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## **Ramos-Horta landslide best possible outcome**

INTERNATIONAL

Politics

Published 16-May-2007

The landslide victory by José Ramos-Horta in East Timor's presidential elections is the best possible outcome for the new country, unifying the nation after the fractious violence of 2006 and giving democracy a second chance.

Ramos-Horta secured more than 69 per cent of the vote, completely overshadowing the candidate from the ruling Fretilin party, Francisco 'Lu Olo' Guterres. The decisive win indicates that the opposition forces stand a very good chance of defeating the Fretilin government at the June 30 parliamentary poll. A victory will herald a new, more democratic East Timor which is also likely to be less hostile to Australia.

Significantly, the presidential election was held without incident, indicating that Australian and UN-administered security is helping bring peace to the country. But these elections were for the ceremonial post of president; the Fretilin government may prove to be a sore loser should it be defeated in the June 30 poll. Renewed violence cannot be ruled out. The significant oil wealth of this impoverished country means the stakes are high.

The vote underscores the depth of antipathy felt towards the Fretilin government. It has badly managed the country's post-independence development and the minor dispute in the armed forces which sparked renewed violence last year.

Fretilin, founded in 1974, was East Timor's first pro-independence party and in the first parliamentary elections in 2001 it won 55 per cent of the vote. But this government, dominated by exiles who had lived in communist Mozambique during the Indonesian occupation, proved to be autocratic in style and substance.

Even worse, it allowed the economy to go backwards after the downsizing of the UN presence in East Timor. In 2005-06 it only managed to spend half of the money available in the national budget. The country's young and massively unemployed population quickly became involved in gang violence when conflict broke out between soldiers from the eastern and western regions within East Timor.

Last June Ramos-Horta and the outgoing President, Xanana Gusmão, used their moral authority to force Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri to accept responsibility for the descent into renewed violence and to stand down. Ramos-Horta served as interim prime minister, and now he and Gusmão are attempting a swap as the President makes a bid for executive power.

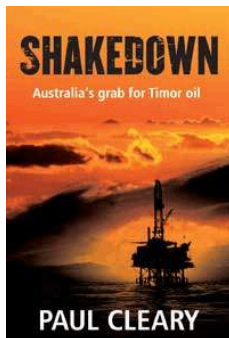
Gusmão has formed a new political party, the CNRT, to challenge Fretilin at the June 30 poll. The President's bid for executive power follows his two-decade war with the Fretilin party. He blames its 'leftist ideology' for having cruelled the country's independence hopes in the 1970s by inviting the Indonesian invasion. His new political party, the National Council of Timorese Reconstruction, bears the same Portuguese acronym, CNRT, as the former multi-party resistance council that he established in 1988.

Significantly, Gusmão and other opposition parties have the support of the powerful Catholic Church, East Timor's oldest institution.

GusmÃ£o and Ramos-Horta are also aligned with the biggest and best-organized opposition party, the Democratic Party. Its candidate for the presidential election, Fernando 'Lasama' de Araujo, a former student activist who spent seven years in Indonesian jail, gained more than 19 per cent of the vote in the first-round election.

Ramos-Horta strongly endorsed the Democratic Party when as a newly appointed prime minister he made an appearance at its national congress last year.

...Lasama's party is the party of the future,... Mr Ramos-Horta said recently.



GusmÃ£o is supported by a group of 'reformist' Fretilin members who failed in their attempt last year to have Alkatiri removed as secretary-general of the party. The *MudanÃ§a* group is led by the foreign minister JosÃ© Luis Guterres, an urbane former ambassador to the United States and the United Nations.

The East Timor elections are also a crucial test for building democracy in a post-conflict country that has the added blessing, or curse, of significant resources wealth. While East Timor may get a more democratic government, it may not necessarily get better policy.

In a rash and populist move GusmÃ£o has proposed undoing one of the exemplary policies of the Fretilin government, the creation of a Petroleum Fund to safely manage the country's oil revenue. So far more than \$US1 billion has been invested in US treasury bills with the US Federal Reserve. Withdrawing all of that money, as GusmÃ£o has proposed, would be an over-reaction to the failure of the Fretilin government to spend the \$US120 million budget, and would underscore why good policy advice from key donors, including Australia, will be needed for a considerable time.

## Aboriginal dignity requires 'subversive' religion

EDITORIAL

Published 16-May-2007

In this issue of *Eureka Street*, Brian McCoy SJ writes about the tragedy and hope embodied in the life of the late Aboriginal leader and activist Rob Riley. Riley is the subject of a book published late last year. It is 40 years since the 1967 Aboriginal citizenship Referendum. It is also the tenth anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* report into the 'stolen generation' of Aboriginal children.



McCoy writes that the book captures a "particular slice of Australian history when Aboriginal leaders emerged in the 1970s and 80s with great energy and purpose". Riley had an impressive ability to focus on an issue. But as a member of the stolen generation, the psychological wounds inflicted early in life led him to towards drug addiction, mental illness and loneliness. These conspired to bring about an early end to his life at the age of 41.

What was missing from his life can be explained, at least in part, by some insights from Malaysian Jesuit anthropologist Jojo Fung (pictured below). Fung ministers to Malaysia's Orang Asli (Indigenous) people. He is visiting Australia this month as the keynote speaker at the [New Pentecost Forum](#) being held in Melbourne, Sydney and Wollongong.

Fung believes that it's a mistake to think that Aboriginal dignity depends upon a referendum of the dominant white society. Instead it is about recognising Aboriginal beliefs and rituals, which are part of what he calls the "existential DNA fabric of Aboriginal human dignity". Aboriginal dignity, he says, is firmly grounded in Aboriginal cultures and religiosity.

These beliefs were systematically suppressed in colonised societies. They were, and still are, considered subversive. Laws were passed, such as Zimbabwe's Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899. Interestingly, this particular law was [repealed](#) last year as part of Robert Mugabe's heightened reaction against colonialism. [This week](#), Pope Benedict XVI elicited a hostile response from Indian rights groups in Brazil when he suggested that Indigenous Brazilians acquiesced to their conversion to the Catholic faith of their colonial rulers.



From his observation of life in indigenous communities in rural Malaysia, Fung suggests that indigenous beliefs empower people to hold their own against the dehumanising influences of the modern world.

He says: "In this subversive space, the scientific rationality behind the current logic of globalisation that reduces the many worlds into one world of neo-liberal capitalism is subverted by a 'space' that promotes the many worlds in the one universe."

Human dignity requires policymakers to provide for the many worlds of the earth's many peoples to be kept intact. Social transformation is inevitable, but there must be checks and balances. As Jojo Fung says, these must allow "democratic space and subversive space to coexist to bring about the full human flourishing where Aboriginal peoples themselves know they stand equal with the members of dominant society."

