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Leading Muslim thinker's non-violent activism

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

This interview with renowned Muslim scholar, [Tariq Ramadan](#), continues the series introducing leading religious thinkers who attended the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne in December 2009. It was recorded for *Eureka Street*, and is sponsored by the [Asia-Pacific Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue](#) at the Australian Catholic University.

Ramadan speaks about the need for Muslims to be open to other faiths, and about one of his passions — education, particularly Islamic education. As a former high school teacher and headmaster, and now Professor in Islamic Studies at Oxford University, he sees education as crucial in overcoming problems in this era of inter-religious conflict. (Continues below)

I first met Tariq Ramadan in his hometown, Geneva, in Switzerland, in 2003. He was one of the interviewees in a documentary I was working on for *Compass* called '[Tomorrow's Islam](#)'. It featured progressive Muslim leaders and thinkers from around the world. Then, as now, he struck me as a highly appealing and charismatic character.

But in the meantime, serious allegations have been made against him, and opinion about him is divided. To his fans and supporters, he is an articulate reformer, or, as he calls himself, an 'activist professor', who works tirelessly around the globe building bridges between the Muslim community and broader Western society. But his detractors have labelled him 'dangerous' and 'double-faced'.

The criticisms of him are reflected in two major incidents. First, in 2004 he was appointed to an academic post in America at the Catholic University of Notre Dame. Just a week before he was due to arrive in the United States, the Department of Homeland Security revoked his visa. Its only explanation was that he was a threat to national security.

His appeal to overturn the decision failed, but it revealed the only specific charge against him was that he had made a few donations to Palestinian charities with links to Hamas.

Second, in 2005, French investigative journalist, Caroline Fourest published a book critical of Ramadan, more recently published in English with the provocative title, *Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan*. Fourest's most serious charge is that while Ramadan speaks in benign progressive tones to non-Muslim Western audiences, he says the opposite to Muslims.

While it's difficult to fathom the degree of angst and opposition he has provoked, they are explained partly by his family background, and his political agenda.

His parents were political refugees from Egypt, fleeing to Switzerland in the early 1950s

after his maternal grandfather, Hasan al-Banna, was gunned down in Cairo. It is widely believed he was assassinated by the Egyptian military as part of a crackdown against Islamic activists by the secular government.

Al-Banna is a revered but controversial figure in recent Islamic history, as he founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. It is widely recognised that radical elements of the Brotherhood — particularly writer and political philosopher, Sayyid Qutb, and his followers — are the major inspiration for the current wave of violent Muslim extremists.

But Ramadan is adamant that while his grandfather was a religious leader and reformer who supported the formation of an Islamic state in Egypt, he was a deeply spiritual man and eschewed violence. Ramadan is also a devout Muslim, and sees himself continuing in this line of Islamic reform and deep spirituality.

Ramadan argues that Muslims in Europe should become contributing active citizens in the countries where they live, and develop a European Islam that's in tune with their new environment. So he challenges members of his own faith, but is also critical of Western capitalist society for being oppressive and unjust. Politically he espouses a form of socialism that he says is inspired by the universal principles of Islam.

In 2006 journalist and academic, Ian Buruma, carried out an investigation into the charges against Ramadan, interviewing all the major protagonists, including Ramadan himself. He [wrote up](#) his findings in a feature article published in *The New York Times* in February 2007, and he came to a positive conclusion:

'Ramadan offers a different way, which insists that a reasoned but traditional approach to Islam offers values that are as universal as those of the European Enlightenment.'

From what I understand of Ramadan's enterprise, these values are neither secular, nor always liberal, but they are not part of a holy war against Western democracy either. His politics offer an alternative to violence, which, in the end, is reason enough to engage with him, critically, but without fear.

Hype undermines atheists' mission

RELIGION

Tim Roberts



While the so-called 'New Atheists' have recently found their voices, the 2010 Global Atheist Convention, 'Rise of Atheism', taking place in Melbourne this weekend, suggests that this movement may be in danger of believing its own hype. Judging by the program, the convention aims to increase atheism's flock by pouring scorn on those whom it should be courting. If that's the case, the message won't reach beyond the fans.

Some of the speakers at the convention take a pragmatic approach ('reason with opponents') while others take an idealistic approach ('alienate opponents'). The former approach, while substantially more difficult than the latter, is potentially far more productive.

But it's unclear whether the convention's overall aim is to reduce the intensity of religious belief or to crush religion altogether. Though Richard Dawkins and others may earnestly hope for the latter, attempting this will only pick off religious doubters while steeling firmer believers against compromise.

Failing to include debating panels with religious moderates is a missed opportunity. Excluding the religious, of course, probably seemed like an obvious move: after all, one wouldn't invite creationists to speak at a biology convention for balance's sake. But inviting representatives from major religions would have prevented the conference from becoming a mere exercise in polemic.

It may seem an unlikely choice, but I'm sure Father Bob Maguire — a Catholic Priest who often seems a whisker away from apostasy — would have relished some productive gung-ho scrapping.

Forging links with moderates against religious extremism should be the first goal of any atheist movement. Change cannot be achieved by eliminating religion, as people's personal beliefs cannot be forcefully harangued into shape. Only by respectfully forming alliances with the moderate religious community will atheists be able to preserve the elements of society that they value most, such as freedom of enquiry and the separation of Church and State. The ego-driven, take-no-prisoners approach dooms atheism to remain an exclusive and tiny club.

It is a falsehood that religion, which reaches so deeply into many people's everyday lives, will melt away when ambushed by the chill winds of detached reason. Rather than treating all dealings with people of faith as an opportunity to notch up a rhetorical victory, atheists need to listen respectfully to opposing views. They would be well-advised to forge alliances with religious people who share many of their core beliefs, rather than quibbling about, say,

whether it was scientifically possible for Christ to have walked on water.

The inclusion of so much comedy on the conference program is therefore misguided. If atheists are concerned about countering fundamentalism's corrosive influence on politics, every hour of that weekend should be spent discussing how to counter religious-based intolerance. Comedians, while good for boosting ticket sales, are as inappropriate at an atheist conference as they would be at a science conference. The organisers' failure to recognise this basic point suggests that many take comfort from sneering at those who disagree with them. Comedians, who are paid to outrage rather than inform, are unhelpful when pragmatism is sorely needed.

One of the primary anxieties that many people harbour about atheism is whether it is possible to construct an ethical framework entirely free of authoritative external influences. This issue should be a central one. Are the New Atheists suggesting that moral principles can be arrived at purely through logical deduction, or do they believe that outside authority is still needed from an alternative source? If the former, what happens when different people arrive at completely different moral conclusions? These questions are both genuine and urgent, and believers deserve better than to have them arrogantly dismissed.

The fact that the Church appears to provide believers with a coherent ethical system based on tradition should not be dismissed out of hand, even if that ethical system is imperfect. External guidance clearly fills a vital human need. The New Atheist movement's inability to overcome its intellectual fragmentation, in order to arrive at an agreed-upon secular philosophy, can be seen as a weakness when compared to religion's promise of steady guidance.

If the alternative to belief is a lonely intellectual trek through myriad, equally valid moral alternatives, many people of faith will choose to stick with what they know. This is not a sign of intellectual poverty; it's a humble admission of personal fallibility.

Despite its many worthy contributors, the convention will drown in a sea of bile unless the movement's adherents realise that they can't remake the world in their own image. Padding the program with snide comic relief puts the event in danger of being dismissed as a weekend of navel-gazing, rather than a genuine attempt to deal with intolerance. And that would be a pity.

Bringing a spirit of silliness to the War on Terror

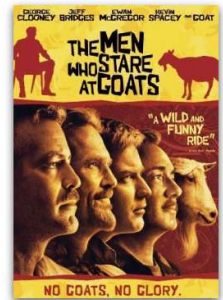
FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Men Who Stare At Goats* (M). Running time: 93 minutes. Director: Grant Heslov. Starring: George Clooney, Ewan McGregor, Jeff Bridges, Kevin Spacey**

It's a question for the ages: Can George Clooney act? Detractors suggest he always simply 'plays himself'. But it's hard to think of more than one role (and the less said about his stint as Batman the better) in which he has not been, at the very least, perfectly credible. That in itself is no small feat.

That's particularly true when the character in question is a middle aged former military man who believes he has psychic superpowers. Who claims to be able to become invisible or block a punch with just the power of his mind, and who activates his powers by listening to American rock band Boston's '70s hit 'More Than A Feeling'. In *The Men Who Stare at Goats*, Clooney brings not only credibility, but even dignity, to just such a ludicrous character.



Lyn Cassady was part of a secret military unit in the late 1970s, the New Earth Army (NEA), led by khaki-clad hippie Bill Django (Bridges), which aimed to harness the abilities of 'gifted' soldiers. They were trained to walk through walls, communicate telepathically, and kill goats with the power of their minds. So says Cassady.

He imparts these secrets to lovelorn young investigative journalist Bob Wilton (McGregor). Wilton is skeptical but, vulnerable in his current heartbroken state and desperate to reaffirm his manhood, he accompanies Cassady on a bizarre quest into the deepest deserts of present day, US-occupied Iraq.

