

BE WATER!

Seven tactics that are winning Hong Kong’s democracy revolution.

Antony Dapiran

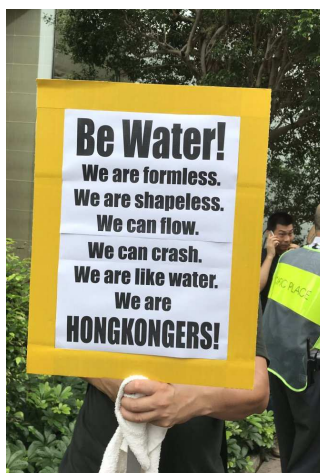
The strategies of Hong Kong protesters, honed through weekly clashes with police, offer a masterclass to activists worldwide or almost two months, a wave of anti-government protests have rocked Hong Kong. Initially sparked by a government proposal to introduce a law that would allow the extradition of criminal suspects to stand trial in mainland Chinese courts, the protests have morphed into a broader pro-democracy movement, demanding greater government accountability and universal suffrage. Protests have largely been driven by young activists, who have developed and adapted their strategies during weekly protests and clashes with police, offering a masterclass in protest for activists worldwide. Here are some of their key tactics.

No more occupying – “Be Water!”

The worldwide “occupy” movements following the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 served as the inspiration for Hong Kong’s previous mass act of civil disobedience – a series of protests known as “Occupy Central” or the “Umbrella Movement” – in 2014. These protests adopted the “occupation” logic of the prior movements, with protesters occupying the city’s main thoroughfares for 79 days in the hope that the disruption would force the government to the negotiating table. The government refused to budge, and the protests ended in

failure.

This time around, Hong Kong’s protesters are taking their inspiration from a source closer to home: local hero, kung-fu movie star Bruce Lee, who famously advised: “Be Water.”



Hong Kong’s young protesters are eschewing the fixed, immobile occupation strategies of the past, in favour of a highly mobile, agile style of protest. A rally may turn into a march; a march may begin in one direction and abruptly change to another direction; the focus of a particular protest action may only emerge in the course of the march itself. In recent protests, small sub-groups of protesters dispatched themselves to carry out targeted “wildcat” occupations of a government building, flooding the entrance lobbies, escalators and lifts. When the government declared the building closed and dismissed staff for the day, the protesters dispersed and moved on to their next target. As Bruce Lee said, “Water can flow,

or it can crash!”

Open-source protest

The current wave of protests in Hong Kong is leaderless. This is partly a response to the Hong Kong government’s aggressive prosecution of past protest leaders: Umbrella Movement figurehead Joshua Wong was only recently released from prison, while many other leaders including the initiators of the Occupy Central plan, Benny Tai and Chan Kin-man, remain behind bars. With no obvious leader, there is no one to imprison.

But the lack of a centralised leadership is also a result of the online, organic tactics. Protesters use online forums such as LIHKG – a kind of local, lo-fi version of Reddit where users comment and vote on posts – as well as Telegram chat groups (the larger among these have tens of thousands of members), where the poll function enables participants to vote on next steps:

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DISARMING TIMES

A quarterly journal of Pax Christi Australia. It aims to provide members and interested peacemakers with peace news and views both local and international. We endeavour in each edition to reflect the three-fold emphasis of Pax Christi which engages members in study, Non-violent action and prayer for peace, justice, human rights, development and inter-faith and inter-civilisation dialogue.

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should the protesters stay on or disperse? Protesters vote on the spot, and act accordingly.

Professor Francis Lee of the Chinese University of Hong Kong has called it an “open spruce “protest”. Volunteers with megaphones or walkie-talkies help to announce and coordinate, but they are not “leaders”. Protesters have also explained that this lack of leadership encourages everyone to get involved and contribute to the movement. In this way, the protesters are enacting the kind of participatory democracy they would like to see.

Airdrop The protesters’ use of Telegram is well-known, and so it was perhaps not a surprise that during the most intense early clashes between protesters and police, Telegram reported that it had been subject to a distributed denial of service attack originating from mainland China. Add on top of this the massive overload of mobile networks when tens of thousands of people are standing in the same small area trying to access their devices simultaneously, and communications can quickly become unreliable. In response, protesters have turned to alternative peer-to-peer technologies, in particular the “AirDrop” feature that every Apple phone is equipped with (AirDrop enables iPhone users to send images to each other over Bluetooth connection, without the need for a mobile connection).

Protesters have used AirDrop both to share messages with participants in the course of protests, and to spread the word among a broader community. Commuters on Hong Kong subway system may find themselves receiving unsolicited AirDrop messages with slogans promoting the protesters’ cause or advertising the next rally. Prior to protests, Telegram chat groups carry the reminder “Remember to have AirDrop switched on!” Towards the end of a recent protest, as the protesters were preparing to again “Be Water” and disperse together, my mobile phone suddenly began to ping with AirDrop requests carry-

ing the simple message: “Leave together at 7:00.”