## Emotion trumps facts in clergy sex abuse doco

FILM REVIEW

Documentary

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***Deliver Us From Evil*. 103 minutes. Rated: MA. Director: Amy Berg. [Website](#)**

Back in 1992, Irish pop singer Sinead O'Connor was widely pilloried for tearing up a photograph of Pope John Paul II on air, during an appearance on *Saturday Night Live*.



Somehow, it's hard to imagine that the stunt — an attempt to draw attention to the issue of child abuse among the Catholic priesthood — would provoke such an extreme reaction today. In the ensuing years, allegations of abuse against priests and religious ministers seem to have become almost commonplace, to the extent that "pedophile priest" is now somewhat of a stereotype — one often based more in caricature than reality.

This in itself is reason enough for a documentary such as *Deliver Us From Evil*, which details the atrocious acts of abuse committed by former Catholic priest Oliver O'Grady in the US during the 1970s and '80s. If nothing else, the film serves to get beyond stereotypes and once again put human faces to a very real, very serious issue.

The film's most potent ingredient is the willing participation of O'Grady himself. The man is despicable almost to the point of being pitiable, offering his sordid confessions for the camera without any apparent sense of remorse, in the hope of obtaining (in his words) "forgiveness and absolution".



If O'Grady isn't enough to rouse a sense of moral outrage, the testimonies of his victims and their families will do the trick. One couple, who regarded O'Grady as a close friend only to later learn he'd been abusing their daughter under their own roof, recall the betrayal with such open grief that it will have many audiences weeping in sympathy.

More unsettling, albeit more difficult to substantiate, are the film's allegations of complicity among the Church hierarchy. It seems certain that for many years, O'Grady was allowed to offend with the full knowledge of his immediate superiors, as they responded to any complaints against him by simply relocating him to another parish.

That said, the extent to which the issue of abuse pervades the Church at large, and how high up the hierarchy the alleged complicity extends, is certainly less clear, although the film would have viewers believe that both abuse and complicity are rampant.

The dearth of hard evidence, beyond compelling eyewitness testimony, is a recurring weakness in the film. Several nasty allegations are levelled against O'Grady and allowed to stand without sufficient substantiation. These contribute considerably to the overall emotional impact of the film, even though the details are sketchy at best, suggesting that the filmmakers are more interested in emotional responses than in 'cold hard facts'.

On the other hand, perhaps it's not a bad thing that the heart is allowed to win over the head. It's right that people get emotional about these issues. Religious bodies have a moral and ethical (as well as legal) obligation to care for and protect their faithful, yet history

proves that they have failed too often in this obligation.

If *Deliver Us From Evil* helps force churches — from the Catholics to the Salvos and everyone in between — to be properly accountable when it comes to child abuse, then it has achieved a good thing.

## Grieving at Amazon.com

### FEATURES

Published 16-May-2007

On this day, in the middle of that most self-centred action of modern life, the Google ego-search, I find the places where my name appears in ether of cyberspace. And more unexpectedly I stumble upon memories and dust.



The intangible shelves of an online bookshop I can only imagine as dustless, but I am searching for a link to a website that might be selling my new book. I intend to include it on my website just in case one of the five people who visit each month is interested in buying it.

They say you can find anything on the web. And you can: cats that look like Hitler or cartoons dedicated to the theme 'monkey punch dinosaur'. I can watch the weather track across the continent as we collectively pray for rain. But I didn't expect to find memories. Certainly not memories that belong to a time before you could say, "Just send me an email."

Here in the mess of book titles I opened up a window to display the finer details of my book like the ISBN and the number of pages. There I noticed one other book that showed up though my search as a similar title. It was about librarianship in the prison system. Tears welled in my eyes.

The book was written by my father's brother in the late 1970s. He died aged thirty-three. I was six years old. I didn't really understand what a brain tumor was.

It is listed at Amazon UK, but there are no copies available, at all. I'm not even sure it is a book, so much as a published pamphlet. Wherever copies of it lie, they are most likely buried under a pile of other books.

Uncle Neil, as I remember him, was a tall man. He was the first librarian at the high school I eventually attended. I remember doing searches in that library by the date of purchase while trying to find books that he may have labeled, may have touched.



How does a person who died two decades before the internet took hold end up a part of it? Uncle Neil was no celebrity, just a librarian who practised his trade in prisons and schools, someone who left an adoring wife and beautiful son. Celebrities end up online, sure, but not an everyday person with a thick, red Ned Kelly beard and gentle eyes hidden behind glasses who died of a brain tumor at his home in the suburbs of

Melbourne.

In front of this computer, some levels above Melbourne's streetscape I see my father surrounded by his three sons, all under seven years. He is sitting in the cane chair that rests against the living room wall. He and mum still live in that house. The cane chairs are long gone, but it is still all red brick and pine. His head rests heavily in his hands, he is hunched and sobbing. The tears pool in his cupped palms and drip onto our slate floor. My brothers and I stand in a semi-circle around him. We must have said something at the time, we must. But, apart from my father's tears this memory is a silent one.

This is the first memory I have of my father's vulnerability. It is a rare memory, one that

hits home, hard. In this memory my father's pain is so obvious and my childhood ignorance of his hurt is so real. That is the pain that hurts me so much now, the loneliness of my father grieving over the death of his brother surrounded by three young boys without the words or understanding to give him the comfort that he needed.

The internet may be in many ways intangible, it does not have the weight of a book in the hand. But as time goes on, it is gathering dust, just like the library shelves that my uncle once sorted, and amid the thousands of inactive websites are stories, names and memories. And the world wide web suddenly becomes an unfillable cup full of ordinary things written by and about ordinary people that can cause extraordinary revelations and emotion.



## The Church's mission to expose climate change sceptics

### FEATURES

Environment

Published 16-May-2007

Try as the climate sceptics might, the evidence for human-enhanced climate change is irrefutable. Three reports this year from the UN's IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) tell the story. The work is credible as it involved 2,500 scientists, subject to peer review, and was open to public scrutiny. While the detail of the reports is immense, the message is simple — reverse human-induced climate change or bear the consequences.

What must the Church do to help people respond to climate change? Cardinal Martino, as President of Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, hosted a seminar on Climate Change and Development last April. Climate sceptics were invited as well as church leaders who want to build a community based pastoral response to climate change. The seminar carries lessons for the Australian church.

The first task of the church is to expose science sceptics. Archbishop Pat Kelly of Liverpool reminded Italian scientist Professor Zuchichi that there is little place for science that is removed from the real lives of people. A rational, equitable and moral response to climate change means using available carbon-reducing technology as outlined by the IPCC.

Some vested interests have to be exposed as a block to effective climate responses. Their PR people sow the confusion that leads to paralysis and push misleading positions: make developing nations rich so they can adapt to climate change; technology will solve agricultural problems in development nations; the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide is good and willed by God.