The plot cuts back and forth between their oddball road trip and the fraught history of the NEA; from Django's New Age conversion on the battle fields of Vietnam (he noticed that the human instinct to *not kill* was so strong that new soldiers would deliberately aim their weapons over the enemy's head) to the NEA's idealistic inception and LSD fuelled training exercises, to its eventual implosion due to infiltration by certain overly-ambitious forces.

As you can probably guess, *The Men Who Stare at Goats* is silly. I say 'silly' using my best, clipped, Graham-Chapman-in-starchy-military-attire impersonation. It's the sort of absurd, hilarious silliness you might attribute to Monty Python and their ilk. All the actors commit wholeheartedly to this spirit of silliness.

In a demonstration to the NEA of the power of mind over matter, one guest guru hooks a weight to his genitals and holds it aloft. His students are suitably impressed, although one does ask the obvious question: 'What is the practical application?' Later, during a test of

telepathic ability, an arrogant young recruit (Spacey) rolls his eyes back in his head as his 'spirit guide' predicts, in an extravagant falsetto, the contents of a box. He guesses wrong.

The punchline to all this is that the film is woven around a thread of truth. *The Men Who Stare at Goats* is based on journalist Jon Ronson's 2004 non-fiction book. Ronson provides an account of the formation in 1979 of a secret unit that sought to harness the psychic powers of 'gifted' soldiers, and links this history to psychological interrogation techniques employed during the War on Terror.

Whether Heslov intends some serious point in his film version is unclear. It's hard to bear much ill-feeling towards a film that contains plenty of genuinely funny moments, but it's harder still to keep a straight face when the film attempts to be poignant. The absurdity is spread so thick it's difficult to discern any particular satirical point, aside from the occasional dutiful nod to non-violence and the tortuous capabilities of Barney the Dinosaur.

Despite this unevenness *The Men Who Stare at Goats* is anchored by Clooney's performance. Cassidy is both a ludicrous caricature and a heartfelt portrayal of a man with genuine faith in his improbable abilities. His quest, it turns out, is a quest for redemption from events in his past, and this is what ultimately sustains the film.

Women unheard in the din about burqas

POLITICS

Ruby Murray



In France on 26 January 2010 a cross-party parliamentary inquiry, set up six months ago to investigate the full veil, handed down its recommendations. It recommended first that a parliamentary resolution be adopted stating that wearing the full veil is contrary to Republican values. It went on to condemn discrimination and violence against women.

Despite the inquiry's position that as yet there is insufficient general consensus in support of a ban of the full veil in public spaces, the parliamentary leader of the ruling party, Jean-Francois Cope, has submitted a draft law stating that 'nobody, in places open to the public or the streets, may wear an outfit or an accessory whose effect is to hide the face'.

The draft law, which would apply to both the burqa and the niqab which fully obscure a woman's whole body and face and leave only a small slit or mesh for the eyes, has created ripples of both outrage and support across the world. Those who support it cry that countries must protect themselves against insidious non-democratic practices. Those who condemn it argue that to target Islam for its religious dress culture is a racist violation of cultural rights.

In the debate, the concerns that supposedly started the whole shebang — women's rights, their protection and promotion, and the complex implications of Islamic dress practices — have been obscured. Instead, women, and women's bodies, are yet again being used as the battleground for a culture war.

The sad irony is that a ban on women wearing the full veil in public places will not liberate women, but further constrain and even endanger them, regardless of their motives for wearing it.

If a woman has freely chosen to wear the full veil, then a law overriding that choice in public places is a clear curtailment of her civil and political rights. Those in the West who argue that women, even through the exercise of their own choice, should not be entitled to put themselves in a position which potentially demeans them, would do better to fight against violent pornography and unregulated prostitution.

If a woman has been forced to wear the burqa or the niqab, then it is barbaric to ostracise her socially, criminalise her, and restrict her access to public services. To isolate her further from the broader society and to discriminate against her while she is vulnerable, in the name of protecting her rights to be free from violence and discrimination, is nonsensical at best, dangerous at worst.

If the focus on the full veil is removed, the underlying sentiments of the French parliamentary inquiry — that women are equal citizens, that cultural practices which discriminate against them are wrong, and that violence against women should be condemned — are sound.

But only about 1900 women in France wear the full veil. In contrast, the number of prostitutes is estimated to range from 20,000—40,000. Many are trafficked, abused, and on the streets.

Domestic violence is also a huge problem. The French Ministry of Health reports that of the 652 women homicide victims in Paris and its immediate suburbs between 1990 and 1999, half were killed by their husbands or partners. France's sixth periodic report to the Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women finds that in metropolitan France on average one woman dies every four days as a result of violence from an intimate partner. It's been estimated that one in every ten French women is a victim of domestic violence.

Problems of domestic violence and prostitution aren't confined to France alone — Australia also has high rates of domestic violence — but they do offer some perspective on the debate over how best to protect women's rights. If attempting to combat discrimination and violence against women really is at the bottom of the debate over the burqa, then why not focus on domestic violence with the same hysteria?

This is not to say that there is no place for a discussion over what the burqa or the niqab mean, and what place they have, and should have, in modernity. From its practical problems to its symbolic implications, the issue of the full veil is loaded and sticky.

Too often, however, the role of women and the way they dress in society is constructed as a debate between right and wrong. It leaves no room for the multiple experiences of the world in which real women live, and the complex factors which influence the way in which women dress.

Tellingly, the French parliamentary inquiry was sparked by President Nicolas' Sarkozy's speech in June 2009 in which he stridently declared that the full veil was not welcome in France. Sarkozy wanted a debate, a political podium to yell from, and that's what he got.

But real understanding of what lies behind women's choices requires a conversation where women's concerns are listened to and acted upon. Polarising political hysteria whipped up by politicians, where women go unheard in the din, will not do.

Rosemary Goldie and the Santamaria Split

POLITICS

Bruce Duncan

Few women have played such an important recent role in the Catholic Church as Rosemary Goldie, who died on 27 February at the age of 94, after some years' retirement in the Little Sisters of the Poor at Randwick in Sydney.

From the early 1950s Goldie worked in the Vatican as secretary to Vittorino Veronese (later director general of UNESCO) in the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of Catholic Action (COPECIAL), which was encouraging the development of Catholic Action in various parts of the world.

She saw her work as helping to clarify the new roles for lay activity in the Church and in wider spheres, roles that were strongly endorsed by the Second Vatican Council.

She continued to develop the new direction, not just in her organisational role, but through her extensive range of personal contacts as well as her writings, including in European Catholic journals. She also lectured at the Pontifical Lateran University in later years.

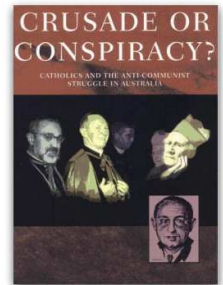
Petite, open and honest in her views, Goldie was nevertheless very professional and conscientious in her work. She was also a gifted linguist, and understood well the theological debates of the time.

At a time when very few women worked at senior levels in the Vatican, Goldie earned the respect of colleagues and ecclesiastics, including the popes of her time. She was one of the few women auditors at the Second Vatican Council, and through COPECIAL contributed to the formation of Council documents on the lay apostolate.

Of special interest to Australians are her role and observations on the debates about the Santamaria anti-communist Movement from early 1954. I owe Goldie a special debt of gratitude because of her help in clarifying the views of the International Secretariat of Catholic Action about the Movement.

Goldie had met Santamaria in the 1940s when he gave some lectures at the Grail training course, 'The Quest', but she left Australia in 1945. While still a member of the Grail, she worked for Pax Romana, the international organisation of Catholic intellectuals. She went as a delegate for Pax Romana to the 1951 Congress of Catholic Action in Rome, but was caught up helping organise its 'chaotic' secretariate.

Her successful intervention there resulted in her accepting what became a long-term



position as secretary in COPECIAL, where she also worked closely with Mgr (later Cardinal) Pietro Pavan, one of the leading thinkers in Catholic Action, and later the main author of Pope John XXIII's famous 1963 social encyclical, *Peace on Earth*.

Pavan was deeply influenced by the thinking of the philosopher, Jacques Maritain (whom Rosemary had heard lecture in France). He insisted on the distinction between Catholic Action, which was properly action undertaken under Church direction, and the 'action of Catholics', which was to be lay people acting independently in their social and political affairs, but with the inspiration of the Gospel and Church social teaching.

This matter had been of concern in various countries, and the international secretariat was intent on keeping the Church's Catholic Action organisations clear of direct political action.

In July 1953, Santamaria wrote to Goldie proposing a social action conference in Melbourne, which he intended to use to extend his model of direct political involvement by a Church organisation throughout South-East Asia. Goldie and her colleagues in the Rome secretariate were alarmed at the implications. She met Santamaria in Melbourne later in the year, but was unable to convince him of the need to keep Catholic Action out of direct political involvements.

Goldie maintained close contact with colleagues in Sydney and Melbourne, and acted as a conduit of information to the Vatican secretariate, as Santamaria pursued his efforts to set up his Pan-Pacific organisation on the Movement model, even after the Labor Split in 1955.