Supply lines and sign language. The experiences of the Umbrella Movement and recent clashes with police have taught protesters what equipment they need at the front lines. To ensure new supplies can reach the front lines quickly, Hong Kong’s protesters have developed a unique system of hand signals, to send messages through the crowd about what equipment is required.

A sign is passed onwards through the crowd back to the supply depots where goods have been transported near to the protest site, and the requested items are then passed through the crowd along a human chain back to where they are needed. These human supply chains have stretched as far as a kilometre in length, and are an impressive sight to behold.

This sign language has become so iconic that on a recent “silver haired” rally of elderly Hong Kongers marching in support of the young generation, the elders were learning and practicing the youngsters hand signals in solidarity. Teaching the elders how to do the youngsters’ protest sign language. All the elders joining in.

Neutralising tear gas When police fired tear gas on protesters at the beginning of

Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement protests of 2014, it caused widespread outrage across the Hong Kong community and helped spark the 79-day occupation of the city. Fast-forward five years, and the deployment of tear gas on Hong Kong's streets has become all-too commonplace. Indeed, over the past weekend alone tear gas was fired by police in dense, residential neighbourhoods on both Saturday and Sunday, and on Sunday evening almost constantly over a period of some four hours. Part of the reason for the increased amounts of tear gas is that protesters have learned how to neutralise it.

Small mobile teams of "firefighters" wait at the rear of the front lines equipped with traffic cones. When a tear gas shell lands among the crowd, they race in to cover the shell with the traffic cone, creating a "chimney" that contains and funnels the smoke away. Another team member then moves in to pour water into the cone to douse the shell, putting it out. When a traffic cone is not available, water or wet towels are used to smother the tear gas shells, or a nimble protester wearing heat-proof

gloves will snatch up the shell and throw it, either back at police or to the side of the crowd out of harm's way.

Avoiding a stampede. One of the greatest risks of injury or death in a crowd arises from the dangers of a stampede. This threat is compounded by the urban geography of Hong Kong: recent protests have taken place on narrow, winding back streets in the old Sheung Wan neighbourhood, or on mazes of overhead crossings and walkways that are interlaced across Hong Kong. When police fire tear gas into tightly-packed crowds, or the rapid-response "Raptor" police teams launch one of their lightning baton charges, the risk of the crowd panicking – and a stampede forming – is acute. Aware of these risks, crowds of protesters chant "One, Two, One Two..." in unison as they retreat, and march in time to the count. This ensures the retreat is orderly and avoids what could otherwise become a deadly crush.

The Revolution will be crowdfunded. Hong Kong's activists wanted to win international attention for their cause, and saw the planned G20 summit of world leaders

to be held in Osaka at the end of June as an opportunity. Though unable to get their struggle onto the G20 conference room tables, they aimed for the next best thing: their breakfast tables. Activists took out a series of full-page advertisements in newspapers across the world to publicise their struggle. They crowdfunded the adverts with a campaign that had raised over £600,000 within a matter of hours. Volunteers prepared and proofed the text in multiple languages, booked the advertising space and delivered the artwork to newspapers across the world. In the days leading up to and during the G20 summit, striking full-page black and white advertisements reading "Stand with Hong Kong at G20" appeared in newspapers across the world, from the *New York Times* to *The Guardian*, *Le Monde* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *The Australian* and the *Asahi Shimbun*, the *Globe & Mail* and the *Seoul Daily*.

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THE AMAZON SYNOD: LISTENING FOR THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

Theodora Hawksley

The preparatory document for the forthcoming synod in Rome is a radical call for conversion that brings the voices of people living in a part of the world remote from us centre stage

The working document for October's Synod on the Amazon was released last week. Predictably, most English-language reporting focused on one tiny section – point 129 (b) – which raised the possibility of ordaining mature married men to the priesthood so that remote indigenous communities could celebrate the Eucharist. It is as though we glanced into the Amazon, and saw only our own reflection.

A longer look might have revealed the staggering challenge this document presents. It demands that we answer the call for conversion to a missionary Church made by Pope Francis in his opening exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, with structures that serve it,

Laudato Si's call for an ecological conversion and *Episcopalis Communio's* vision of a genuinely synodal Church. The question it confronts us with is not, "How can we save the rainforest?" or even "How can we get more priests in the Amazon?" but something far more radical: How can we hear the gospel of life, as it is proclaimed to us by the peoples of the Amazon? And how can we proclaim the gospel of life as the peoples of the Amazon need us to proclaim it? Answering these questions means seeing beyond our own preoccupations, and allowing the Amazon and its peoples to take centre stage, calling us to conversion.