Sadly, vested interests often play on the good will of ordinary people. Under the banner of concern for the poor they argue against carbon taxes. At the Rome seminar they ignored the testimony of people like Ms Sharon Looremot of 'Practical Action Kenya' and Archbishop Paul Ruzoka of Tanzania. While connecting poverty and climate problems, these two speakers rejected imposing western models of agriculture which had helped cause problems.

David Miliband, Minister for the Environment in the UK government speaking at the seminar, asked the churches to add a moral and ethical tone to the climate debate. He called for an 'Environmental Contract' similar to a 'Social Contract' and praised Pope Benedict for buying the first bond in the UK's carbon trading scheme.



The insights of Kubler-Ross on responses to health trauma also apply to the psychology of climate change. 'De-nial' is not a river in Africa. At the seminar some blamed countries such as China for increasing climate gas emissions or Indonesia for its forest fires in an attempt to divert attention. Some Australians use the same arguments, yet for financial purposes we still import cheap Chinese goods and Indonesian forest timbers.

There are a number of ways that churches can constructively enter the debate on climate change.



First, churches can more *actively* enter the public debate on climate change by providing cogent ethical criteria — the right of all people to a safe environment as taught by John Paul II, the rights of future generations, fair distribution of climate abatement costs, solidarity with developing countries which need modern technology uninhibited by patenting laws, the plight of environmental refugees. In an election year, the Australian bishops need to be encouraged from the pews to publicly build upon their 2005 position paper on climate change.

Second, the churches can provide motivation for people to act on climate change by bringing from its store 'new things and old'. The role of earth in the story of Christian salvation develops as we listen to the earth groaning. The revealing role of Earth for spirituality can grow through preserving its diversity. In his closing address, Cardinal Martino said, "This reflection deepens doctrinal reflection as Gospel meets life in society...the Gospel is always new, adapting as historical conditions change."

Third, many participants in Rome called upon the Pope to write an encyclical on the environment and join with major church leaders in a common statement on climate change. Church leaders in Australia could ask why the new endowment fund for universities does not carry a condition that new buildings have a five star energy rating, for example. Church groups could talk about 'green jobs' to break the link between economic growth and increased climate gases as the UK has done. Bishops could designate a part of World Youth Day 2008 to reflection and action on the universal issue of climate change.

*Dr Charles Rue is a Sydney-based priest of the Columban Missionary Society, and co-ordinator of Columban JPIC (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation). His report of the recent Vatican Climate Change Seminar is [here](#) .*

## Who pays for our impulsive consumption?

AUSTRALIA

Published 16-May-2007

A tradition of disposable clothing has existed in the fashion industry for many years — clothing that falls apart easily, garments that you wear twice and then give away. However, we rarely consider what effect this impulsive consumption of goods has. Perhaps we know at one level that the fashion industry has quite a lot to do with poverty?

Recently I walked into a 'disposable clothes shop' in Sydney and viewed it through a different lens. As I looked at a beautifully embroidered shirt and a pair of trousers, I started to picture the women who worked to assemble its pieces.

Remembering lines of women in Cambodia walking along Phnom Penh's roads with pink scarves around their heads, long sleeved shirts and simple black pants, my conscience was pricked. These women were on their way to work in garment factories, yet rarely did I remember seeing on the labels of my clothing 'Made in Cambodia'.

While these Cambodian women work in comparatively good conditions, it is impossible for Cambodia to continue on this path as it can no longer compete in the world market. The franchise that China has on the garment industry is preventing countries like Cambodia from working their way out of poverty.

On the other side of the world the situation is similar. The United States subsidises its cotton farmers, which prevents African countries such as Mali from being able to export good quality cotton to a world market. Peru is in a similar situation with its alpaca wool.

This situation was considered in *The Dollar a Day Dress*, a documentary made by the BBC's *Panorama* in 2005. The documentary travelled to Peru, Mali, Uganda and Cambodia to source material from people who lived on less than a dollar a day. The dress was then created by London School of Fashion students and paraded during fashion week, 2005. However, despite advocacy efforts like this, two years later, the situation has not improved.



In July 2007, the world will reach the halfway point of the UN Millennium Development Goals. These development goals aim to alleviate extreme poverty and hunger, providing universal primary education and addressing gender inequality. So let's look at the facts. Australia is a signatory to these UN promises, and by signing on to them Prime Minister John Howard signed onto a pledge which states: *"We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want."*

Australia currently ranks 19th out of 22 OECD countries in its contribution to overseas aid spending. In last week's Budget, whilst the Federal Government increased the aid budget, it failed to increase aid funding from its current level of 0.3 per cent of GNI. The budget did however decrease its governance funding on a percentage basis, and increased infrastructure, health and education spending by \$1.6 billion over four years. This is



promising, in that less aid dollars are being spent on security operations in places such as the Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, and more is being spent on sustainable development. Nonetheless, our signing of free trade agreements with the United States is the very thing which keeps developing countries from working their way out of poverty.

One answer to these complex problems is for Australia to show some leadership, and start providing more and better aid; to focus its aid dollars on development projects with a mandate of building peace and alleviating poverty, and investing in fair trade initiatives. One of the Millennium Development Goals is to create a global partnership for human development. It is not possible to eradicate extreme poverty without working together. Working together using principles of fair trade is a challenge that governments need to be made aware of. Programs need to be firmly grounded in good development principles, encouraging a mentality of doing with rather than doing for.

Another more personal response is to consider our buying habits. Our awareness of the working and living conditions of garment workers rarely plays out in our own lives. Christian Kemp-Griffin, the Chief Executive Office of Edun Apparel — an ethical clothing company founded by U2's Bono and his wife Ali Hewson — says that socially conscious clothing sells. "The ethical image has value. A company doesn't have to sacrifice its margins to sell its product because it's doing it ethically. It actually adds value for the consumer."

A fundamental shift needs to happen in the minds of Western governments. It takes specific action and focussed aid and development dollars to alleviate poverty, and the need is more urgent than ever.

## Prochoice Amnesty means no choice for members

### OPINION

Published 16-May-2007

Australia's mainstream press has shown little interest in a debate within one of the world's pre-eminent human rights organisations, Amnesty International, that threatens to seriously fracture and weaken the body. Amnesty International's board has just called for abortion to be decriminalised globally. The human rights organisation has thus abandoned its long-held 'neutral' policy that states: "Amnesty International takes no position on whether or not women have a right to choose to terminate unwanted pregnancies; there is no generally accepted right to abortion in international human rights law...."

Amnesty branches in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, among others, voted to move away from this neutral stance on abortion. A subsequent poll of UK members had a majority against the change, but this was not binding. Here in Australia, the local branch was unable to reach a formal position on the change. Amnesty's new policy does stop short of backing aborting as a "fundamental right" for women because, according to spokeswoman Widney Brown, that approach was not supported by international human rights laws.