When the Sydney alignment of bishops went to Rome in late 1956 to appeal for Vatican intervention to resolve the Movement dispute, Goldie did some secretarial work for Cardinal Gilroy. The case for both sides of the Movement dispute was presented for the commission of cardinals to judge, and Pavan was nominated to present the case against the Movement model, which he did convincingly. The Vatican directed that the Movement was to cease its political activities.

Goldie continued to monitor the affair as it unfolded in following years, but was mainly involved with her work helping coordinate and encourage Catholic lay movements throughout the world. In 1959, she became executive secretary of COPECIAL, and in 1966 under-secretary for the Vatican's new Council for the Laity.

Goldie had no personal animus against Santamaria, and admired his dedication to defeating the communist hold on key trade unions, as well as his efforts to translate Catholic social principles into practical policies. But she was disconcerted by his refusal to concede the matters of principle involved in the Movement dispute, and dismayed by the Movement's defiance of clear directives from the Holy See.

Goldie blazed a path for other intelligent, committed women in fashioning new roles even at senior levels in Church organisations. Her autobiography was published in 1998, *From a*

Roman Window — Five Decades: the World, the Church and the Catholic Laity (Melbourne: Harper Collins).

When sitting is subversive

NON-FICTION

Suzanne Hemming



It's surprising what you notice when travelling to other countries. I always notice the things that are missing. This was true during a recent trip to Singapore what I noticed was that there were virtually no seats.

In Singapore's vast monuments to international consumerism, the malls, you won't find those strategically placed seat clusters you might find in your average suburban Australian shopping centre; seats just to rest for a moment, to take a load off. Instead you have to go to a coffee shop or noodle emporium and spend money in order to sit down and rest your wearies.

Sometimes that is not what you want. You don't feel like a double mocha grande latte or a plate of black pepper prawns, with service charge plus GST. You just want to take five, regroup, sort your bags, and be on your way.

Apparently the Singaporean government doesn't like the idea of people congregating: they find it subversive. They have heavy fines for antisocial behaviour such as spitting and swearing. It works for them, and creates a pleasant and safe environment for tourists. But the lack of seats suggests something more: a form of social control.

The lack of seats encourages people to be purposeful, to be either in a shop, or making their way to a shop. Spending money and filling coffers. Not just sitting there, daydreaming and being unproductive. This is probably economically sensible but struck me as a little mean-spirited.

I barely had time to notice the seatless platform on the MRT — Singapore's mega-efficient underground rail system. Trains appear as if by magic behind glass doors every three minutes. In order to keep to a tight schedule the doors snap shut with barely enough time to disgorge passengers, let alone board new ones.

I wondered what would happen if you had a stroller, or were old and frail. Strangely enough, everyone seemed young and unencumbered.

It makes sense — no need for seats on the platform, since you won't be waiting long. Still, after a long walk in the humidity, a seat would have been nice, if only for two minutes.

How different to Australia's train systems where the plethora of coffee and cake outlets acknowledge that no, we can't run an efficient train service, so you might as well have something to eat while you're waiting. A seven-course degustation menu could be consumed waiting for the 7.49 to Flinders Street, but that is another story.

On returning to Australia I observed how many benches, seats, stools and places to perch we have in our big cities. Even my local strip shop has a bench, just the one, in case the 50m journey from the newsagent to the gift shop becomes too much.

It's a lovely bench, with green wooden slats and cast iron trimming. Over the years vandals have tried to remove the wooden slats, and occasionally succeeded, but the slats have always been replaced. Now they leave it alone. It sits on a narrow footpath, facing the road. And yes, there is nearly always someone sitting on it, a mum with kids or an elderly gentleman, just watching the traffic go by.

I'm glad we have a generous smattering of seats and benches that have no real purpose, other than to say, have a rest, sit a while, reflect a moment. Enjoy the sun, shelter from the rain. Have a think, have a nap. Our park benches are used as beds by homeless people, as dining tables by those quaffing a quick takeaway, by couples, friends, strangers. People chat, eat their lunch, make phone calls, or just enjoy sitting. When the music stops you will always have a seat.

The provision of seats seems generous, imaginative, and hospitable. It also makes for a messy environment, with litter and loitering.

Singapore is impeccably clean, and I'm sure the citizens like it that way. I liked it too. But the missing seats bothered me. I only hope that our government never comes to view sitting as subversive.

Australian farmers sold short by cheap food

ENVIRONMENT

Sarah Kanowski

How much do you pay for tomatoes? Bananas? What about for your garlic?

If you are one of the 90 per cent of Australian shoppers who buy garlic imported from China you're spending around \$2/kg. Buying organic, locally-produced garlic on the other hand, can set you back \$38/kg. But don't be fooled about which is really cheaper.



Throughout his 2007 election campaign Kevin Rudd pledged to address what he termed 'inflated grocery prices,' contending that 'the increasing cost of living is felt most sharply by families at the local supermarket'.

In reality, Australians are spending less at the supermarket than ever before: our expenditure on food is 14 per cent of household income, down from 22 per cent in the 1960s. The declining price of agricultural products is the main reason why agriculture's share of the economy has dropped from 14 per cent in the 1960s to 4 per cent.

But this cheap food has come at a cost, one ignored by Rudd, but tallied on the livelihoods of Australian farmers and on the degradation of the Australian environment.

In his recent book, *The House on the Hill: The Transformation of Australia's Farming Communities*, social researcher Neil Barr describes the bleak future facing independent farms and the country town connected to them. The core of his pessimism is declining commodity prices.

Barr grew up on a small, struggling stone-fruit orchard outside Melbourne. He uses his parents' experience as an illustration: when they bought a farm in 1953, ten acres of productive orchard was sufficient to earn a reasonable family living. The falling price of fruit and the rising cost of growing it meant that before too long the amount of land required to make an income rose to 15 acres. It kept rising. Barr's parents gave up when it reached 30.

'Get big or get out' has become a truism of modern farming: if farmers survive it is by buying out their failing neighbours. Only one in two farming families will pass the business on to a successor within the family.

Falling food prices and farm aggregation are both cause and effect in a complex network of changes that have transformed Australian agriculture. These range from the triumph of global trade over national schemes of price fixing and controlled production, to the impact that women entering the paid workforce has had on the way Australians eat.

Time spent preparing the evening meal, for example, has dropped from two hours in the 1950s to one hour in the 1980s, to between 20 and 30 minutes today. With time-poor shoppers increasingly turning away from raw produce to processed food like frozen chips and tinned tomato sauce, farmers are getting an ever smaller proportion of the money we spend on food.

The rise of the supermarket giants, Coles and Woolworths, has further weakened farmers' financial position. Farmers are increasingly locked into direct supply arrangements with supermarkets who effectively set prices and transfer risks, such as quality control, to the growers.

But if farmers are suffering from our appetite for cheap food, so too is the land.

Around 70 per cent of the 500 million hectares of land used for agriculture in this country is degraded. The remarkable gains in agricultural productivity, which have helped make food so cheap, have been dependent on clearing, poisoning native grasses, draining swamps, and intensively fertilising.

The former chief of CSIRO Land and Water, John Williams, has put it bluntly in official reports on the environmental impact of Australian agriculture: 'business as usual is not an option'.

Patrice Newell is a biodynamic farmer of garlic, olives and beef cattle. She is adamant that cheap food is a furphy, as prices fail to factor in environmental expenses. Australia's industrial agribusinesses do not pay for their real water use or soil degradation: the big profits are a mirage.

For an industry that exports 70 per cent of its product (for some crops, such as wheat, the figure is more like 80 per cent), any changes to the way food is costed will have significant economic impacts. But Newell insists this dependence on exports is what we should be giving up, rather than small, independent, environmentally sustainable farms. 'What's the point of destroying the Murray-Darling Basin to export food? I mean, why?'

The real cost of food is not what politicians want to talk about, but we must. So how much do you pay for your garlic?

My story of God

POETRY

Various

so for you

it's a god of sugar, a god
of shallow forgives,
it's a god of stained truth
and glass asunder,
it's a god of textas on sky,
a god of not asking,
it's a god a drips and akimbos
but it's not a god of metaphors,
not a god of pressed tin
celings or pianola rolls,
not a god of clouds
or of cut buffalo,
not a god of zephyrs
nor a god of sweet unseens
— *Kevin Gillam*

Story of God

My story of God seems
pass the tambourine
and do we have a dollar
here for Jesus.
Essentially, it is

disaster relief,
as history made
not in tutorials,
but from middens of waste.
Best interpretations
are so far off the mark
they must be a laugh
if they last a decade,
then like the wireless
of the forties
maybe derivations will remain.

Create a phonetic alphabet
with one sound missing
randomly chosen by algorithm
in a very limited edition
to be printed on a sheet
of guillotined B4
in six point calibri
and you may start
to get the picture.

When futility had truly tired of me,
only devotion would let it be.

— *Michael Crotty*

Two Women

Everything unfolds
and Mary picks her way

through cosmic calls
to grace
and the here and now
of shock and awkward explanations.

Elizabeth knew
and women together
they celebrated
the ill matched threads of history
stretched into the one cloth
lifted up and filled
until it floats above them
interweaving prophecy
and deep dreaming.

— *Jorie Ryan*

To catch a bully

COMMUNITY

Luke Williams



The growing awareness and legislation around bullying has had an unintended consequence: many workplace bullies have simply become sneaky.