The first and second sections of the document allow us to hear the voices of some of the 64,000 people consulted as part of a remarkable process of synodal listening. The list of sins is familiar: deforestation reaching levels of 15 to 20 per cent, extractivist industries leaving environmental devastation

and community breakdown in their wake, land grabs, human trafficking, drugs and despair. All this seems distant, present to us only in fragments: the gold of our wedding ring, the components of our smartphone. What can we do? Only small things, it seems at first – consume as carefully as we can, sign petitions to protest against some of the things that the Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro, is getting up to. But listen harder, and we can hear the voice of the peripheries announcing the gospel to us, stuck in our sin: the idolatry of money, "colonialism (dominion), an economicist-mercantilist mentality, consumerism, utilitarianism, individualism, technocracy, throw-away culture". These are deep-rooted heresies, as destructive of us as they are of the Amazon, and we are being called to a conversion that cannot be broken down into discrete actions: it is a journey towards a whole new way of seeing and interacting with God, one another

and creation.

This is why the Amazon matters. What is under threat is not just a vital lung of the planet, or groups of indigenous peoples, but “life as conceived of integrally”. This is the gospel of life for our times, now being preached by those on the peripheries to us in the centre. Indigenous ways of living, thinking and believing offer us “a benchmark for rebuilding a new paradigm of integral ecology,” and our response has to be a real metanoia, both concrete and spiritual. The document quotes Benedict XVI’s assertion that “the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.”

This radical call to conversion is addressed not just to individuals, but to the Church, which is

called to a “mutual listening to peoples and nature”, and a courageous response. The challenge is to see the Amazon not as a pastoral problem to be solved, but as a true locus theologicus, where the Spirit is speaking to the Church and inviting her to the graced and risky task of becoming incarnate in the Amazon, including through local forms of ministry and liturgy. There is much that militates against this kind of trusting and open dialogue with indigenous peoples: the document lists “petrified doctrines”, “insincere openness to the other, just like a corporatist attitude”, and “economic interests and a technocratic paradigm.”

In the face of these challenges, the question of priestly ministry is small potatoes. We are not being called to “be green”, but to re-

learn creatureliness, and to re-learn it from the most marginalised and disposable people of our world. This is a decisive moment: the Church has the opportunity to “differentiate itself clearly from the new colonising powers” and “present Christ in all his liberating and humanizing power” not only to the Amazon but to the whole of creation. Will we manage it?

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region takes place from 6 to 27 October 2019 on the theme “Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology”. *Theodora Hawksley is a sister of the Congregation of Jesus. She is a theologian specialising in peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching.*

UPDATE ON SYRIA, 1st August 2019

David Macilwain

The reporting of events in Syria by our mainstream media has become so deficient and so misleading, that the truth as experienced by Syrians on the ground and reported in non-Western media may appear to be from a different country. Such disinformation and “regime change” propaganda is hardly new, and has driven the violent war on Syria since the very beginning in 2011, but the need to present the Syrian point of view has never been greater. Despite some talk of the “need to accept that Assad has won”, a recent intensification of opposition propaganda accompanied by calls for intervention over the situation in Idlib shows that Syria’s enemies have not yet given up their campaign and would sooner see the conflict continue than admit defeat.

Most worryingly, the new propaganda offensive which began at the end of April has recently been given even greater credibility by statements from the UNHRC and Save the Children. That these most trusted organisations now effectively support the ongoing violent terrorist insurgency makes it harder than ever to persuade Western audiences of the truth – but increasingly urgent.

Two months ago the UK’s former ambassador to Syria Peter Ford, concerned about the completely false stories being told about the Syrian Army’s fight against terrorist groups in their “last redoubt” of Idlib, wrote a detailed update on the true situation. It is well worth searching out, on “squarespace.com” from June 4th, but I will attempt to summarise it here with some additions of my own.

Having visited Syria last year, including the suburb of Douma only weeks after it was liberated, I have some familiarity and empathy with Syrians, as well as enormous respect for their tenacity and bravery during eight long years of war. This respect also extends to the Syrian Arab Army and its allies, and the enormous efforts made by the Syrian and Russian governments to negotiate ceasefire, amnesty and reconciliation agreements. This work has proceeded steadily in the face of disruptive and antagonistic actions from foreign governments and aid agencies. Such agreements could never have been reached without underlying support and good faith from the community and from committed individuals; we can never forget the

leading role that Mother Agnes Mariam played in this action and her faith that it was possible to negotiate even with violent extremists.

It was Mother Agnes’s words during her visit to Australia in June 2013 that came back to me recently. Her experience with the UN in Geneva as well as the evident cooperation of the UN with armed opposition groups in refugee camps showed that even such NGOs can be highly partisan. Today’s declaration condemning “Russian attacks on hospitals” in Idlib from the UN head of humanitarian affairs Mark Lowcock to the Security Council is a striking example of such official mendacity in the service of the NATO aggressors. Its condemnation in unusually plain language by Russia’s representative Vassily Nebenzia as *a lie*, shows just how insulted and slandered Russia finds this accusation, as it risks its men and resources to fight the West’s “rebel forces”.

So what is the true situation in Syria now, west of the Euphrates?

The campaign to liberate Eastern Ghouta that culminated in Douma in April last year left two areas of Western Syria still under the control of armed militant groups.

control of armed militant groups. The most violent and resistant of these had been concentrated in Idlib province next to the Turkish border in the North West, as fighters who refused to agree to government peace deals in other areas were relocated there. The UN, aid groups and Western media however portrayed these violent Islamist militants and their families as “rebels” and refugees from “the Syrian Regime” and its Russian ally, and warned of a “humanitarian disaster” if the Syrian government pushed to regain control of Idlib.