As a Catholic priest and the Principal of a school with an active Amnesty group, such a change in policy places me in the unwanted position of contemplating the closing down of Amnesty's presence in the school. Many Catholic members of Amnesty would also face the painful decision of whether they could remain members of the organisation. The English bishop, Michael Evans, a member of Amnesty for thirty years, a council member, and the author of the Amnesty Prayer, has indicated that he will resign from Amnesty if it changes its policy. Other people from other religious traditions, or from none at all, with sincerely held convictions about abortion, would also find themselves in a difficult position.

Bishop Evans is right when he asserts that: "...The world needs Amnesty International. It has touched the lives of countless numbers of people across the world who have been wrongly imprisoned for their beliefs or subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment. Long may it do so - hopefully with the active support of Catholics worldwide. But this will be seriously threatened should Amnesty adopt a policy supporting the right to abortion. Those involved in decision-making at international level need to ponder this very carefully indeed...."

I do not see this issue as being about abortion as such. I would hope that, even as I have a passionate pro-life stance, I would oppose any move to have Amnesty adopt an anti-abortion policy. Bishop Evans made the point that Amnesty International was not founded to be an all-embracing human rights organisation, but rather to focus effectively, as it so clearly has, on certain key issues. Amnesty, with 2.2 million members, has a proud record of working for the freedom of prisoners of conscience, for fair trials, and against the sanctioned use of torture and the death penalty. Amnesty is largely responsible for introducing into the vernacular the term "...prisoners of conscience...". Its strength comes from a clear and limited focus that allows people from almost every belief system and ideology to find common cause.

By changing its position on the issue, the effectiveness of Amnesty International is at stake, and this should be of concern to all who have an interest in human rights. Already it takes an internal toll. The United States branch did not make public its position prior to the presidents' meeting. Members are lining up to resign. I have spoken to members who were unaware of the consultation, and if you look at both the national and international websites it is curious how difficult it is to find reference to the decision or to the consultation. An organisation promoting conscience has become to some extent unconscionable in its process.

Whatever the range of views of Amnesty members on abortion, moving from its neutral stance may well serve to undermine its effectiveness in its key areas of expertise and influence. Its ability to work with the Catholic Church and other Christian bodies would be impaired. It would come to be seen as a partisan body, especially in places like the United States, and thus lose its ability to build consensus around issues like the death penalty. As an organisation which explicitly excludes some of the most vulnerable of all — the 'unborn human' — from its campaign to 'Protect the Human', it leaves itself open to question.



We should be clear what is at stake here. Amnesty's abandonment of its neutral stance on abortion will exclude those whose religious beliefs lead them to a position of conscience opposing abortion. It will weaken the ability of Amnesty to work effectively in many parts of the third world. It will identify Amnesty as a secular, partisan, first world body, playing into hands of, for example, Islamic radicals looking to discredit human rights activism as a Western driven agenda. It will weaken the campaign against capital punishment in the United States by driving a wedge between its two most vocal institutional critics, the Catholic Church and Amnesty. It could embroil Amnesty in campaigns against abortion laws in countries such as Ireland or in Latin America.

As a Catholic I find it particularly sad to see Amnesty go down the path of abortion advocacy. Amnesty was founded in 1961 by an English Catholic, Peter Benenson, who died last year. Amnesty and the Church have worked together in many areas. Here in Australia, Amnesty and the Church stood together in the campaign against the execution of the Australian, Van Tuong Nguyen, in Singapore in 2005.

Amnesty played an important role in the campaign to gain the freedom of Australian priest and social activist Fr Brian Gore who was jailed in the Philippines by Ferdinand Marcos in 1983. Defending the rights of refugees and asylum seekers has also been an area of common endeavour. I do not question the sincerity of those pushing for Amnesty to abandon its neutrality on abortion, but I do question their judgment about the impact of such a decision on a body dedicated to protecting prisoners of conscience, and I worry about a consultation process that seemed secretive and lacking in respect, even at the highest levels, for those who in conscience hold a view that abortion is an attack on the human rights of the most vulnerable members of the human family.

## Deeply buried emotions of the Stolen Generations

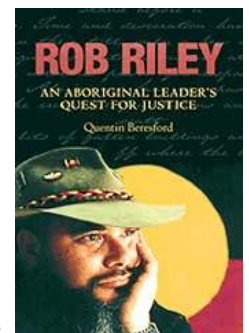
BOOK REVIEW

Feature Review

Published 16-May-2007

**Rob Riley - An Aboriginal Leader's Quest for Justice. Quentin Beresford, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006. ISBN: 0 85575 502 4 374 pages [Website](#)**

There are times when I wonder if I have become immune to the deaths, violence and suffering of Aboriginal people. And then, often quite unexpectedly, something lifts me up to a new place of insight and range of emotions. I find my immunity, or perhaps it is my resistance, cannot last for very long. This describes something of my experience when reading this compelling book about Aboriginal leader and activist, Rob Riley.



I first met Rob in 1989 when he was working for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC). He was responsible for the Western Australian Issues Unit that came under Commissioner Pat Dodson's brief to examine underlying issues. Since that time I have always valued his offer to take me into the world which I knew so little about, the place where he grew up, Sister Kate's Children's Home in Perth.

As the RCIADIC moved around us and its demands grew increasingly intense, he would find time to close his office door and share with me something of his early life. Sister Kate's was the home where he was taken as a baby and where many other Aboriginal children were also taken. It was his 'home' for the first eleven years of his life.

Whether he felt that I would or needed to understand his story, because I had lived in Aboriginal communities and knew something of their dormitory stories, or whether he felt the need to work through the issues that were emerging as a result of the RCIADIC, I still am not sure. However, I sensed then, as Quentin Beresford reveals, Rob's ambivalence about his 'home'. It was a place of growing up and making lasting friends. It was also a place that deeply wounded him.

Rob's life was certainly not dull or boring. The book captures well that particular slice of Australian history where Aboriginal leaders emerged in the 1970s and 80s with great energy and purpose. As a field officer for the Aboriginal Legal Service, then a leader of the protests at Noonkanbah and as Chair of the National Aboriginal Conference, Rob both led and acted in his own distinctive, direct style. His ability to address and focus on an issue was impressive. He was articulate and often fiercely outspoken.

He was also wounded, as if early life experiences would not let him go. Drugs, mental illness and loneliness each played their part. His active, committed but flawed human life offered little evidence at that time that he would die some seven years after the Commission, by his own hand, aged 41. Nor was it expected that in the year after his death there would be the [Bringing Them Home](#) report. This was the first, public recognition of Aboriginal children who like himself, were forcibly separated from their families and 'grown up' in institutions such as Sister Kate's.