Covert bullying is now far more common than overt aggression. The modern workplace bully debilitates with a thousand subtle cuts; sarcasm, innuendo, sabotage, exclusion, criticism, overloading, discrimination. It's delicate but deadly psychological warfare, difficult to detect, tricky to explain and hard to report. Indeed, when it comes to psychical damage, the poison of workplace bullying is usually worse than its bite.

Norwegian researcher and psychologist Stale Einarsen's long-term research showed that 75 per cent of workplace bully victims displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Even five years after the bullying, 65 per cent still had nightmares, panic attacks, flashbacks and anxiety. An even higher proportion felt the bullying had a long-lasting and negative impact on their friendships, leisure time, familial and sexual relationships.

Social psychologists tend to understand the effect of severe bullying as a breakdown of 'core cognitive schemas'. These schemas are the fundamental beliefs about our world (such as seeing yourself as a person important people will like, and believing that hard work will be rewarded) that make our lives meaningful. A breakdown of these assumptions can make the world seem unsafe and unstable, often resulting in high psychological distress.

Some people are able to take the devastating new experience to create new 'schemas'; they may become wiser and tougher. For many others, there is nothing but pure mental breakdown, sometimes with fatal consequences.

We had a wake-up call to the consequences of bullying with the death of 19-year-old waitress Brodie Panlock, who took her own life in 2006 after enduring persistent bullying by three of her colleagues. The cafe operator was fined \$220,000 and there were calls for the perpetrators to be charged criminally.

As a result, the Victorian Government announced 40,000 snap inspections of bullying in the workplace. This is not an unreasonable response. A government or industry-sponsored awareness campaign around what is and is not bullying would be an effective partner to the investigations. The biggest limitation to any effective inspection is that people are reluctant to talk about it — bullying is massively under-reported.

While the Productivity Commission says more than 2.5 million Australians have been

bullied in the workplace, it's thought that less than a third ever complain about the bullying. One reason is that one psychological effect of bullying is a strong sense of hopelessness and disempowerment. Another is simple pragmatism; people want to protect their careers.

Even with bullying procedures in place, most workplaces are made up of complex and informal networks, empires and factions that can aggressively protect powerful managers accused of bullying. Often victims are bullied more after they make a complaint, often with an abuse of performance management so the victim is made to look incompetent or disgruntled, or the actions somehow justified.

It's not uncommon for co-workers to turn against people who make complaints to protect and even advance their own careers. In my experience, it is often the victim who leaves the workplace with a career in tatters, while the bully gets slapped on the wrist and is eventually promoted once again.

Adelaide psychologist and bullying expert Moira Jenkins says the issue of under-reporting is further complicated because often those who do report bullying aren't actually victims. Rather, they have mistaken reasonable management action for bullying.

The meaning of the term 'reasonable' is battled out every day in workplace bullying cases across the country. Part of the problem is that there is no simple definition to mark the point where management action ends and bullying begins. Legislators and anti-bullying advocates need to come up with a sharper and better-promoted definition so that 'bullying' becomes an adequate prescription of behaviour in the workplace.

Earlier this year the Productivity Commission released its draft [report](#) on Occupational Health and Safety stating that only two states in Australia have specific legislation on workplace bullying.

The two states, Queensland and Western Australia, have had a significant decline in worker compensation claims related to bullying since the introduction of bullying specific codes of practice. Queensland has reduced the number of bullying claims from 265 to 130 over five years, while Western Australia had just 20 claims in 2008. Victoria, by comparison, has the highest number of bullying claims — 595 in 2008 alone.

Not all is hopeless. This very debate might be starting to swing. Bullying is costing money, with many bullying victims getting significant payouts to avoid allegations going public. Worksafe has had a massive spike in calls since the Panlock case hit the news, Panlock's Facebook page has over 5000 members, and people are starting to identify the behaviors of their managers as clear cases of bullying.

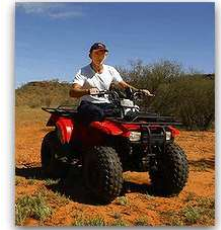
Perhaps it's time bullies started to lie awake and worry about what will become of them if their career comes to an end. Perhaps it's time bullies started to feel they are being watched.

Action-man Abbott undervalues bureaucracy

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

Opposition leader Tony Abbott says the Federal Government's health reform proposals are all about the system, and there's nothing for the long suffering patient. He was right to the extent that health care should be about caring for patients, and not feeding bureaucracy.



However a simplistic and *ad hoc* approach to rebuilding the nation's health care system would set us back even further. This occurred in 2007 when the Coalition Government tried to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians by riding roughshod over bureaucracy with the Northern Territory Intervention. Last week's action-man images of Abbott riding a quad bike and eating a witchetty grub gives us cause to worry that he could approach health reform in a cavalier manner.

Health bureaucracy is a necessary evil because it protects patients from special interests whose primary motivation is the bottom line of health-related businesses. These include the Australian Pharmacy Guild, drug companies, private health insurance funds, and to some extent the AMA. Lobbyists from these groups dominate debate, as they are better resourced than non-profits such as the Cancer Council, whose only interest is patient health.

After last week's announcement, John Menadue of the Centre for Policy Development [said](#) the Rudd Government is moving in the right direction in its determination to get the system right. He suggested that the Government should establish a permanent, independent, professional and community-based statutory health authority similar to the Reserve Bank in the monetary field.

'The Reserve Bank's governance structure has made it almost impervious to lobbying and generally, it has been independent,' said Menadue. 'Such an independent health commission with strong economic capabilities is necessary to facilitate informed public discussion, counter the power of special interests and determine programs and distribute Commonwealth health funds across the country.'

Such a body could establish a world-class health funding system for patients in the future. However those who need proper care now should not be ignored. Again this is where action-man Tony Abbott has a point.

Martin Laverty of Catholic Health Australia has [said](#) there are 89,000 patients who have been waiting longer than the clinically appropriate time for their surgery, and that there must be an interim arrangement to ensure they get the treatment they deserve. He suggests using spare capacity in the private hospital system to treat public patients. This surely must be

considered as part of a short- and long-term solution for Australia's broken health care system.

Conversations with atheists

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton



On the weekend after next Australia will have its first Global Atheist Convention, bringing together such interesting speakers as Richard Dawkins, Philip Adams and Peter Singer.

It is an important event, and one to which we shall be expected to have an attitude. I confess that my feelings are mixed. I look forward to it with the same tempered gloom that would descend upon me if an international convention of Christian evangelists came to town.

Gloom is tempered because there is much in both kinds of events that I find attractive. The Atheists Convention will surely be a lively show with stirring rhetoric. And in an open democracy I can only applaud the opportunity for like minded people to share their ideas, to persuade others to take them seriously, and to commend changes to the law that will enshrine their view of the good society. That kind of coming together is part of a rich society.

Many theists will predictably rally to defend their cause. I also applaud the efforts of theists who have a different view of the good society to share their own ideas with the like-minded, to rebut the views of their opponents, to persuade others to take their ideas seriously, and to commend a legal framework that will protect what they see as integral to a good society. That is democracy at work.

Conventions offer enthusiasts and their opponents outside the tent the opportunity to criticise one another's views and to propose their own ideas. The exchange will be conducted at full volume before a stadium of barrackers, through debates, rebuttals, selective quotation and hyperbole.

Champions in the red corner will buffet champions in the blue corner, winners will be declared, and the spectators on each side will be momentarily chuffed or peeved by the performance of their team.

I admire those who have the skills and the weapons for this kind of jousting. But I have neither taste nor time for it. Partly, no doubt, because of lack of ticker. But also because I believe that polemical exchange destroys the evidence for religious faith.

The wellsprings and justification for religious faith, and for other foundational views of life, are to be found in qualities of human experience that are not susceptible to large, knockdown and narrow arguments. Faith in God and in humanity, is rooted in experiences of wonder, questioning, desire and invitation that are delicate and not easily framed in simple argument.

Powerful arguments can and should be built for faith, but the experience on which they are built needs clarification, not codification; amplification, not reduction; ruminative conversation, not assertion.

In conversation we can tease out the subtleties of our intuitions, and the ways in which we account for the beauty and the complexities of our world. We can explore why people find religious faith persuasive, and also come to see how people put together their lives and their world without it.

This kind of conversation gives priority to personal reflection and to listening. It will be necessarily quiet and exploratory, no matter how strongly settled is the framework within which we live our lives. Like any conversation, it allows both partners to commend what they believe. But the commendation is done by allowing the truth to appear, and not by shouting it.

In the clanging certainties of conventions, whether they gather together Christian or Atheist evangelists, there is little space for that kind of conversation with people of a different mind.

This is not to say that large meetings do not contribute indirectly to good conversation. No doubt atheists, like Catholic young people at World Youth Day, will relish the opportunity for a conversation with like minded companions, in which they discover that they are not alone but are among friends.

Such conversation may give them confidence to explore the wellsprings of their beliefs. If people then gain the confidence to go beyond their own circle, and engage in open conversation with those with a different point of view, that would be a great result.