Given the problem of liberating the area from its estimated 50,000 well-armed militants, who shared Al Qaeda’s ideology and Islamic State’s barbarism, a temporary de-confliction zone around the province was agreed between Russian and Turkish militaries in September 2018, with a 15km wide boundary to be demilitarised. In the meantime the Syrian Army and Russian military police had progressively regained control of Southern Syria up to the Jordanian border and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. The Western media mostly ignored this successful peace-making operation, or misrepresented it.

In one of the most indicative acts of the whole eight-year war, hundreds of so-called “Syrian civil defence volunteers” or White Helmets were evacuated over the Israeli border in a joint UN-Israeli operation, when the Syrian Army offensive had trapped them and their jihadist friends in the Golan Heights. Israel has long been supporting Islamist extremists including Al Qaeda and IS in this area with military and logistical assistance including airstrikes against Syrian army positions. And the support is mutual; for all their propaganda messaging and Islamic fervour, neither Islamic State nor any other extremist group in Syria has ever criticised Israel for its oppression of their Palestinian Arab brothers, nor expressed a desire to liberate the holy city – Al Quds – from its Zionist occupiers.

This particular episode – and the subsequent resettlement of White Helmet members in Canada and the

UK – symbolises the division between the friends and enemies of Syria and the near-irreconcilable division between their “media narratives”. To the West the White Helmets symbolise the “humanitarian intervention” effort and the focus on refugees “fleeing Syrian and Russian bombing, but for Syrians and Russians, Iranians and their allies, the White Helmets are the fake façade of a violent insurgency and the West’s principal propaganda weapon. Only one of these faces of the White Helmets can be true, and in the end must be beyond dispute; only more lies can sustain the false image of these UK and US funded mercenaries, whose purpose is both to assist their armed jihadist partners and to stage and film “rescues” for Western government propaganda.

In recent months the White Helmets have been exposed not just for their fabricated videos, using bodies from morgues and kidnapped children, but for far worse crimes including torture and organ harvesting. Most significantly perhaps, the White Helmets criminal cooperation with the violent Salafist group occupying Douma, Jaish al Islam, was fully exposed as having staged the “Chemical Weapon attack” that formed the pretext for the joint US-UK-French missile attack of April 15th last year. While the chemical attack was long known to have been a fabrication outside the Western media echo-chamber, the fraud was verified following the leaking of a suppressed OPCW investigation in May, which determined that the Chlorine gas bottles allegedly dropped on an apartment block from a Syrian army helicopter and responsible for 35 deaths there could not have fallen from the sky as claimed. The unpalatable but unavoidable conclusion was that these unfortunate victims, mostly women and children, were in fact victims of the White Helmets’ video production, captives apparently tortured and gassed on behalf of their sponsors in Whitehall and Washington.

Countless thousands of innocent people have suffered similar, and worse fates at the hands of

their brutal captors, including being killed to serve as film extras as happened six years ago for the “Sarin attack” on Ghouta. Yet not only are these atrocities unknown to Western audiences, it is the Syrian government and army that stands accused of similar war crimes, along with its faithful allies from Hezbollah and Russia. Events of the last three months around Idlib illustrate this total disconnect between reality and Western media stories.

Far from launching a ruthless campaign of bombing on civilian targets and towns in the “rebel” occupied area of Idlib, almost all the initial military actions of the Syrian army and Russian air-force have been in response to attacks by armed militants on villages outside the Idlib enclave. The terrorist groups have launched numerous such attacks, including particularly on some Christian villages in Latakia province, and using Grad missiles and anti-tank weaponry newly brought over the border from Turkey. We don’t see the children killed in these vicious sectarian attacks, nor their weeping mothers, nor the testimony of the Syrian soldiers who die trying to protect their communities.

What we see instead bears little relation to this scene of personal pain and bravery and resistance. Dozens of White Helmets “rescuers” wearing spotless new jerseys scuffle in a pile of rubble and uncover yet another child, previously buried, and rush it to a new White Helmets ambulance. Some men stand around, looking like extras. We are told that a market, or school, or hospital has been bombed, “killing women and children” though we rarely see them. And it is true that schools and hospitals are being bombed, because this is where the White Helmets and their Al Qaeda mates make their bases; we never see them, in the act of killing or dying, though that is what they do.

No better illustration of this subterfuge – and war crime – of using a hospital as a military base, was than in Douma, where Jaish al Islam had dug a massive tunnel system deep beneath Douma hospital – the scene of the “chemical attack” last

year. The tunnels extended for kilometres to other suburbs of Damascus, and were reinforced with pre-formed steel sections, wide enough for armed vehicles and supplied with power and communications. The involvement of foreign intelligence agencies and special forces in supporting this underworld was revealed when Douma's besiegers were finally evacuated to Idlib.