Now it is May 2007, ten years after that report was first tabled in our Federal Parliament. In the years that followed, voices within our Federal Government have sought to challenge a number of its claims, but the film *Rabbit Proof Fence*, and many other human stories, have revealed more about those faces and the deeply buried emotions experienced by those of the 'stolen generations'. Whatever the numbers, the rationalisations and the excuses, what can no longer be denied is the hurt and pain felt by many who have lived through the consequences of those race-based policies.

Recently, I came across the song, 'Accolades', by the Australian band The Standard Deviations. It was composed by Vicki Bennett who, as a medical practitioner, first met Rob in Roebourne (WA), probably around the same time as I did in 1989. Her life was changed as a result of that encounter. Her song is a reminder of Rob's journey, the pain that he and many others share due to separation from family. It sings of the journey ahead, of reconciliation and justice. It is also a remembrance of a talented and committed Aboriginal leader, who died before his gifts and contributions could be publicly acknowledged.

*Hey man of wisdom do you know  
how many of us feel the blow  
strong in presiding  
your gentle confiding  
taught me the very thing I needed to know  
and now these thoughts are going round inside my head  
why do we leave praising 'til somebody's dead.*

This book is another accolade of sorts. It celebrates Rob's efforts to redress the litany of wrongs and injustices towards his people. At the same time, it reveals the tragedy within his story as it also touches a raw wound in our Australian psyche. It is hard not to be touched by the energy and humanness of his life, the great moments of insight, humour and activity. It is equally hard not to be touched by his suffering and those deeply tragic moments of despair. Rob would be pleased that I continue to remember him and the stories of his early life. There are times when I cannot remain immune and forget.



## Why militant anti-theism is a God-send

COLUMNS

Published 16-May-2007

In the course of an [interview](#) for *Frontpage* magazine (published on 10 December 2003), Christopher Hitchens made a stunning admission:

*"Watching the towers fall in New York, with civilians incinerated on the planes and in the buildings, I felt something that I couldn't analyze at first and didn't fully grasp until the day itself was nearly over. I am only slightly embarrassed to tell you that this was a feeling of exhilaration. Here we are then, I was thinking, in a war to the finish between everything I love and everything I hate. Fine. We will win and they will lose."*

This belated confession added fuel to the already raging fire sparked by Hitchens' full-throated support for the American-led military intervention in Iraq earlier that same year. Even more baffling to his erstwhile comrades on the left is Hitchens' on-going advocacy of this gruesome war, despite the complete unravelling of the stated grounds for the occupation and in the face of mounting public pressure to withdraw. It is only with the publication of his new book, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, that the basis for Hitchens' unwavering commitment to this cause becomes clear: the struggle in Iraq is but a symptom of the real war now being waged, and that is against religion itself.

This war, to which Hitchens silently pledged himself that day, must be fought wherever the enemy is encountered, whether in the guises of global jihadism and vulgar American fundamentalism, at one extreme, or in the West's more urbane agnosticism — which amounts to little more than a self-congratulatory 'Dunno', a position lacking both intellectual stamina and moral courage, all the while priding itself on being open-minded — at the other. As he demonstrated in *The Missionary Position*, a devastating exposé of Mother Theresa (and effectively the prequel to his latest book), neither the most saintly instances of religious belief nor the most seemingly innocuous should be left unopposed because "all religions are versions of the same untruth", and, as such, are "positively harmful."

This same sentiment — one of sheer, unmitigated aggression, the "exhilaration" to which Hitchens referred earlier — drives Richard Dawkins' contribution to the contemporary assault on religion. *The God Delusion* emerged from a deep sense of the intolerability of a situation that had been allowed to fester for too long. As he wrote just days after the event in September 2001:

*"It is time to stop pussyfooting around. Time to get angry. And not only with Islam ... | Only the wilfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today. Those of us who have for years politely concealed our contempt for the dangerous collective delusion of religion need to stand up and speak out."*



**Frontpage Interview: Christopher Hitchens**  
By James Glavin  
FrontpageMagazine.com | December 10, 2003  
**Frontpage Interview**  
had the privilege of conducting the following discussion with Christopher Hitchens, author of the new book, *Lies, Damned Lies, and Profound Fabrications of Sin, in an exact correspondence.*  
**Frontpage Magazine:** Thank you for joining Frontpage Interview. Mr. Hitchens, I'd like to begin with your intellectual posture. You're on one side or side of the Left and, if I am correct, a Darwinist. What led you to this political disposition? Is it more a matter of a kind of personal psychology and character that led to your political outlook. When you look back, does this apply to you in any way? Tell us in the above your attraction to the Left, Darwinism, and Christianity, etc.  
**Hitchens:** At the time and place when I came to political awareness, which was in the early 1960s in England, the prevailing Establishment view that of the Labour Party to its own collapse and replacement first led by "Widdowson, which we all understood as the real signpost to us that of the Democratic evolution of

And this, perhaps, is one of the most striking characteristics of the current wave of intellectual atheism: its affective content, the fact that there is little measured or polite about the way it expresses itself. Even the term 'atheist' seems a little too mild, too respectable a designation for the position occupied by Hitchens and Dawkins (to which list one should also add Ayaan Hirsi Ali). They are anti-theists, opposed in principle to every last attachment to the divine, leading many to accuse them of a kind of inverted fundamentalism, a failure to exhibit the core modern virtue of tolerance or respect for others.

But is this heedless intensity really so bad? It is hard not to be taken by the seriousness of anti-theism, particularly when compared to the suffocating cultural and religious lethargy from which it has emerged. Indeed, it is the very impotence of so much Western Christianity — having long since been content to give succour to people's basest fears and to acquiesce in the 'spirit of the age' as yet another vendor of personal satisfaction and spiritual meaning — that has created the intellectual space for the current debate to occur.

It is at this point that T.S. Eliot's *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* is more important than ever. He forecast that the indiscriminate unification or harmonizing of a culture would achieve naught but its own debasement. In our time, when cultural diversity (to use Francis Fukuyama's astute formulation) is little more than an "ornament to liberal pluralism", supplying the otherwise dull veneer of Western culture with a certain culinary and aesthetic flair, the multiculturalist refusal to, as Hirsi Ali puts it, "classify cultural phenomena as 'better' or 'worse' but only neutral or disparate" actually reinforces the barbaric treatment of women within Islamic communities. What is called for is not intellectual tolerance and mutually-degrading respect, but rather division.

We should be thanking these anti-theists for picking a fight that we should have started long ago. The only question now is, as Christians, will we have the courage to oppose our common foe — what Barth rightly termed "religion as unbelief" — or will we retreat to the safe-ground of religious obsolescence?