A poetic word on gay spirituality

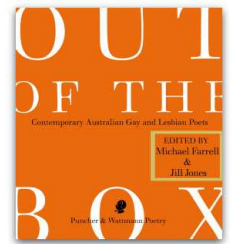
BOOKS

Will Day

Farrell, Michael and Jones, Jill (ed.): *Out of the Box: Contemporary Australian Gay and Lesbian Poets*. Puncher and Wattmann, 2009. ISBN: 9781921450280

On a grey Saturday morning last December we found ourselves in a room packed full of people from all over the world, sesh* and not sesh.

Michael Kelly, notable Australian gay Catholic writer and activist, had organised this session, 'Voices of challenge and wisdom: gay and lesbian perspectives on faith, spirituality and embodied grace' — the only session at the Parliament of the World's Religions addressing the fraught relationship between religion and homosexuality.



I was one of those invited to speak on the panel.

One after another, from the panel and the floor, men and women testified to their faith, their spirituality, their love of God. They spoke of the joy and satisfaction of their lives as sesh folk and also of the sadness in their hearts.

I heard voices from the Jewish, Christian, Buddhist and Hindu traditions describe the sadness, confusion, disbelief and anger experienced by men and women who desire to truly belong within a religious community yet who find themselves ostracised, or obliged to conceal or doctor who they are, if they want to really be part of God's gang.

The tragedy is that many non-sesh folk do not realise that, for so many of us, sesh is not merely a sexual orientation. It is a kind of 'self' — a sensibility, aesthetic, intelligence, humour, spirituality and creativity — so that to try to muzzle it is to try to muzzle the soul.

Given the sadness, I was struck by the enthusiasm and playful delight which bubbled through the room. Perhaps this was a simple expression of joy to be meeting in a richly religious context where the energies and expressions which are subtly or overtly damped down in many other religious contexts could flourish.

One week later, I was having lunch with a group of friends when poet Michael Farrell produced a copy of the book he has recently co-edited with Jill Jones, *Out of the Box: Contemporary Australian Gay and Lesbian Poets*.

Many of Australia's lauded contemporary poets are represented here: Dorothy Porter, David Malouf, Pam Brown, Peter Rose and Joanne Burns ... This caused me to wonder whether sesh folk might have an unusual aptitude for poetry. Given the names represented, we could leave the 'gay and lesbian' tag to the side — this is simply an appealing collection of

contemporary Australian poetry, a bellwether of the poetic 'now' in this country.

But the 'gay and lesbian' bit is inseparable from the curious, sensual vitality of the work represented.

In Nandi Chinna's tender, compelling memories of her father ('King Brown') a threat lurks beneath the delighted, mannish bravado of the narrator: 'He keeps king brown beer bottles /strung on a string like shiny fish/dwelling in the thick mud of the dam./I haul one in and crack the cap...'

Martin Harrison describes his clear-sighted explorations and discoveries, twining weather, landscape and the heart's devotions, with crisp, inhabited honesty.

Tim Denton's gentle touch is here in two simple poems: '[D]oll/ I'm off to the footy/come and sit /and we'll wear red scarves in the rain' ('Darlinghurst Road'). joanne burns meanders pensive, anxious, quotidian in 'aerial photography' and then does exotic, raj-esque crazy-paving with 'mardi gras'.

The editors of this collection tend away from a commonplace, linear, lyrical narrative in their own poetry. When something like a conservative narrative pops up in a Farrell poem, I'm looking for the catch. Jones opens her excerpt from 'Limits We've Shouldered' with the telling lines: 'With words understand the ground/speak at least with particles ...' Some other poets of this less conservative ilk are also included in *Out of the Box*.

Often I'm told such poetry is silly, impenetrable or intimidating. It would be a pity to miss out on the sweet wit of Scott-Patrick Mitchell or the entrancing spinning-wheel rhythms of Susan Hawthorne's fecund, humid 'Rose Garden', so do experiment with them — read them aloud, twice. Take in the little charges of sound and feeling/memory/atmosphere/association held in each word fragment or seemingly illogical sequence.

This book has nothing to prove: it is an assured, open-handed gesture of creativity — entertaining, thought-provoking, full of mystery and revelation. The poetry world, and by extension our culture, might be enriched, enlivened and inspired by all these queer voices.

I couldn't help but reflect back to my experience at the Parliament. What a pity that the sesh sensibility, sesh voices, which might so greatly enrich and evolve our religious institutions if they were permitted to flourish, are still so often obliged to eke their way along the shadowy paths of fastidious, crazy-making discretion, or some half-conscious performance of heterosexuality or neuter-hood, if they want to be part of God's gang.

Certainly we sesh folk have been finding ways to contribute to our religious communities since time began, but there is a potential blossoming, a flourishing into freedom and safety, that was sensed in that room at the Parliament, but is yet to come to our religious institutions.

*In this piece the word 'sesh', originating in Victorian surfing culture, is used in place of

'gay' or 'homosexual'. For my purposes it is a less loaded, more spacious term.

Hilary Clinton and Hollywood's gender war

FILMS

Ruby Hamad



Kathryn Bigelow (pictured) is only the fourth woman to be nominated for an Academy Award for best director in the event's 78 year history. [The Hurt Locker](#) director joins Lina Wertmuller (*Seven Beauties*, 1975), Jane Campion (*The Piano*, 1993) and Sophia Coppola (*Lost in Translation*, 2003), none of whom went on to win.

Bigelow is arguably closer to the coveted Oscar than any of her predecessors. Her victory at the Directors Guild of America (DGA) awards in January saw her become, surprise, surprise, the first female to win that award. The DGAs are a stronger precursor to the Oscars than the Golden Globes (in which Bigelow lost to *Avatar* director James Cameron). In its 62 year history, only six times has the DGA winner failed to follow up with an Oscar.

Bigelow, a true pioneer, is nonetheless, a prime example of the problems women face in their fight to be taken seriously in the workplace. The numerous sexist references made to Bigelow's appearance at the DGAs took much of the sheen off her success. The most grating comment came from fellow Oscar nominee and openly gay *Precious* director Lee Daniels (surprising given that his film is about a young girl who is taunted because of her looks), who informed Bigelow 'your film is as beautiful as your legs. You make me question my sexuality.'

Others, such as her star Jeremy Renner [chimed in](#) with 'the only thing to rival Kathryn Bigelow in a bikini is Lee Daniels in a one-piece'.

While ostensibly compliments, these remarks undermine Bigelow's achievement as they take the focus from her capabilities and place it squarely on her sex. As Andre Soares reported on the [Alt Film Guide](#):

'Comments abounded on Bigelow's looks ... on the fact that she's a woman. Had she been a handsome guy, I wonder how many remarks would have been made about his physical attributes. And how many male directors and presenters would be publicly questioning their sexuality.'

Objectification of women's bodies has repercussions. Macquarie bank stockbroker David Kiely was lucky to keep his job when he was sprung downloading raunchy images of model Miranda Kerr on live TV. Few may think he deserved to be sacked, but as Macquarie University academic Cordelia Fine [wrote](#) in *The Age*, it is a mistake to think that actions such as his are harmless:

'Consider a study that showed one group of men a series of ads portraying women as sex

things, and compared their behaviour with that of men shown instead advertising material without sexual imagery. Later, each man was asked to interview a female job candidate, and their behaviour was carefully observed.

‘Men who had recently seen women portrayed as sex objects sat closer to the interviewee, flirted more and asked the candidate a greater number of sexually inappropriate questions. These men also rated her as less competent, and remembered a great deal about the woman’s physical appearance but less information that would help them decide her suitability for the job.’

When men view images that portray some women as sex objects, it encourages them to view all women the same way, including the ones they work with, which limits women’s prospects for advancement. Citing the studies of psychologist Christine Logel, Fine examined the ‘stereotype threat’ which shows that women expend so much energy fending off bad stereotypes about themselves, it interferes with their ability to do their job:

‘When men interacted with female colleagues in even a very subtly dominant and sexually interested way, it triggered stereotype threat in female engineers, who then performed worse on an engineering test ... the women’s ability was harmed by the subtly sexist behaviour of their male peers even when they weren’t aware of it.’

The lack of female representation at the Oscars is not because women directors are less talented or deserving than their male counterparts, it is largely because women are limited by the way men view them. Historically, women have had two primary roles: to be homemakers and to be sexually attractive. When women break out of these roles, when they threaten to become as (or more) successful than their male colleagues, they become the target of sexist jibes designed to remind them of their place.

Remember the man who yelled out ‘iron my shirt!’ at Hillary Clinton during the 2008 American election primaries? Or the constant references to Sarah Palin as a MILF?

Bigelow is a 30-year Hollywood veteran and, unusually for a woman, has a resumé brimming with action films including *Point Break* and the underrated *Strange Days*. She has achieved something no other woman (and very few men) have and yet, on the very night she called ‘the most incredible ... of my life’, her male peers chose to commend her, not on her body of work, but on her body.

A subtle but sure signal that she had infiltrated male space and a reminder to all women that no matter what we achieve in our working lives, there is always the threat that the value of our worth will be measured according to how good we look in a bikini.

Chile's tremble

HUMAN RIGHTS

Antonio Castillo

Last Saturday Chileans suffered the worst earthquake in 50 years. With an intensity of 8.8 it was the fifth biggest in world history. The violent displacement and friction of the continental plate provoked not only a massive earth movement but also a devastating tsunami. Fishing boats dragged by waves of eight meters to the centre of southern Chilean coastal cities conjure up images of apocalyptic dimensions.