It is the tragedy, and crime

of the war on Syria, that despite everything thrown at the people by the most powerful and dirtiest countries in the world they have not only survived – “won” if you like – but become stronger and more determined and more united. But it is this independence and strength that is the one thing Syria's enemies cannot tolerate. They didn't turn Syria into a battleground out of care for the people, or even to steal Syria's oil and gas, but

because it remained the block to the Empire's plans to subdue and occupy the whole region, detailed in the Brookings Institute paper “Which Path to Persia”.

Current developments give us little faith that anything can stand in the way of the “Rogue States”.

David Macilwain is an independent observer and writer with a special interest in Syria, Iran and Russia.

EARTH @ PEACE CONFERENCE

Reflections by Danity Laukon and Sharon Ading from the Marshall Islands

The two day conference provided us with useful insights to current global issues and possible sustainable solutions toward a just and peaceful world. Firstly, members that joined the conference, especially panelists in each of the sessions, shared diverse views on the complexities of a just and ecologically sustainable peace. This enabled us to see, think and understand through different lenses and different approachable solutions toward global issues. But more importantly, each views provided us with ways to think about our own student movement.

For Sharon and myself, we come from the Marshall Islands, a matrilineal society that is threatened by its' nuclear legacy and even more so by climate change. Our mere observations and contributions at the conference, as student activists for a nuclear free and independent Pacific, we feel there is an ongoing need for our generation to stay educated on global issues. More importantly, that we thrive to find practical solutions to influence change, both on the ground and policy level. We recognize we cannot do this alone. We need the support from our elders who has more knowledge, practical experiences and resources.

Sharon and I reflected about Indigenous agricultures and ways of knowing. The inspiring discussion by Bruce Pascoe, on *Dark Emu: Australian Indigenous Agricultural Perspectives for a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace*, really is a critical reminder for us and

the world to rethink ways of doing agriculture. Growing up in the Marshall Islands, we've heard great stories about ways in which the Marshallese Indigenous people prepared and preserved their food during the dry and wet seasons. Unfortunately, these agricultural practices and many others are slowly disappearing due to modern civilization. Modernization and productions are useful in our fast paced daily lives, however, such are a major contribution to global emission. Therefore, we hope to explore and integrate more Indigenous ways of knowing into existing frameworks.

Few concepts that we connected well with were the “*Innate Wisdom – Peace on/in/with Earth*” as discussed by Norban Hable and the notion of *wonder and awe* by Heather Eaton. Mr. Hable suggested that innate wisdom is really understanding that all beings on earth are connected with nature. Heather suggested everything is interconnected and that there is wonder and awe all around us. Coming from a Marshallese culture that values relationship we thought this was interesting because we learned earlier on that our ancestors were physically and spiritually connected to life on land, ocean, and air more than we do so today. As told by our elders, when life on land is being affected directly by climate change it is hard to discern the effects it has on the ocean and air. The nuclear legacy, like climate change, is a complex issue that doesn't discriminate either. The nuclear dome in the Marshall Islands

is a problem to mother earth, nonetheless.

Heather, then, suggested that act of peace should be inclusive of gender, ecology and culture. In our upcoming student events we will incorporate more discussions around nuclear and gender. Often time we focus only on the environmental and cultural aspects of things.

More importantly, we feel it is important for us to recognize that trauma is intergenerational due to many factors especially that of colonization. While we learned that everything is connected as it should, we also know that colonization divides and separates. It is an western worldview embedded in many Pacific Islands States cultures including the Marshall Islands. In the Marshall Islands, people especially those in urban areas, are more westernized due to the US influence. There is a tendency to blame ourselves for the way things are. At the conference, we learn that although there is so much abused power in the world, faith and compassion could fuel our souls to move forward with the work we do. We aspire to work within our own cultural group, as well as with our Pacific peers and colleagues, on the importance of sustaining our identity. We need to remind that it is not and was never our fault that many of our ways of knowing are not practiced and taught to next generations as much as it should.

In addition to impacts of colonialism that we learned from the

conference are the disturbing injustices done toward people who are in asylum in Nauru and Manus Island. This is our first time learning that there are detainees in other places outside of Nauru. Our thoughts and prayers are with these people and their families. We hope to stay updated on the call for Australian government to resettle families from detained spaces in Nauru and Manus Island.

Moreover, we were humbled to have met and heard wonderful stories from people we connected with at the conference. We met and managed to stay connected with Kanchana Weerakoon from Sri Lanka who's work focuses on educating communities on climate change through bike journeys. We plan to collaborate in the future and also connect her to other existing youth climate change movements in the Pacific.

We also worked with our Group B facilitator Dr. Daryl Le Cornu regarding education based and nuclear disarmament text. This is

helpful because the Marshall Islands is currently working on integrating nuclear history into its school curriculums for the first time. On another note, we managed to agree on integrating climate change and nuclear disarmaments in school curriculums as part of our group work outcome statement.

