognising that effective horror lies not in visceral shock and gore but in gripping the deepest fears and discomforts of the human heart.

The film's most intense scene, therefore, comes not upon the discovery of a human abattoir in the basement of a seemingly abandoned house, but moments later, when the house's cannibalistic owners unexpectedly return (cannibalism is rife in this desperate world). For tortuous seconds the Man, not wanting the Boy to meet a profane end at the murderers' hands, believes the time has come for them to carry out the ritual double suicide they have rehearsed

for just such evil circumstances. Here we experience the kind of gut-rending dread that good horror is made of.

The scene is indicative of a world where right and wrong seem to have become one grey smudge across the face of existence. Only in such a world could suicide be seen as an act of both survival and love.

This blurring of right and wrong, good and evil in a world where civil structures have disintegrated, is a theme in both novel and film. It is seen most clearly in the Man's escalating wildness; his growing desperation to preserve the life of his son, and his conviction that the end of survival justifies a growing list of dubious means.

Two scenes in particular underscore this theme. In one, the Man and the Boy encounter an elderly man (Robert Duvall) hungry and helpless, wandering on the road. The Man refuses to share with him their studiously scavenged food, and only grudgingly accedes after much begging and obstinacy from the Boy.

Later, the Man takes cruel revenge on a fellow traveller (Michael K. Williams) who has stolen from them during an uncharacteristic lapse in vigilance. The Boy's protests reveal the rift that has begun to gape between father and son: the Boy has begun to notice the flaws in his father's fatalistic mantra. But whereas in the book these moments signify existential shifts in the relationship, on film they seem merely domestic.

Both film and book end on an ambiguous note. The outcome is hopeful, or sinister, depending how inclined to optimism one can be after the story's dire events. The Boy navigates these final moments with a mixture of the innate distrust of other people that his father has taught him, but also with the knowledge, born of his own maturity, that at some point, trust will be needed for the continuation of his existence.

There is a sense that, whatever happens beyond the closing moments of the film, the boy has at least been equipped with the resilience to survive, and the desire to keep trying to distinguish good from bad, and right from wrong, no matter how grey that indelible smudge becomes.

MySchool: helping rich schools get richer

POLITICS

Tony Kevin



The opening of the [My School](#) website last Thursday is a bracing reality check. Things that for many years were intuitively felt, and discussed anecdotally among parents and educators, have been quantified beyond doubt.

My School did not publish 'league tables' ranking schools' average NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) scores. But newspapers in many states quickly filled the gap. In my city, the *Canberra Times* published 20 graded lists of NAPLAN results across the ACT's 91 primary and 32 high schools.

Canberra is small enough for readers to recognise and compare the schools which are public, Catholic parochial (mostly administered by the CEO, the Catholic Education Office), and non-Catholic independent schools (NCIS).

Canberra does not have any elite high-fee-paying Catholic schools. The Catholic low-fee parochial system essentially serves most of the Catholic school population.

The public system used to be similarly universal, but over the past 25-odd years there has been rapid growth in the NCIS sector, from two Anglican grammar schools to 11 NCIS primary and nine NCIS secondary schools, including an Islamic school and a few secular community schools.

It is clear from My School data that in the ACT the educational peer-group streaming effects of this bifurcation of the formerly almost universal public secular education system have been statistically significant.

I imagine other states' league tables will show similar general trends, though qualified by two ameliorating factors: a robust tradition of selective public high schools in major state capitals, and a small Catholic high fee-paying elite school sector. Because we have neither of these in Canberra, the differences are clear.

As a parent of children attending Catholic primary and high schools, I have no particular axes to grind, apart from believing in a plural society, in free choice in education, and an interest in the quality and social justice of the education on offer to all Australian schoolchildren.

I cherish the Catholic parochial system, yet feel saddened to see the alternative public system eroding into disparate congeries of religiously affiliated and other NCIS, that seem on

the face of it to be taking the academic cream of students, leaving an educationally disadvantaged school population in the public schools sector. For this is what My School-derived league tables suggest, to judge by the Canberra example.

A close look at ACT tables ranking numeracy at year 5 and year 9 reveals that the spread of school average scores in the Catholic system was similar to those in the public system. Most Catholic schools were bunched around the middle scores. In the year 9 numeracy test, the top scoring Catholic high school got 623 and the lowest-scoring got 582, compared with a national average of 589.