At the time of writing more than 700 people are dead and the toll keeps on rising. There are hundreds of people missing. One and a half million are homeless and there is major destruction to infrastructure, especially bridges, ports, airports and hospitals.

The earthquake struck on the last weekend of the summer holidays. Like every other year thousands of Chileans were returning home. In Chile, March is a month when life comes back to normal. Back to school. Back to work. Not this March. It has become a month of sorrow and burials.

Chile is a land of earthquakes and they have been merciless with this long, thin country squashed into a 180 km wide corridor between the magnificent Andes and the Pacific Ocean. Chile is located in the highly seismic 'Pacific Ring of Fire.'

Is it trembling? Chileans casually query each other — almost as a daily greeting — while dim and sometimes imperceptible tremors shake the earth underneath. Chileans live with these tremors and seldom express fear. They are used to them. At least until something so cataclysmic — as last weekend's earthquake — occurs.

Earthquakes are deeply engraved in Chilean identity. Chilean poet and Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda was so moved by the 1960 earthquake of 9.5 that destroyed the southern city of Valdivia that he felt compelled to write 'Earthquake in Chile, the Barcarola':

'For the fallen walls, the weeping in the sad hospital, for the streets covered by rubble and fear, for the bird that flies without a tree and the dog that howls without eyes, motherland of water and wine, daughter and mother of my soul, allow me to blend with you in the wind and tears so that the same enraged destiny obliterates my body and my land.'

The violence of the earth in Chile also drew German novelist Bernd Heinrich Wilhelm von Kleist (1777–1811) to write 'The Earthquake in Chile', a story of two lovers caught up in the devastation of the 1647 earthquake that destroyed Santiago, the Chilean capital.

Concepción, the second largest city in Chile, was worst affected by the weekend's

earthquake. It was 115 km from the epicentre. I know this city well. I studied in the University of Concepción, the birthplace of the legendary Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR in Spanish).

I was in Concepción little more than a month ago. I was visiting old comrades and my sister and her family. At the moment of writing I have been unable to contact them. I know there is no electricity or water. No gas. Food is also becoming scarce. Vehicles rest abandoned due to the lack of petrol. Banks have run out of money. The desperate are now looting.

Concepción is a city that has been destroyed more than once before. So many times in fact that the historical centre no longer exists. And despite this, Penquistas — as people from Concepción are called — are proud of their city. In the past they would proudly tell you of the new, ultramodern airport, the new highway that had just opened. They would show you new buildings just completed and new construction just commencing. It was a mini-Shanghai — a construction site. Most of this is now gone.

Concepción — and its almighty river Bio-Bio — was the place where the Mapuches, the ferocious indigenous nation stopped the Spanish conquistadors in their advance to the south.

During the conquest — in the 1500s — the Spanish fought not only against the Mapuches but also against the devastating effects of Chilean earthquakes. Newly established towns were victims of earthquakes that appeared and disappeared. 'An earth tremble and earthquake came abruptly in that city [Concepción], so big that most houses fell and the earth open in so many parts that was an admirable thing to see,' wrote in 1570 Alonso de Góngora, a Spanish conquistador and chronicler.

March used to be a month when life came back to normal for Chileans. Now Chileans are searching for life under the rubble. 'Our history is riddled with natural resources testing the will, determination and solidarity that characterise us as a nation,' said President Michelle Bachelet just hours after the tragedy that hit this country of 16 million people.

On 11 March, President Bachelet will hand over power to Sebastián Piñera, the right wing billionaire elected president. The reconstruction of the country will be a colossal challenge. It estimated that damage might be as much as US\$30 billion.

It won't be an easy time for this emerging nation. However as has happened in the past this disaster has the potential to becoming a catalyst for deep changes in the political and social outlook of this country.

For 18 years — during the dictatorship of general Pinochet — Chile was a nation of enemies. Perhaps this unparalleled tragedy will become a turning point. Perhaps it will become a time of solidarity and most of all a time when reconciliation among Chileans is finally achieved.

Uighurs failed by Cambodia's sham refugee law

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



In June last year a solitary Uighur from Xinjiang Province in China arrived in Phnom Penh seeking asylum. He registered his claim with the Cambodian Government and with UNHCR.

Like East Timor, Cambodia became a signatory to all major UN human rights instruments when in receipt of considerable UN assistance. They, with the Philippines, are the only three of Australia's South East Asian neighbours to have acceded to the UN Convention on Refugees. The Cambodian government has been very slow in setting up its own procedures for refugee determinations, being dependent on UNHCR to provide the service.

UNHCR had been working for many years with the Cambodian authorities to come up with a workable refugee law. UNHCR did not invite input from other refugee or human rights organisations and refused any civil society scrutiny of the proposed law. During the interim refugee status determination process, independent legal representation as requested by asylum seekers was neither permitted nor encouraged.

Having been interviewed four times to determine refugee status, the solitary Uighur had a strong claim backed by documentary evidence. He was worried after one meeting with the head of the Cambodian government's unit responsible for refugee processing who told him that China was a good place which respected its people.

Meanwhile, things turned sour back in Urumqi, Xinjiang Province between 5 and 7 July 2009. Tensions between Uighurs and newly arrived Han Chinese erupted in violence in the factories and on the streets. More than 700 persons were arrested and about 200 persons were killed.

By October, participants in the street violence were prosecuted in courts constituted by 'politically reliable' judges and described in a resolution to the US Congress as being 'without the benefits of any due process, public observers, or court procedures in violation of international legal standards'.

A further 21 Uighurs, including a pregnant mother and her two infant children, then fled overland through Vietnam and into Cambodia. They were cared for by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) which provided them with legal representation and humanitarian assistance. UNHCR provided them with letters stating that they were persons of concern to UNHCR and under the protection of the UNHCR office.

The plight of the Uighurs in Phnom Penh became international news once the *Washington*

Post carried a story about them on 3 November 2009. Radio Free Asia even published the names and dates of birth of some of the asylum seekers. Media reports stated that the Chinese government sought the extradition of the Uighurs.

On 9 November 2009, there were credible media reports that the Chinese government had executed nine persons involved in the Urumqi violence. On 7 December 2009, the Cambodian Ministry of Interior informed the press that they were waiting for a decision from UNHCR on the status of the Uighurs and that the Cambodian government would cooperate with the UN agency.

A week later, UNHCR met with JRS and informed them that the Cambodian Government was very close to promulgating its long awaited refugee law but had asked UNHCR to continue assistance with the refugee determination process of the Uighurs. The Cambodian Government also asked UNHCR to provide a safe house where the Uighurs could be brought together, and assured security.

JRS expressed concern to UNHCR, saying the Uighur asylum seekers were at risk. JRS highlighted three concerns in light of the close political ties between China and Cambodia. Cambodia had a chequered history of providing protection to refugees from China; the vice-President of China was about to visit Cambodia to conclude major business deals; and there were credible reports that China had requested the extradition of the Uighur people.

Also discussed was the complaint, previously brought to UNHCR's attention, that the Cambodian head of the refugee office had told the first Uighur asylum seeker that he thought China was a good place that respected its people. JRS also informed UNHCR of threatening telephone calls received by their legal officer, Taya Hunt, asking why she was 'helping terrorists from China'.

JRS advised UNHCR that they wanted to move the Uighurs out of the capital to a less vulnerable place, but UNHCR advised strongly against this.

On 17 December 2009, the Uighur asylum seekers were taken to their final safe house (pictured) after spending the previous night in a site reserved for Montagnard refugees from Vietnam. And after years of delay and protracted negotiations with UNHCR, the Cambodian government mysteriously and promptly issued a sub-decree on procedures for processing refugees and asylum seekers.

Next evening, the Uighurs were praying when Cambodian police entered the safe house and abducted them at gunpoint. Cambodian authorities then rang UNHCR and said they had been deported. The UNHCR representative conveyed this message to JRS, saying that in his 30 years history in UNHCR this was the most flagrant violation of the 1951 Convention on Refugees he had experienced.

Embassies, international bodies and NGOs were alerted. It turned out that the asylum

seekers had not yet been deported; they were being housed in the Ministry of Interior. Diplomatic representations at the highest level received no response. The Uighurs, including the pregnant woman, her husband and two infant children and the man who arrived legally in June, were deported via chartered plane the following night.

On 20 December, the day after the forced return, the Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping arrived in Phnom Penh to sign contracts worth US\$1 billion.

None of the refugee claims had been determined in accordance with new procedures endorsed by UNHCR. The long awaited Cambodian refugee law provides for an interview process: 'If a negative decision is made, reasons shall be given for the rejected application.' There is then provision for an appeal within 30 days, whereupon the Immigration Department should consider the appeal within 15 days.

None of these procedures were followed in the first test case of the new law two days after its promulgation. No credible explanation was offered for the peremptory rejection of the Uighur claims.

The new law does provide that officials of the Ministry of Interior 'may immediately reject the application for refugee status' if the applicant does not cooperate or if the applicant does anything to harm national security and public order. There was no evidence of non-cooperation or disruptive behaviour. This was simply a matter of political convenience for the Cambodian government not wanting to cause any embarrassment to the Chinese.