Lastly, in a conference where we felt humbled to be a part of, we also noticed that we were the only two youngest members and perhaps the only Pacific Islanders including our brother from West Papua. It would be great to see more youth, activists/advocates, and scholars from the Pacific Island States in these kinds of events because they can also contribute, learn, be inspired, and do more to spread the word. Does Pax Christi along with the other groups sponsoring this conference wish to have an ongoing relationship with MISA to help provide the resources and opportunities for youth, activists/advocates, and scholars from the Pacific Island States to participate in these kinds of events in the future

and other projects to build on the themes of the Conference?

A special thanks to our friends from the Pacific Fellowship who supported us through the process of our *My Fish is Your Fish* project. The impact we made would not have been as high if it weren't for their generous contribution. We also thank the coordinators of the event for the opportunity to share our documentary video, *My Fish is Your Fish*. Many thanks to those at the conference that reached out and provided ideas on how to spread our campaign further.

After attending the conference, and with great support from the Pacific Fellowship, we felt more compelled to continue advocating for a nuclear free world especially now that the world is experiencing climate change impacts. Sharon strongly feels that ongoing dialogue is key to inform our peers on these issues. We will do so while continuing to put pressures on our leaders to ban nuclear weapons.

Many thanks and best wishes to all.

MAINTAINING HUMAN CONTROL.

Why we must ban lethal autonomous weapons systems

Matilda Byrne,

With new technology comes great progress and great benefit. However, certain modern technologies are challenging humanity's morality, ethics, legal principles, and global security. Lethal autonomous weapons systems, or 'killer robots', are currently being developed and pose concerns in all these areas. These weapons would utilise artificial intelligence (AI) so that no human would need to control, supervise, verify, or oversee its selection of targets and use of lethal force.

Delegating the decision to take human life to machines is an affront to human dignity. Killer robots are not moral or conscious agents and cannot appreciate the value of human life. Herein lies the incompatibility with human rights and the fundamental notions of human dignity and right to life.

If this morality argument isn't already compelling, these weapons

also present unique, unprecedented challenges to international humanitarian law (IHL). Killer Robots cannot comply with the core principles of distinction, proportionality and accountability that underpin IHL. Technological capability is not able to properly distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, and even if it could, the judgement required to assess if a particular use of lethal force is appropriate is an innately human evaluation. The contextual understanding, and variation of circumstances encountered in conflict cannot be foreseen, let alone programmed into a machine.

Accountability is one of the biggest issues associated with these weapons systems. It is unsatisfactory to hold a robot itself responsible for misapplications of lethal force. However, given the explainability gap of

these technologies a user has no way to predict and subsequently prevent harm, so also cannot be held legally accountable. Moreover, it is also problematic to place accountability on manufacturers, coders or developers.

The weapons also carry risks for international security. For example, lethal autonomous weapons would lower the threshold for war by further removing personnel from the battlefield. Not needing to consider consequences of putting 'boots on the ground' encourages otherwise avoided confrontations or imperialistic interventions. Experts have also warned we may see a new-age arms race.

Often the argument posed in favour of these weapons is that they will be quicker to process, don't get tired nor need rest, and aren't subject to human emotions.

to human emotions. However, in conflict it is human restraint, exercised because of emotion that saves lives, and fast paced weapons will only accelerate war.

The ramifications for the technology sector are also far-reaching. Researchers fear that the stigmatisation of AI will have a negative impact on applications for social good. The threat of repurposing of technologies is also a huge dilemma for workers who feel unable to create solutions to certain issues, due to concerns that the same technology might be later used for lethal autonomous weapons.

A ban delineates what is acceptable and what is not. Establishing this line means workers can develop new technologies without fear of dual-use, and with a clear understanding of what is within the boundaries of law. In the same vein, it gives clarity to manufacturers, governments, defence departments, and all those in the chain of command.

Stopping Killer Robots

The international community has an urgent need to establish legal clarity around lethal autonomous weapons. 29 countries have already called for a ban to be negotiated, with Jordan being the most recent addition. The Non-Aligned Movement of 120 countries has also declared its support.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots (The Campaign) is urging governments to support a ban on killer robots in order to address the concerns raised by these weapons. The Campaign is a global coalition of 113 NGOs in 57 countries, including Australia from diverse sectors of civil society.

The Campaign is a constant voice at the talks held at the meetings on lethal autonomous weapons held at the United Nations' Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW). The CCW has now held eight dedicated

meetings on the issue, the most recent of which took place on 21-22 August 2019.

The result of this meeting was very disappointing. The outcome was a paper to outline the way forward, but it undid work achieved in meetings in March and the recommendations formed were diluted and convoluted. It is a far cry from the bold and decisive action needed to adequately address this issue.

Regrettably, Australia's position is as equally unambitious as the international proceedings. The government stance is that it is premature to support a ban. During negotiations, The Australian delegation asserted that work in 2020 and 2021 should only be for building shared understandings and compiling existing IHL. Australia only considers the development of a possible framework appropriate if it is deemed necessary at the end of the next two years of CCW talks.