However, between Canberra's public and NCIS schools, there are large differences in NAPLAN average scores. In the year 5 numeracy test, NCIS came in first, second, fourth and sixth places; six of the 11 NCIS scored in the top 20 of the 91 schools. And by the year 9 results, of the 32 schools tested, NCIS occupied the top seven places; the other two NCIS ranked 11th and 14th. Scores ranged between 674 and 608, all well above the national average, and well above Catholic high schools' range of average scores.

In Canberra, parents and children face a three-way choice. A city that 50 years ago had a flourishing state sector, an under-resourced but striving Catholic sector, and almost no NCIS, now presents a paradox: a well-resourced Catholic system that works well in educational equity and social justice terms, but a troubled picture elsewhere of a burgeoning NCIS sector and a state sector whose professionals are worried about its future.

The Catholic system is highly equitable both between schools and between areas of the city. A child attending any Catholic school in the ACT will be part of a class peer group with NAPLAN scores which are reassuringly close to other Catholic schools, and almost all above the national average.

Non-Catholic system parents have a more difficult choice to make. If they regard NAPLAN class average scores as an important indicator of the peer group within which their children go through school, they will be pushed towards NCIS which have so many apparently brighter kids. They will face the choice of high fees and social narrowing in the highest-fee-paying schools, or perhaps constraining fundamentalist ideologies in lower-cost NCIS.

If they stay with the state system, where there are lots of very bright kids and good teachers, they will wonder whether their kids are getting a fair share of national educational resources. For at least in Canberra, the richer NCIS are doing hugely well out of the present national and state-level educational funding systems. In the non-Catholic system, the lesson seems to be: to him that hath, more shall be given.

While Labor education ministers around the nation say that the NAPLAN school scores will lead to more political pressure on governments from parents and voters to direct more resources to 'under-performing' schools, this seems disingenuous. Most federal funding has high automaticity, on a per capita basis. Except on the staffing side, there are limits to what

state or territory governments can do to level the playing field.

Meanwhile, parents vote with their feet, moving their children across to the expanding NCIS sector. This trend can only be accelerated by the publication of NAPLAN tables.

Citizens and voters who are concerned not just for their own children's educational welfare, but about education as an instrument of social justice, should be prompted to ask: What is being done about the fact that the richest NCIS are getting richer, in part at taxpayer expense? What is being done to help improve the NAPLAN performance of below-average schools, and to help narrow the statistical differences?

And how do we use this data to protect our children from a situation where parents, voting with their feet, may themselves foster the outcomes they fear most — underprivileged, low-morale schools in poorer suburbs breeding a generation of alienated, under-achieving kids? We are not yet there, but the danger signs are evident, in parts of the NT, and in some deprived schools in inner-city or outer suburban ghettos in major cities.

Finally, what do the kids themselves prefer? Many of the kids I know — even kids attending Catholic and NCIS schools — admire the social diversity and ideological flexibility of open public education. They look forward to moving into broader more plural social milieux at the junior college or tertiary level.

I suspect they won't be thrilled at the proliferation of NCIS schools sucking bright kids and life out of the state system. They would want us to come up with better answers.

The allure of J. D. Salinger and Shane Warne

EULOGY

Brian Doyle

It is a peculiarly American custom, perhaps, to be more interested in artists than their art; or maybe Americans have just gone further, as is their wont, gossipwise, than the Brits, say, who were more absorbed by Byron's life than his work, or the Australians, absorbed by Shane Warne's antics more than his exquisite artistry.

So Jerome David Salinger, born in seething Manhattan just after the First World War, grew more famous in American life for retreating from it, in 1953, than for his two masterpieces, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1948) and *Nine Stories* (1953).

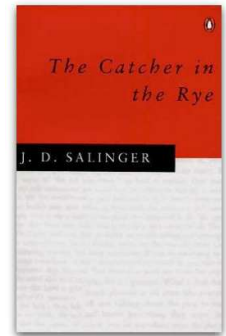
Salinger sightings, rumors of mounds of finished but unpublished novels, memoirs by a former lover and by his daughter Margaret, sudden copyright lawsuits issuing from his refuge in the New Hampshire forest — this was what we heard of Salinger for more than half a century, as his public persona morphed from the lanky, dashing, funny war vet (he fought on D-Day and in the Battle of the Bulge) who created one of the greatest voices in American literature, to a sort of woodsy Howard Hughes, reportedly an ascetic obsessed with religion, privacy, and health food behind the high fence of his rural compound.

Meanwhile *The Catcher in the Rye* became a classic (it sells 250,000 copies a year, and is, with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and S. L. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, a basic text for American teenagers) and *Nine Stories* became a touchstone, particularly for writers; among the authors who counted it a lodestar are Philip Roth and the late John Updike.