## Playful irreverence in the Town Common

COLUMNS

Summa Theologiae

Published 16-May-2007

At 6.00a.m. on the day before Good Friday, ABC Radio's Triple J breakfast team ran a competition in Melbourne's Federation Square called [Jesus, You've Got Talent](#). The idea was that contestants would come dressed up as Jesus (you can just imagine the array of badly-arranged bedsheets, old sandals, and improvised beards on display), and then perform their favourite party piece: juggling cats, yodelling the national anthem, or whatever.



Advertising for the event, if not so much the quest itself, created a bit of a stir — so much so that Triple J seemed to hurriedly remove any official reference to it from its own website. ...œEven for a non-Christian... , wrote Andrew Bolt in his blog, “this safe mockery of a faith which won't hit back seems both tiresome and pathetically weak,” adding on Good Friday, “Mocking Christ has not, in years, seemed this childish—even cowardly.”

Outrage from some of those identifying themselves as Christian was often less moderately worded, with some violent rhetoric in the feedback sections of both websites appearing over the Easter weekend, perpetuating the prejudice of some, no doubt, that — even in the middle of a comedy festival — Christians have no sense of humour.

Feeling vaguely guilty for not being more upset or offended myself, I couldn't help wondering, had the 'second coming' been scheduled for early morning April 5 at the corner of Swanston and Flinders Streets, and Jesus was told by a well-meaning ABC radio producer to please take a number and fill out an entry form while waiting over there for his turn behind ukulele-playing Jesus — and, by the way, great costume! — what would he have listed as his show-stopper? It's a bit like Abraham says in the parable from Luke's gospel: if people don't warm to Moses and the prophets, nor will they be impressed even if someone should rise from the dead.

One can imagine the scene: “Yes, Jesus number 28 — ok — you've got talent, clearly, but we were kind of looking for something else, thanks anyway. Next up, Jesus #29 and 'The Disciples', with a theatre-sports sketch based on 'Thank God you're here'”.

Jesus was, of course, no stranger to the demand for signs—some demonstration of special ability. And on Maundy Thursday of all days we're reminded of the fickle reception the works he did perform received at the hands of various sets of judges, works such as: pronouncing unlikely forgiveness; finding a place at table for the religiously, socially and thus economically outcast; challenging oppressive or self-serving readings of life-giving traditions; naming injustice; enabling the broken to find healing and wholeness— each an expression of his one great talent: communicating divine hospitality—a talent often regarded as blasphemous.

Insofar as the Church is gifted and charged with developing this same talent, does communicating divine hospitality extend to seeing the funny side (assuming, of course, that there is one) of Triple J's talent quest, or of any of the religious jokes featured during the recent International Comedy Festival, which — according to Andrew Bolt — were made

principally at Christianity's expense? (Having seen Shappi Khorsandi's *Asylum Speaker*, however, I'm not so sure.)



In the Church's 'making room' for the other, is there not still a space for playful irreverence in the Town Common – traditionally that most therapeutic realm of the 'carnavalesque' where, especially on 'holy days', fools play the king, and death – above all – is ridiculed?

As Kenneth Craig explains in *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnavalesque*, following Rabelais and Bakhtin, "Carnivals are celebrated as a feast for all the world in the public square . . . [where] destruction and uncrowning are related to birth and renewal ... All the images of carnival are connected to the paradox of the dying and the reborn world." It would indeed be ironic if, in Eastertide, there were not just such a space.

The carnivalesque may appear to sit uncomfortably with Manning Clark's sense of Australian religiosity as a "shy hope in the heart", or Gary Bouma's notion of the "quietly spiritual" (see [Paul Collins, Eureka Street Volume 17 No.8](#)), but perhaps it is a corporate expression of precisely these impulses, made safe by the accoutrements of cynicism and satire, and with its own fully serious purposes. For Christians to deny it a place, then, whether through defensiveness or out of some no less tiresome or mocking "bread and circuses" disdain for popular culture, seems in its own way somehow comical.

## Science journalism battles stereotypes

COLUMNS

Archimedes

Published 16-May-2007

Five days of harmony, presentations, and finger food. Hardly Woodstock 40 years on, but one of the most exciting and important conferences in years — the 5th World Conference of Science Journalists held in Melbourne recently. And the noise of the interaction, between Arabs and Americans, Africans and Chinese, Finns and Canadians, was deafening.



More than 600 delegates from over 50 countries — including the premier of South Australia, Mike Rann, the chairman of the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, Ziggy Switkowski, noted immunologist, Sir Gustav Nossal, and one of the editors of Eureka Street — met on the verge of a momentous decade for science and the world.

While they discussed how to report climate change, emerging diseases, nuclear expansion, economic development, water restrictions, bushfires, the development and policing of the Web, drugs, war...| only a few hundred metres away, the Victorian Parliament was debating stem cell legislation. It was also the week when Australia's new research reactor was launched in Sydney and the nation's first synchrotron was opened in Melbourne.

Most big stories these days have science and technology buried in them. Understanding science is often critical to understanding a story and to separating fact from spin.

Yet science traditionally has been treated like a poor cousin in Australian journalism. It loses out to 'real' stories of politics and economics in the serious broadsheets, magazines and current affairs programs, and to crime and celebrities in the tabloids and to infotainment on TV. At the conference itself several of the country's most important news executives bluntly said as much. And delegates from emerging nations complained bitterly of the same attitudes in their countries. All this, despite the fact that market research continually shows that readers, listeners and viewers consistently rank science and medicine as two of the topics in which they are most interested.

There are two major reasons for the poor status of science in the media, and they are related. With some notable exceptions, Australia has lacked editors of sufficient background and knowledge of science to see its potential as a source of news stories. Most people at the top of our media organisations never studied science, and don't really understand it.



That means traditional stereotypes persist — boffins and nerds in lab coats, researchers who communicate in impenetrable language, and technocrats who talk endlessly about things which seem boring to the average punter. And these stereotypes remain unchallenged partly because of the lack of journalists who want to write about science and have the ability and necessary skills to bring topics alive for a general readership.

It's a vicious circle. So long as editors consider science boring, journalists will recognise it is an area where they are unlikely to make a name for themselves and steer clear of it.

The visitors to Melbourne had a lot to teach us. In Japan, for instance, the Asahi

Shimbun, a newspaper with more than 12 million readers, employs a staff of about 30 just to report science and the issues it raises. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *LA Times* consider science important enough to support large and influential science sections. And the same is true of the top media organisations in Germany, France, Spain and the UK. (The 6th World Conference will be held in London.)

In the coming decade we face critical decisions about climate change and our use of energy and water; about stem cells, gene therapy and genetic testing; about minerals and waste disposal; about privacy and freedom of speech; and many other such issues.