Furthermore, Australia has given \$9 million in funding for a research project on imbedding ethics into killer robots. Leading experts world-wide argue this is a futile endeavour and technologically impossible. Notwithstanding technological limitations, it could never provide solutions to all the concerns associated with these weapons. The Australian government also sponsored a flagship Defence Cooperative Research Centre called Trusted Autonomous Systems. If we are developing and using autonomy in our defence forces it is even more important that we take a strong stance in differentiating what is acceptable, and what crosses moral and legal lines.

Australia's Department of Defence organised a summit in August to discuss issues around AI, and this, in principle, is a worthwhile exercise. Subsequently the department announced that a clear position on AI ethics in military uses will be released

by the end of 2020. This, however, does not stop Australia from supporting a ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems while other aspects of AI in military applications continue to be discussed. A defence spokesperson said, 'Australia is an active participant in ensuring that all autonomous weapons have appropriate ethical oversight'. For this to really be true, we would need to rule out developing killer robots and support a ban.

The Campaign in Australia

The Campaign established a branch in Australia in January of this year. It has started to raise the profile of this issue amongst academia, the tech sector, students and peace networks. Since The Campaign has been launched here, it has been able to connect with Pax Christi Australia and took part in the national conference, as well as that of Independent Peaceful Australia Network.

Earlier this year, The Campaign held a public seminar in conjunction with University of New South Wales Grand Challenges. Following the recent CCW meeting it held a nation-wide multidisciplinary roundtable to review international and domestic progress and discuss growing the campaign in Australia. We have an upcoming event planned with Responsible AI Melbourne with details to be announced soon.

To find out more about our work, upcoming events, sign up to our mailing list and take action through our current petition and letter writing tool visit: safeground.org.au/what-we-do/campaign-to-stop-killer-robots. You can find us on Facebook and Twitter at 'Campaign to Stop Killer Robots Australia'. The global campaign has many other resources and is found at stopkillerrobots.org.au

Matilda Byrne is National Coordinator, Campaign to Stop Killer Robots (Australia) and Secretary – SafeGround Inc.

Editor's Note

I was hoping to include an article from a Pax Christi scholarship holder from West Papua who attended Earth@Peace. He could not send it as Indonesia has cut off the internet in West Papua.

AUSTRALIA AT THE CROSSROADS, TIME FOR AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY

IPAN Conference, Darwin, August 2019, Catriona Devlin & Rita Camilleri

Why Darwin? Australia has 2,500 American marines stationed there, “in constant readiness” (although invisible). Darwin is also the site of military hardware which makes the NT a target in the event of armed conflict. In 2011 there was no parliamentary debate prior to the 25 year “agreement” to host this US initiative. Nor was there any consultation with the local Larakia first people. Environmental damage by chemicals and infrastructure costs are borne by the host country.

Among the speakers was Prof **Lisa Natavidad** from Guahan (Guam) an island the size of Adelaide which is a US “unincorporated territory” home to an American military base (one of 800 around the world) where the “Occupiers” never consult with the locals whose youth are loudly protesting its presence right now. The Philippines and Japan (Okinawa) also host US military base. The promise of jobs in all cases was never fulfilled.

Henk Rumbawes from West Papua pointed to the failure of Australia to address the rights of West Papuans.

Jordan Steele-John, a WA Greens Senator for “peace, disarmament and veteran affairs” told us that war is the result of political failure and named the greatest danger in the Asia Pacific region to be climate change. This was echoed by other speakers who also saw this as THE challenge, not war, as we have no enemies.

There was also a strong presence of unionists in support of peace, who are linked with other unions around the globe. Recently Italian (Genoa) and French (Le Havre) maritime workers refused to load arms destined for Saudi Arabia to be used against the people of Yemen.

Dr Margaret Beavis from the Medical Association for the Prevention of War focused on the massive financial cost in preparation for, and the devastating humanitarian consequences of war (nuclear in particular) including PTSD, domestic violence and the impact on women.

Dr Sue Wareham launched “Choosing Humanity” an ICAN publication which strongly recommends Australia sign the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (which so far 122 countries have signed and 24 ratified) This would be in our own interest and would be more in step with our Pacific neighbours. Copies available.

Finally, the “don’t buy into war” campaign rejects the Australian military budget’s \$200bn, the \$3.8bn loan fund for Australian arms exports to put Australia into the top ten weapons exporters globally.

Speakers reminded the ninety plus who attended that Australia is in the growth centre of the world. It has never been comfortable in its own skin. The real threats are existential, climate change and nuclear war. We need also to confront cyber and other disruptive technologies, resource depletion, environmental degradation, food, energy and health security. The threat to our future comes not from China but from neglect of these issues. The focus must be human security not state security. For all this we need genuine democracy at our core. In case of war, Australian forces would be under US command (under the euphemism “interoperability”) and we would be dragged into a war with all of its disastrous repercussions.

On the second day of the conference we peacefully protested against the resident US marines in a rally held at the Robertson Barracks.

The ABC gave it good coverage that evening on local television.