Despite years of training for Cambodian immigration officials, the rule of law counted for nothing with the law's first test. In fact, the prompt passage of the sub-decree after years of waiting was a political artifice for the exercise of unreviewable, arbitrary power. The sub-decree underwent a last minute change with a proviso: 'The recognition of a refugee, the termination of refugee status and the removal of refugee status shall be determined by ministerial order of the Interior Minister.'

On the day Vice President Xi Jinping signed the deals, he thanked the Cambodians for the return of the Uighurs. The Cambodian Foreign Ministry reported him saying, 'It can be said that Sino-Cambodian relations are a model of friendly cooperation.' Cambodia's chief government spokesman was quoted in the *New York Times*: 'China has thanked the government of Cambodia for assisting in sending back these people. According to Chinese law, these people are criminals.'

The Chinese government provides no access for UNHCR, lawyers or family members to the returned Uighurs. On 14 January 2010, a Khmer newspaper published an unconfirmed report that four of the returnees had been condemned to execution and 14 sentenced to life imprisonment. The Uighurs were not only denied protection in Cambodia; they were forcibly returned without even any pretence at determination of their claims. The refugee status determination procedure became a foil for gathering them together awaiting forced return to

China.

Cambodia's long awaited refugee law is a sham. It may be a signatory to the UN Convention, but to date that counts for nothing.

Confessions of a stamp murderer

NON-FICTION

Devyani Borade

30 May 1931. An unremarkable date. The British Raj is still Lording over the Indian populace as revolts are cropping up like angry acne all over the country.

It is an unremarkable day in an unremarkable remote village of India. On the main road, cycles trill shrilly and overbalance into pedestrians. A cow squatting on the footpath is placidly chewing the lungi of the newspaperman established on the wayside. A radio teetering on the edge of his table blares out classical music between bursts of static. With every knock it receives, it emits a fresh outburst of indignant squawking.

Adding to the cacophony, hawkers exalt the virtues of their wares with indiscernible yet hypnotic lyric, punctuating the sounds of the hot afternoon with their soprano cries.

Every plant is parched and coated with dirt and grime. A similar layer of grime is building up inside the collar of a small boy standing at a shop. Oblivious, his whole being is concentrated on a man's hands, as they carefully pick up a stamp, apply glue to its back and press it down firmly with a steady thump-thump into an album. In a few minutes, the man smiles at the boy who grins and, clutching the album, runs home to gloat over his treasure.

26 January 1951. It's been a year since the country has been declared a secular sovereign socialist democratic republic with its own written constitution. The little boy has grown into a strapping young man with a son of his own. The baby is brought up in a free environment and encouraged to follow his dreams.

The stamp album never leaves his side. It now contains not only postage stamps but also revenue stamps, local utility stamps, old currency notes, crumbling letters and first day covers. Protective to the extreme, the lad constantly fusses over it, adding, changing and lecturing his siblings on the ways of distant lands — lands that he has visited only in his soaring imagination on the wings of fancy, via his stamps.

15 August 1981. Television has made its foray into the land and old perceptions are being dispelled everywhere. New opportunities in new frontiers are available and science has hauled mankind to the brink of the Information Age. Into such an India I am born, the apple of my father's eye. I take to reading at an early age and churn out juvenile stories with childish gusto. A literary career is stoutly predicted for me by the family astrologer.

And the stamp album sees it all.



I am a pigtailed nine-year-old in frocks when I first lay eyes on it. It is an ordinary book with no distinguishing feature save for its uneven bulk. I spy a corner sticking out from under a mound of paper and, curious, pull it out. With a soft *whoossh*, several loose stamps cascade from between its sheets and tumble onto the floor. I rescue them and squat down to investigate my discovery.

The book has been divided into sections, many of which are only half filled. At a glance I can tell my grandfather's obviously old stamps from my dad's newer ones. Excitement fills me. What a treasure! I am rich! Now I can buy all the dolls I want! To my dismay, only Indian stamps abound. Bah! What use are those? Everybody has them. Cross, I tuck the book away to explore at leisure.

Soon my family leaves the ancestral home for the promising new city of Bombay where prospects are finer. The album, which contains stamps from all over the world but itself never travelled further than the local post office, sets forth from its secure haven and makes its first journey into the world outside.

Settled in at the metropolis several months later, I renew my acquaintance with the album. I decide to reorganise the album and keep a running tally of the number of stamps. I dunk the entire album into a tub of water and wait anxiously for the glue to dissolve so that the stamps can float free.

After 15 minutes of chafing impatiently, I wrench out the remaining stamps and throw the album away. Many stamps get torn — a few slightly, others beyond recovery. But ignorant at the devastation I have caused, in my vernal world I am happy with what I have. I bind together some sheets of paper and make a brand new album.

For a few days after this, I admire my handiwork regularly. Eventually life gets in the way of this pastime and the stamps fail to keep up my interest.

3 October 1991. Computers are catching on in a big way and the internet boom is around the corner. My grandfather, the creator of the old stamp album, passes away. I lose a great companion and apotheosis.

By the time I next open the new album, I am studying hard for my examinations and trading stamps with my friends — their shiny new ones for my torn and smudged old ones. I feel clever thinking I've got the better of the bargain, little realising I am actually handing away a part of precious history for the contemporary today.

My album grows with additions of triangle-shaped stamps which become the pride of the collection that I, without any qualms, have now started calling my own. Gradually when they demand more storage space, the stamps are gathered into plastic bags and dumped together. As examinations take over, I attend to my stamps less and less often, until, in the novelty of making new friends at college, they — my oldest friends — are forgotten.

9 December 2001. Political boundaries are blurring and terrorism has reared its ugly head. World Trade Centre twin towers have recently been razed to the ground amid a frenzy of fear.

I get married and move to a different country and my stamps accompany me. I chance upon them accidentally and guilt motivates me to photograph and bag each stamp painstakingly. After agonising over days whether to sort them by location or content, I run out of patience, stamina and clear plastic bags. Back they all go into the bottom of the chest. Predictably, once out of sight, they are out of mind.

22 June 2021. The future is here.

My daughter has acquired the stamp album and has grand designs to restructure it to showcase the stamps to their best advantage. She sounds sensible and confident. I reflect upon the past, full of remorse about my actions. My irresponsible behaviour has stamped me as a murderer. My inability and disinclination to preserve my inheritance has resulted in the irrevocable loss of a rich heritage.

They may not be Penny Blacks, yet a considerable amount of love, care and sweat has been invested into these stamps — who can afford to buy or sell such priceless sentiments?

As my daughter prattles on, I glance at the stamps to beg forgiveness. They seem content at last.

Scapegoating ministers

POLITICS

John Warhurst



Too often government ministers are made scapegoats. This applies to three federal ministers at the moment: Peter Garrett, the Minister for the Environment; Stephen Conroy, the Minister for Communications; and Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities. Too often criticism of ministers neglects the wider context and fails to recognise the responsibility of the broader community.

It is legitimate to pin individual responsibility on ministers even to the extent of calling for their resignation. They must be held accountable for their own actions and those of their department. Yet the wider context includes the balance between collective and individual ministerial responsibility. After all Garrett is just a junior minister and Shorten is merely a parliamentary secretary.

But even recognising the Cabinet context is not enough. Ministers are being made scapegoats, not just for Cabinet decisions but for the deeper failings of the community as a whole.

Shorten bore the brunt of criticism in a recent ABC *Four Corners* program for government failure to adequately fund support for the disabled. The program documented the terrible demands made on families and the lack of resources available to charities to assist carers through the provision of residential facilities.

But the failure of government provision is the responsibility not of any one government but of us all. We are individually and collectively responsible. Governments will act when they are pushed hard or when they judge that the community demands action. The community is not yet sending such signals about the disabled and their carers. Instead we fund the welfare sector out of our spare change. Shorten is just an easy target.

Conroy has been accused for cutting \$250 million from the licence fees of the commercial free to air television companies. In particular he has been criticised for meeting privately with Channel 7 owner Kerry Stokes. Tony Abbott accused him of electoral corruption despite enjoying a similar meeting with News Ltd magnate Rupert Murdoch at much the same time.

Yet Conroy's real failing is that he is willing to meet with any major stakeholder in the communications industry. Name a major sporting event and he has been a guest in a corporate box. He loves sporting freebies.

The whole communications industry deserves the criticism. Business as usual is for the top end of town to waste shareholder and client dollars on conspicuous consumption and

extravagant political lobbying. That is a scandal of at least equal proportions to any of Conroy's sins.

And in this case everyone is us, the top end of town us, but us nevertheless. We excuse such extreme corporate self-interest when, as shareholders or voters, we should try to eliminate it or at least spread the blame beyond government ministers to a private sector that splurges on such luxury.

Garrett's responsibility should be shared with his Prime Minister and Cabinet who insisted speed was of the essence in the implementation of the household insulation program. He was left holding the bag. His weaknesses and those of his department must be put in context. Their regulation of the program was glaringly insufficient but they were driven by their political masters.

But this case reflects also on the small business community. There have clearly been many dodgy operators and a great deal of dodgy installation. They have poured through the gaps in the government's program in their own self-interest, taking the opportunity to make a quick buck as importers of sub-standard insulation, trainers running various courses, or as small businesses doing the actual work.