If we don't gain some understanding of the science behind these issues, we allow two unpalatable things to happen to us. We become frightened about and unprepared for the future, and we allow those who are better informed and have monetary or ideological agendas to hijack the debates where critical decisions are made.

We are already witnessing the consequences of the lack of public understanding of what science has to tell us. Parties and governments of all persuasions have been appallingly unprepared to face Australia's lack of water resources — in the driest continent on earth. We have lost years of time coping with climate change. We have yet to come to terms with our new understanding of genetics. We seem to be unable to keep up with the legal and infrastructure demands of telecommunications.

But, as the scientists who have been preparing the latest climate change reports have learned, calling politicians and leaders to account means doing your homework — and allowing them little wriggle room. You have to get your story right and then put it in terms everyone can understand.

That's where science journalists come in. And it's why the meeting in Melbourne was so important. Science journalists have become crucial to our society. They are the translators who can provide the information to guide our future.

*Tim Thwaites was co-chair of the program committee for the 5th World Conference of Science Journalists.*

## Flavius smirks at tourist-clogged modern Verona

COLUMNS

By the Way

Published 16-May-2007

In the first century AD Flavius, the ruler of Gallia Cisalpina, or Verona as we know it, had a problem. His city still had no colosseum. Flavius's opponents were agitating for a broad band of territory south of the city as the site for people's amenities: recreation, education, galleries and future solicitude for the populace. So, more and more conscious of this pressure and fearing inaction might lead to an attempt to upset his political hegemony, Flavius announced in his official financial statement of 30 AD a grant of thousands of denarii for what he promised would be the greatest of Roman Amphitheatres and a perpetual endowment for Gallia Cisalpina. Moreover, he proposed to bring in white and pink limestone from Valpolicella and use the vast area outside the walls as the site for the Amphitheatre and an adjacent square for leisure, exercise and conversation.



Neither Flavius nor his cohorts had shown the slightest interest during the past decade in amphitheatres, popular recreation and leisure, pink and white limestone, or much else other than their obsession with the fortification of the city walls, the locking out of wandering transalpine travellers seeking asylum from northern invaders, and the growth of the Cisalpine treasure chest. So there was a certain amount of cynicism when, with startling suddenness, the massive Amphitheatre began to take shape.

Still, it was real enough and its huge white and pink blocks shone in the sun and gleamed ghostly in the moonlight. Flavius could not have known, of course, that, in later ages, his Valpolicellan wonder would be plundered for its stone and become a source of material for medieval architects. But it would survive and be transformed, to become in the twentieth century one of the world's great venues for opera, the Arena di Verona. This was something of an irony really, because Flavius and his party were total philistines who were enthusiastic supporters of gladiatorial contests but were never seen inside the walls of a theatre or gallery and who regarded even the drinking of coffee as epicene and pretentious.

The years passed, and Flavius and all his machinations, ambitions and coterie took their place on the rubbish heap of empire. The vast square in the shadow of his *magnum opus* became a popular place for meeting, strolling, talking and, soon, eating and drinking. As Romans evolved into Italians, as Latin became the Italian language, as the loosely and often conflicting provinces of the peninsula finally united to become Italy, the square became the Piazza Bra — one of the most famous of its kind in the world and, along with the beautiful, compact city of which it was a part, the destination of tourists, opera buffs, Shakespeareans, lovers and coffee drinkers.

Even in Flavius's Verona, Roman chariots would queue and clash because the streets were narrow and tortuous and were made more so by the constraints of the walls and the huge pressing mass of the Amphitheatre. Modern Verona, choked with cars and cacophonous with intolerantly revving motors and impatient horn blowing, is a severe test even for those visitors with their hearts full of Capulet love or Montague pride or Verdi flourishes. As pervasive as is the phrase 'Romeo and Juliet' in Verona, it is equalled for



frequency by Senso Unico — a typically euphonious Italianism which is, however, no more than a traffic direction.



I know of one couple who translated each Senso Unico as an invitation to view a 'Unique Sight' and constantly found themselves heading the wrong way up one-way streets. This infuriates Italians not because they are worried about the breach of law, but because it holds everyone up and makes it necessary for them to lean on their horns, shout and raise their fingers. This clamour makes babies wail and brings headscarfed women to the windows of apartments above, screaming "Silenzio!" This is probably

why Italians are so good at opera — because Italian life unfolds each day not with the rational continuity of the novel, or the spareness of the short story, but with traditional opera's volatility, its impatience with the mundane.

And then there was the Australian couple whom I know even better. Threading our car through Verona's one way streets, roadworks and diversions, we suddenly found ourselves heading at last for blessed space. "Straight ahead and round that bunch of tourists", says the navigator of my days, and we burst into — yes, you've guessed it — the Piazza Bra, a Pedestrians Only area since Flavius banned chariots there. A car in the Piazza Bra attracts the voluble, arm-waving attention of a bicycle cop, and camera-pointing Japanese tourists send their spouses or children to pose beside it before it moves on in acute embarrassment, scattering tourists and even normally imperturbable pigeons who have never seen the like.

Somewhere, Flavius smirks.



## Reviving the domino theory

POLITICS

Published 16-May-2007

Islam has re-emerged as a potent force in international politics. The so-called war on terrorism, in particular, has refocused the West's attention on the many 'faces' of Islam. Indeed, for some, the demise of the red menace of communism is seen to have been replaced by the green threat of Islam. A number of recent studies have revealed a disturbing pattern of growing Islamaphobia.

A poll conducted by University of New South Wales academic Dr Kevin Dunn, for example, indicated that only one in six Australians had a high-quality understanding of Islam. The most common negative stereotypes were that Islam is a fundamentalist (27 per cent) and intolerant (24 per cent) religion. Unsurprisingly, individuals with no contact with Islam were twice as likely (45 per cent) to be ignorant of it, in contrast to those who had some contact with Islam (21 per cent).

Personal cultural experiences and expectations will influence individuals in their understanding of other races and cultures. A stereotype is a static image in which the attributes of a group are exaggerated or simplified, and the group is described or evaluated in terms of these attributes. Although ethnic and racial stereotypes may have some indistinct, vague basis in reality, they are flagrant oversimplifications and ignore the reality that any group is composed of individuals who are themselves infinitely complex and different from each other. Misguided and limited perceptions enable stereotyping to contribute to prejudice and discrimination in many parts of the world. Selective attention in choosing religious extremes will also allow broad and often erroneous generalisations to be made.

Islam is neither unified nor a threat to the West. Authors such as Leon Hadar have correctly referred to dangerous analyses that posit an all-consuming threat out of unrelated, isolated events all over the world. Numerous examples are given of the changes and instability of a post-Cold War environment being part of a perceived grand scheme of Islam and Islamic solidarity. These include the World Trade Centre bombing in New York City, the civil war in the Sudan, terrorist attacks in Egypt, the popularity of Islamic parties in Algeria and Tunisia, the Lebanese Shiites' struggle for political power, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Persian Gulf war.