Writers of every age are still thrilled by Salinger's uncanny ear for the rhythm and verve of the way people speak, and for his wonderful eye for turning points of infinitesimal subtlety — the virtues of the best short fiction.

Salinger also published two collections of long linked stories about the Glass family — ex-vaudevillean parents and seven brilliant children, some of whom appear in *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* — and he was rumoured to have written vast reams more about them; a roman-fleuve, perhaps, like Patrick O'Brian's sea novels or J. K. Rowling's wizardly epics, that probably will appear some years from now to great acclaim.

A friend of mine maintains that Salinger's greatest creation was the Legend of the Forest Recluse, which protected the troubled man (he was hospitalised at the end of the war for what we would call post-traumatic stress disorder) and allowed him to live the quiet life he wanted; but I am more interested in what he prosed than what he posed.



With his death the legend vanishes and the books remain. *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High* are interesting and worth a look, but *Nine Stories* is brilliant and haunting, some of the best short stories ever written in America, and *Catcher* is one of the best American novels ever. It will always be in print, no matter what sort of country America becomes, because it gets at the deepest American virtues and vices, and does so with a verve and brio and seeming cockiness that is alluring and insane-making at once.

Holden Caulfield is a sneering, cynical, skeptical, snob, quick to blame others and slow to assume responsibility; but beneath the brittle veneer is a youth starving for love and meaning. Not unlike, maybe, the young country he and his creator come from, and the young country where you read these words.

Corruption fuels crisis in water-poor Yemen

ENVIRONMENT

James Dorsey



As Yemen struggles to defeat Al Qa'ida, to end a tribal uprising in the north and to prevent the south from seceding, water could turn out to be the thing that tips the country over the edge. Like much of the Gulf, Yemen faces a reduced water supply resulting from climate change and from rising temperatures compounded by poor management.

Without radical reform of agricultural and other policies, the Yemeni capital Sana'a stands in a decade at most to become modern history's first capital to run out of water, according to a recent projection by the World Bank-funded Sana Water Basin Management Project. Rapidly dwindling water resources are likely to lead to disputes, reignite riots against a government already widely viewed as corrupt, nepotistic and incompetent and strengthen Al Qa'ida's Yemeni affiliate, Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

One of the world's water poorest nations, Yemen is consuming its limited water resources at a far faster rate than it is able to replenish them. At Yemen's current seven per cent population growth rate, consumption can only increase. Yemen's population is set to almost double from 23 to 40 million over the next two decades.

Alongside unemployment, water is driving increased internal migration and urbanisation. Some 70 per cent of Sana'a's population either buy their water from private vendors or collect free water from local mosques. Vendors sell a liter of water for \$0.15, a steep price in a country where incomes average \$2 a day. The vendors draw their water from wells near the capital and deliver it in tanker trucks or jerry cans. With no enforced standard for potable water, quality varies.

Water extraction rates in Sana'a are believed to outstrip replenishment by a factor of four. Sana'a's water basin is close to collapse. So is the basin in Amran, 50 km north of Sana'a. Of the 180 wells tapped a decade ago by Sana'a's municipal water company, only 80 remain active. In some districts of the capital, taps have shut down. In others, supply is interrupted at least once a month.

In 2008, the Eurasia Group reported that 19 of Yemen's 21 aquifers were not being replenished and that in some cases non-renewable fossil water was being extracted. Wells in several parts of the country have run dry. The falling water table means wells have to be dug deeper at levels of 200 m and more where the water is contaminated.

Alongside rising domestic consumption, Yemen's water crisis is fueled by corruption, poor or no resource management and wasteful irrigation. Agriculture consumes most of Yemen's

water. Qat, whose leaves are consumed as a daily stimulant by the majority of Yemeni men, is Yemen's foremost agricultural product. The more water the plant gets, the more productive it is, making water conservation a non-starter.

Yemen's lack of resource management is evident from the fact that the government created a separate ministry for water and environment only in 2004. Six years later, the country still suffers from lack of effective regulation and oversight, particularly with regard to groundwater. As a result, digging of wells remains uncontrolled and so does extraction of groundwater.

Water Minister Abdul Rahman Fadhl Iryani, unable to enforce licensing of new wells, estimates that 99 per cent of water drilling in Yemen is unlicensed. Moreover, Yemen does not regulate the import of drill rigs, which are not subject to custom duties or taxation. Yemen is estimated to have some 800 privately owned drill rigs, a number far higher than most other countries.