We are often too quick to apportion blame to government ministers. They should have thick skins and, in these instances, Shorten, Conroy and particularly Garrett may emerge with tarnished reputations. But we should not neglect the wider context. Ministers are there in our place. In rushing to criticise them we often let ourselves off the hook too easily. Widespread community values are the deeper problem.

Why I still go to church

POETRY

Charlotte Clutterbuck

Why I still go to church

This moment

Which doesn't drift away.

John Foulcher

'Why I go to church'

never for the flat parish choirs

sometimes for tea-towelled shepherds
and tinselled sleepy angels

possibly for the story of St Martin de Porres
who promised the rats he'd feed them
if they stopped annoying the prior

certainly not for the sermon that never asks
can Neanderthal men be saved?
can a single death two thousand years ago
redeem the hypothetical populations
of 55 Cancri's planets 41 light years away?

partly because even if no one is there

sometimes in the vaster spaces
of St Kit's, I feel a charged stillness

always because of the kneeling, the touch
of fingers on forehead, the taste of the host
the red, green, purple rhythms of seasons
wisdom of parables, music of psalms

now because of you kneeling
beside me, thumbing the scarred leather
of the little mass-book your grandmother
hid at the back of her Protestant linen-press

and perhaps because driving up Canberra Avenue
when the spire of St Stephen's briefly aligns
with the national flagpole soaring
like Lucifer above Parliament House, the Big Syringe
of modern communication on Black Mountain,
the stone steeple has human dimensions.

Sanjusangendo Temple

For Takayoshi Fujiki

east and south antipodes
intersecting near
the Greenwich Meridian

at the beginning of winter's long
wet days, she bumped into him
among the second-hand books

secular Buddhist, lapsed Catholic
entranced by Langland's
medieval certainties

though his Japanese schedule
took him away too soon
fast pace of other duties

time paused for an hour
she chose him books
they might one day

talk about together
irrelevant to schoolgirls in Toyono
and perhaps none of her business

she took him to the train station
without remembering
to show him Shelley's statue

twenty-four years later
arriving in Osaka wearing
his gift of a scarf as a sign

*what will we say to each other
have I brought the right presents
why did I bring so much baggage*

*Don't mind
he says, heaving my case
don't mind.*

*what will he give me to eat
am I staying too long
will he let me pay for the hotel?*

No, he will not, but when he holds
my hand to say goodnight
our eyes are as certain as siblings.

this place taught me to take off my shoes
leave money at the gate

this word taught me to count
in Japanese — *San-ju-san-gendo*

thirty-three bays filled
with a thousand gilded Bodhisattvas

three thousand pairs of hands turned up
my heart turned upside-down

the smell of incense, the massive timbers
Buddhist prayers for my sea-dog dead father

my grandmother dying at one hundred and three
the wild rage of new-born infants

carved on the huge faces of armoured spirits
the calm flow of sacred characters

*The Buddha is always there, but alas he never comes in sight.
At the soundless dawn, he dimly shows himself in our prayers.**

feet brushing through clouds
of pink-white-crimson-orange cosmos

your voice from the yellow metal seat behind
lifting up the slope, *It is a dream!*

further on foot, cool steep ascent
through dark pines, stone guardians

a crazy crone crying from her collapsed mouth
blessings or curses or requests — you never told me which

up to the mountain's crown, stone cistern, bamboo cups
water purifying hands and mouth

the thick rope of the gong in your hands, the clang
Shinto or Buddhist, I don't know, does it matter?

is the stranger allowed to place palms
together and bow in a moment's belonging?

when I take the unthinkable step you write
here in Japan your case is unthinkable

but also you are my everlasting friend.

**Ryojin Hisho, Kamakura Period.*

Israel's rogue behaviour

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

When former US President George Bush was compiling his celebrated list of 'rogue nations', he wasn't thinking about Israel. Last week our Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were unnerved by news that Israeli officials almost certainly forged Australian passports in order to carry out a Mossad killing. When Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said it 'was not the action of a friend', he could have been *thinking* that it was the behaviour of a rogue nation.



The passports violation was not the only disturbing Israeli action in the news last week. Israel's air force unveiled its Heron TP fleet of unmanned aircraft, which it says can travel as far as Iran. It coincides with Israel's push for increased international pressure against Iran in response to its nuclear program. The drone can fly for more than 20 hours, and is suitable for both surveillance and launching missile attacks. This development will provoke even moderates in Iran to think the country needs nuclear arms in order to defend itself.

We are easily impressed by the magnitude of what such technology is capable of. It is the realisation of what we have so far only seen in movies and computer games. Leaders bent on waging war see many advantages in drones and other robotic tools of warfare. The use of such technology in Afghanistan and Iraq has led to a significant reduction of US casualties when compared to Vietnam.

The cost is a rising percentage of civilian casualties. In World War I, the number of non-combatant casualties was 10 per cent. This rose to 50 per cent in World War II, and over 90 per cent in today's wars. With the large-scale employment of robots and drones, the figure will soon be close to 100 per cent.

These statistics were quoted in the latest [Just Comment](#) briefing from the Edmund Rice Centre, which is titled 'Games we play — war by remote control'. It says remote warfare will save lives, but only for countries that can afford the technology.

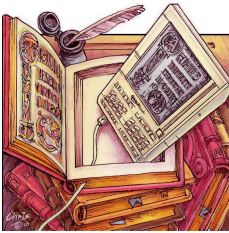
'More countries will develop remote capabilities, leading to greater destruction on every side — but the poor continue to suffer.'

War by remote control is faceless. It is acting behind another's back as in rogue behaviour. We remain at a distance from those with whom we disagree. There is no basis for trust. Resolution to conflict involves looking the other in the eye, shaking hands and agreeing to cooperate. These are the actions of friends.

Libraries lead the e-book revolution

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Philip Harvey



Have you read an e-book yet? Do you think it means the end of bookshops and libraries as we know them? Will book people have to turn into e-book people to meet the brave new world? It's all a bit early to say.

I haven't read an e-book and when asked by borrowers if I feel that my profession of librarian is under threat, I ask them if they themselves have used an e-book. No, is the consistent reply. But they know chapter and verse about the developments, usually from what they have seen on the internet. The new slimline gadgets can display everything a text maniac wants to get their hands on. Or so it seems.

Every day trucks cart away more of the university collections of Michigan, California Berkeley, and Stanford, to the Google digitisation factories. Nobody has the full data on progress, it's a secret, but millions of works are now being assembled in what is a monster digital library and bookstore. Google claims that this is all a service, making available works in e-form that are not easily accessible, and that it will all be for free.

This last claim brings out the sceptic in most of us, but more pressing for now are the claims from authors and estates that their copyright is being abused. Test cases are cropping up all over the United States and the Justice Department has started looking unfavourably at Google, in part for the very American reason that Google is creating a monopoly, thus stopping competition.

Digital is moving in, that's for sure. But will readers get what they want? I don't mean readers who ask for the latest blockbuster, but all of us who need those difficult-to-get books for study or personal interest, the ones Google says are not easily accessible. It is the same librarians who remind the digitising deliverers that inter-library loan can get the requested print version at next to no cost and in short time.

Far from sidelining academic and special collections, the digital libraries of the future make easy and free access to print-libraries even more of a priority: there is no way of predicting the price tag for that rare thesis or out-of-print title in its downloadable form. This is an issue that more academics and specialists need to be questioning now, especially as they are the ones often making the decisions about their libraries, and not the librarians.

Actually, libraries have a large measure of responsibility for the Information Revolution. Libraries must be super-sensitive to any form of information production and retrieval: it's

their job. In the early '80s, when I was at library school, there were students who already resented being called librarians or library managers — we were Information Managers. Some heroic individuals had these words painted on their office doors when they went into the workplace. When you remind librarians that their title comes from the Latin root for book, they are much too busy figuring out how the translation button works on a research site to worry about a dead language.

Indeed, the fourth century shift from the scroll to the codex is being used as a comparison to the present transmogrification. I tend to believe that we are seeing the early technology of the e-book. In five years the e-book will look, feel, sound, smell and gesticulate in very different ways from its iPad and Kindle prototypes. iPad will look as cute as a cassette tape.

As usual, libraries are quietly ahead of everyone else. At universities there are library departments dedicated solely to the acquisition of e-materials for students and lecturers, while public libraries make e-books available and train the staff in their use, anticipating the demand before the e-books themselves are even on the market. But neither are libraries in a hurry to drown their books and make the sea change.

I imagine that the e-book and the book will thrive together. The real question is usability. Will people quite simply prefer one over the other? If everyone goes mad over the e-book then it will place publishers in a very interesting situation. It is in the lap of the gods and, like the laptop before it, the gods are fickle. The ancient technology of the codex book succeeded because it was practical and pleasurable.

I will still be reading the print perfect, easy-to-manage, hard bound book when it is no longer fashionable or profitable to do so. But I also know that when it comes to one of my favourite pastimes, browsing the entries in Samuel Johnson's Dictionary, it is more comfortable to do so on a compact plastic screen than it is to lug the leatherbound volume (40 cm folio) onto my peak-hour express train.