The Islamic resurgence is not a powerful global ideology competing with democracy. It is important to note that some of the fanaticism displayed is typically nationalist in origin. The notion of preventing Islamic influence contains, however, strong echoes of the 'domino theory' from the Cold War. This theory argued that the expansionist aims of communism could not be appeased and that the communist threat had a propensity to expand across state frontiers devouring all before it as countries collapsed like falling dominos. This powerful metaphor, popular in the 1950s and 1960s and used to justify US military intervention in Southeast Asia, was later widely criticised for its undeveloped and unstructured generalisations about political systems that are quite different from each other.



**Dominio Theory Principle, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954**  
Public Papers of the President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954, p. 391-392

**The President's News Conference of April 7, 1954**  
The President:  
We will go right to question the meaning, intent and purpose.

Q: Question about Capitalism

The President, answering the 100th question, and not going to answer to make a point and figure it out, and as the 100th question continues to progress, we are having nothing that is directly applicable to the question now at hand.

The President:  
Yes, we have no intention of going into a program of going into the world. I don't know whether the common realization is that, and therefore, we have been made aware that we will, I think, in even thinking a bit through the other atmosphere.

Q: Question on the world

We are not sure.

Muslim faith and practice is expressed in a variety of attitudes and values. The term fundamentalism needs to be applied carefully. Nonetheless, a willingness to give credence to bland generalisations and crude stereotypes occurs in part because of the misunderstanding of Islamic concepts such as *jihad* (holy war) and its notion of *dar al-harb* (the house of war). The concept of jihad has been used by some leaders to justify war or the preparation for war.

Yet jihad is not one of the five pillars of Islam, and is not a strict individual obligation. Further, different interpretations are possible due to the Quran's ambiguous references to jihad, and the complex nature of jihad itself. Certain authors and jurists have interpreted jihad as a defensive endeavour, while others maintain that it should be understood in a spiritual rather than military sense.

One must be careful to avoid making oversimplified connections between Muslims, fundamentalism and Islamic culture. The cultural influence of Islam has had significance in shaping and sustaining distinctive beliefs and rules in Islamic communities and societies, encompassing a diversity of interpretations. Monotheism is a not clear guide to faith or religion; it is complex in both practice and explanation. The mystery of this one God creates different assumptions and expectations within Islam. Crucially, these interpretations will often be shaped by the specific cultural, social, and political history and the present circumstances of a particular people or nation.

## A brief history of the car bomb

BOOK REVIEW

Published 16-May-2007

***Buda's Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb*, Mike Davis, Verso, \$39.95**

[Website](#)

It's not difficult to see why Mike Davis is regarded as a chronicler of apocalypse. His last couple of books have included one on the avian flu crisis and another on the world's megaslums. His latest is a history of the car bomb that begins with Mario Buda, an Italian anarchist, who in 1920 parked a bomb-laden wagon on Wall Street. This was an ominous sign of things to come: use of an inconspicuous vehicle to bring terror and carnage to the heart of modern capitalism.

Davis's books examine the injustices and inequities that get hidden away through society's divisions and separations. This book charts the dreadful return of the repressed. As a weapon of urban terrorism, the car bomb is cheap, anonymous, simple to make; it is a kind of "open-source warfare". Davis's book spares us none of the appalling consequences of this "poor man's airforce".

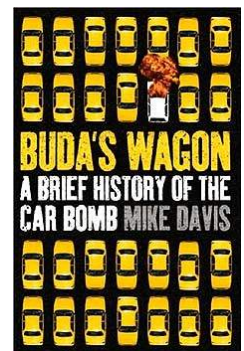
This history really gets going in the Middle East, but Davis doesn't look to the usual suspects to find its source. It was first utilised by a group of Zionist guerrillas, the Stern Gang, against the British authorities and the Palestinian populace. Davis then follows its trail to 1950s Vietnam and finds confirmation of Graham Greene's theory in his novel of CIA intrigue, *The Quiet American*. Car bombings blamed on the communists were used to enhance the position of the US man in Saigon, General Trinh Minh Thã©.

Early on in the book we see car bombing practised by states, the marginalised, political insurgents, and gangsteris. The early history also includes car bombings by the clandestine French military organisation, the OAS, which was intent on preserving the position of the white settlers in Algeria. By the 1960s, it is used by the Viet Cong against US personnel in Vietnam.

Davis observes that Beirut in the early 1980s "became to the technology of urban violence what a tropical rainforest is to the evolution of plants and insects". After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah made its contribution to this grisly history: the suicide bomber. The effectiveness of this was evident in 1983 when they used a truck bomb so powerful that it lifted the US barracks into the air, killing 241 marines and caused the withdrawal of US forces.

No matter what the disagreement around 'blowback' as an explanation of terrorism, it is difficult to ignore the US training and arming of Islamist fighters against the communists in Afghanistan during the 1980s. CIA training and equipment provided via the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence — including that associated with the use of fertiliser-based car bombs — is described by Davis as "the greatest transfer of terrorist technology in history".

Technology doesn't drive history, of course, but must wait for its time to come. Davis's account shows this moment as arriving with the repercussions of Beirut and Afghanistan, in the various actions of Basque nationalists, Columbian drug Lords and Peruvian Maoists. With



the end of the cold war there was a globalisation of car bombings that even saw the IRA targeting London's financial districts.

If the US had illusions of invincibility after the first Gulf War, it was disabused of this with the car bomb that blew a seven-story crater in the basement of the World Trade Centre in 1993. We can't help but recognise this as a portent of a time when cars would grow wings. That the US faced a chaotic array of enemies at this point was made clear by the different kind of blowback visited upon them by Gulf War veteran Timothy McVeigh.

Some seem to hold faith in the well-targeted strike against terrorist HQ as a solution to current problems. A look at the history of car bombing allows Davis to recognise a more complicated and "diffuse ecology of terror and resistance" nurtured by closer factors such as Saudi money and Pakistani intelligence. Hence the groups that continued emulating al Qaeda after September 11.

Davis's account was always going to lead us to contemporary Iraq, where car bombs have been used to drive out the UN, target police recruiting stations and foment civil war. The Americans withdraw to their green zones while average Iraqis are subject to crime, murder and insurgency. Davis ponders this as a future for us all, living in red zones, subject to surveillance, police checks and suspended civil liberties.

Davis's book shows how the history of a technology can be used as a focus and shorthand for exploring some of the key forces and events of an age. The downside of this is sometimes a lack of an adequate sense of context and motivating belief of the actors involved. Nevertheless, Davis clearly demonstrates that this is a technology deserving of its own history. As a marker of present progress and development it is a very grim signpost indeed.