Subsidised diesel powers landowners' water pumps. Yemen has so far resisted donor demands that it abolish diesel subsidies ever since rioters fearing price hikes and higher inflation in 2005 forced the government to drop efforts to do so. Abolishment of subsidies would also cut into profits from diesel smuggling that are raked in by the country's elite.

Yet, the more the Salih government postpones biting into the sour apple, the sourer it gets. Donors may be betting on the president's son, whom Salih is grooming as his successor. A ten-point reform plan drafted by deputy finance minister, Jalal Omar Yaqoub, that includes abolishing subsidies and streamlining bureaucracy, has curried favor with the United States and other donors.

The water crisis plays into the hands of Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, the Al Qa'ida offshoot that claimed responsibility for the failed Christmas Day bombing of a USA airliner. To compensate for its lack of control in large parts of the country, the government has delegated responsibility for water to local authorities, establishing water companies primarily in urban areas. It is in those tribal areas, like Marib and Shabwa, where no such companies were created that AQAP is strongest.

Economic and political reforms demanded by donors will have to go beyond cost-cutting to incorporate more efficient water use and distribution, pricing to encourage water conservation and development of sustainable agriculture. Without such reforms, water could be at the core of Yemen's next generation of conflict.

City of steel and jaded bricks

POETRY

Cassandra O'Loughlin

Enduring things

After Jack Gilbert

The small animal in my head at night
hesitates, then picks up
the scent of an ancient route
and another place in me:
the city of steel and jaded bricks,
of mills, foundries and furnaces,
its locomotives grunting, whining
on tracks that sliced through the hearts
of the sweat-shiny, blackened men
whose households were regulated by the whistle
they woke or slept by.
The BHP, like a bulker tethered
amidst chimney stacks and luffing cranes
to a bollard on the Hunter,
rising out of the river mist, silhouetted against a broad sky,
is now a thing of air,
a transitory room across the birds' flight-path.
The coke ovens and furnaces are now quenched, levelled.
Platt's Channel reclaimed by water-hens, plovers,
the mangroves in the tide's ceaseless swell.
The last workers? Retrained,
shunted into retirement,

or an early grave.

And what about the housewives
whose lives hinged on too much work,
or too little,
on soot and the wind's direction?

They hold fast
to family heirlooms lest they break or are lost
in the bumpy transition.

Their weekend children rubbing the sticks
of themselves together, igniting the flame
that generates new life, at the Town Hall,
or the Palais. Their children's children
have grown, moved away:
on the web trafficking the atmosphere,
on the back of coal, Hospitality or Tourism,
in service, or drifting into the harbour on luxury liners
that look like sleek white albatrosses.

Perhaps this land wants its ancient self back:
the alluvial soil, the rocks (their art intact),
and the beach where I'm now strolling.

I think I understand how the elephant felt,
the one photographed for the *National Geographic*
as it tracked through the lobby
of the Luangwa Valley Lodge in Zambia,
on its way to its favourite mango tree.

My ancient routes have been criss-crossed and disturbed.

Nevertheless, I'm listening for the tribal sounds,

the South Pacific's breeze through the bush,
the soft brush of percussion
and indiscriminately above that, the wind
free as the Whistling Kite
above the foliage, and then above the valley.
The animal in me thrives among the natives
and the sound of sunshine
in this pleasant place my solemn heart has made.

Unhinged

Me and a stranger clutch
prawner's poles that hammock
a net. Dark's spangled hair
is tressed on the Watagans.
Streetlights fasten long hinges
on the lake where, stride after stride,
we scissor its black satin;
the cool fusion is riding my ribs
to a halter,
my mind's parched country.
We circle back moon-walking,
buoyed in the body's liquidity,
my feet kneading the celestial silt;
alien crabs in their flying saucers
propel from my touch
and dumb stars orbit
in gentle collision
with my bare legs.

A restless curlew is calling,
it's voice floats
eastward across
the braid of tide-swept land between
the lake and the ocean. Since when
have summer nights been so alive?
Our campfire spits sparks
from its earthen cradle
under stars scattered loose
as lost ancestors.
It casts a heavy axis, like an iron rod
to take hold of.
But the alabaster stones in my pockets
whisper another way home.
The catch is a burden
I think I cannot carry in the air.

Apple angels and MySchool demons

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

In the early hours of Thursday morning, two potentially life-changing events took place. One was the announcement of Apple's iPad computer reading tablet, and the other was the launch of the Federal Government's [MySchool](#) website.

Immediately Apple afficianados sought to turn the iPad into an object of worship, and educators who feared the consequences of the website demonised it.

British actor and tech guru Stephen Fry [spoke of](#) 'joining the congregation at the Church of Apple' for what amounted to a service to venerate the iPad. He [said](#) : 'You want to fondle it and lick it and play with it.'

Meanwhile there was fearmongering within the education unions, with Australian Education Union president Angelo Gavrielatos [promoting concern](#) about 'damaging league tables that will now only be one click away as a result of the website'.

Both the Apple iPad and the MySchool website will enhance our wellbeing if we use them responsibly and overcome the urge to deify or demonise. Each is a means to an end, and holds particular promise.

The iPad is priced to appeal to the mass market rather than an elite, and it could hold the key to a manageable large-scale transition from print to electronic books, magazines and newspapers. Such a move is both environmentally desirable, and inevitable, and it needs to be made as painless and equitable as possible.

Sydney Archdiocesan Executive Director of Catholic Schools Dr Dan White [said](#) the MySchool website could serve a useful purpose in providing rich, meaningful data about schools' achievements that would generate constructive dialogue between schools and parents.

But he stressed that simplistic 'one-dimensional' use of the data could be damaging, and his example hints that such improper practice could have a negative impact on some of the most needy students.

'Statistics can be deceiving, particularly in smaller schools, where the presence of two or three children with special learning needs can significantly alter the class average.'

There will be distortions too in the lives of Church of Apple worshippers and others who see technology as an end in itself, and fail to appreciate that right and proper function must



come before beauty.

Delivering justice in the schoolyard

EDUCATION

Vic O'Callaghan



It was lunchtime. I was on playground duty. The day was hot and sultry and the kids were out of sorts as they grappled with the winning and losing of games.

Michael and Sam, two of my active students, appeared before me babbling to gain my attention and frantically selling me their version of an event that had occurred on the handball court.

Under this barrage of information I called for time out. Moments later I was searching for Brian who had apparently been hurt in a scuffle between himself and Michael.

Brian was in tears. A sheen of skin had been removed from his right knee and his left hand was slightly grazed. Michael was into his mantra of accidental cause — 'He tripped over my foot' — while Sam was stuttering in astonishment. Sam had seen Michael deliberately push Brian off the handball line.

I attended to Brian to make sure there were no broken bones or internal injuries. I asked Brian if he was alright now. He nodded. 'You feel better?' I added. Brian sniffed lightly and glanced up at me. I saw an innocence that troubled me briefly.

But I was in the centre of this teeming non-linear world, warding off forces of turmoil and chaos, striving to bring resolution to the incident between Michael and Brian; so I had to work hard and fast.

I asked who had done what and brought quick resolution. I brought peace and order. I found out exactly what happened and Michael was reprimanded and told to apologise to Brian and sent to think about what he had done. It was a small incident in the day to day running of a school. Good. All sorted.

Or was it? What questions had I asked? Had I brought a sense of justice to all parties? What had Brian said? The fact was Brian had said not a word. He was a puppet in the whole exercise. But he had spoken, through his distress. His eyes had said, 'You think this is okay. I am not tough enough, am I.'

But I had arbitrated for Brian and delivered a legal response and a consequence for Michael. This is an important step. I had to punish Michael to make sure he did not do it again. This imperative drove me. By making Michael face me (as the big authority figure) he would see the errors of his ways and desist from further similar behaviour. I was a bullet proof policeman on another planet.

But what was driving what I was doing? What would Michael or Brian or Sam learn from this experience? Would they be friends in an equal relationship? Am I able to look back on this incident and say, 'I am proud that these young people learned about justice through this experience?'

I had established safety. I was operating from what I believed to be a reputable and values based code of behaviour. The code I had absorbed as a young person was driving my practice. But, what is behind this code? The secret was before me. I had seen it in Brian's eyes. This fear casts innocents mute.

I did not realise it, but I was as mute as Brian and Michael. Punishment and fear are twins and their bittersweet play is compliance. This is the core of the code.

Is this the best we can do? Is conformity the measure of our success? What level of moral and character development are we developing within our students when our benchmark is a deep still water pond? True, the need for boundaries and limits are crucial, but when there is an absence of supportive and nurturing relationships, we create hollows in people that seed doubt and isolation.

Had I been inspired to ask appropriate questions, there was one person who could have provided me with understanding. Brian. Brian and all the Brians I had dealt with over the years. The Brians who had learned that silence is the way to peace, where resentment and pain can be buried deep.

My assumption was that I could reveal reality to Michael. But it was not me who Michael needed to hear from, it was Brian. Brian was the one who knew what had happened beneath the surface of the smiling pond.