Conference resolutions following workshops included the following:

Free Julian Assange

This 2019 National Conference of Independent and Peaceful Australia Network expresses its solidarity with Julian Assange, its resolute objection to his [imprisonment] in a high security gaol in UK, and its complete opposition to his extradition to the USA, for exposing the war-crimes of that country and others to the world.

No Australian involvement in US war on Iran

This IPAN conference urges the Australian government to reject pressures from the USA to send our ships to the Straits of Hormuz, adding to the pressures by the USA government to isolate Iran and destroy its economy.

Export peace not weapons

This 2019 IPAN conference in Darwin urges Australia to abandon plans to be a major weapons exporter, and instead promote Australia joining with New Zealand in Disarmament and Peace-making together with all geographical regional neighbours.

IPAN continues to build links with peoples and organisations in the Asia-Pacific campaigning for peace. It continues to provide information, analysis, coordination and assistance for affiliates, NGOs, unions, churches and community groups to campaign for peace and against foreign military bases and troops in the region.

*IPAN is planning rallies nationwide on the International Day of Peace September 21: the slogans in Victoria: **No War on Iran and No Australian Support for US Wars** (1pm Federation Square)*

WHY ARE WE VIOLENT?

Pax Christi National Conference 2019 by Caesar D’Mello

Pax Christi Australia’s biennial organises a Conference provides a valuable opportunity for members and supporters to consider in depth aspects of peace and justice today. This year the Conference delved into an underlying question: **“Why are we violent?”** at the gathering in Kildara, Melbourne, in August 2019.

“Why are we violent?” merits repeated airing given the ubiquity of human violence. The keynote presentation *“Exposing Violence: Steps on the Road to Peace”* and workshops explored this with the assistance of Sister Susan Connelly, a Religious of St Joseph, who led us with clarity and expertise. Her doctorate at the Australian Catholic University probed “the relationship between Australia and Timor Leste between 1941 – 1999 in light of Rene Girard’s Mimetetic Theory”. Sr. Susan had spent twenty years in Timor Leste working closely with the local people.

Rene Girard’s thinking is not mainstreamed enough to draw more people to his profound insights. Nevertheless, Girard (1923-2015) has been writing and refining his thinking for over five decades, increasingly coming to the attention of a growing cohort of serious scholars, writers and analysts who find his approach illuminating in understanding human violence.

Mimetetic Behaviour Girard’s “Christian Anthropology” begins with the foundational role of mimetic behaviour - imitating or learning from the other. The booing of Adam Goodes at the MCG for instance, could be seen as a form of imitation among the crowds. Mimetetic behaviour is about desiring, and learning to desire what the other has. Advertising and fashion industries that benefit from their knowledge of how humans behave and relate, exist to create desire. Literature and cinema mirroring human behaviour illustrate the role of desire in conflict. Desire is natural. Imitative desire, however, becomes destructive when individuals, groups, communities and nations want to possess the same object but without wishing to share it, resulting

in rivalry, re-



sentment, envy, conflict and violence.

Crisis Rivalries and natural disasters unsettle societies creating a crisis of anguish, hostility, fear and disunity in the community which we want to be rid of. Applying Girard’s framework, the Conference’s *“Abandoning the Stranger at the Gate”* working group named the unprecedented movement of people impacted by colonisation, war, famine, climate change and other factors as a modern crisis. An office or workplace with staff in conflict is a crisis on a smaller scale. History documents at length the collapse of systems and even intra-group violence when major crises

ing, the Conference working group on *“The Violence We Do to Our Planet”* identified greed and entrenched self-interest as hurting the planet. When people seek for someone to be held responsible for upheaval in their midst, the well known, familiar process of *scapegoating* begins. “All against one” is better than “all against all”. The High Priest Caiaphas, for instance, demonstrates this dramatically when he puts to his Council deliberating on how to deal with the Jesus challenge: “Don’t you know it is better for one person to die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed?” (John 11: 50)

Criteria for the Scapegoat The scapegoat is often untypical of or different from the group, a newcomer, who may not be “like the rest of us”. A person or group that is weak and without allies satisfies the community looking for an answer. The working group on *“The Curse of Inequality and Self-interest”* referenced marginalised sections of society who were scapegoated for their own disadvantage by uncaring authorities. Perhaps the scapegoat is already suspect in the eyes of the dominant group, but is unlikely to be responsible for the total



crisis. The “*Appeal of Militarism to Resolve Conflict and Evoke a Sense of Security*” working group saw China, painted

erupt. A dysfunctional state of affairs – ‘all against all’ – threatens the survival of the group or society.

Crime When faced with a crisis that engulfs all, the instinctive reaction is to seek an explanation. An unwholesome act, an evil, a crime is believed to have brought this on. Analysing the crisis of global warm-

authoritarian and intent on domination and aggression (while military interventions by the US and allies are overlooked), as scapegoated in our times. A scapegoat may even be totally blameless of the attributed crime but, being incapable of self-defence, is easier to dispose of without causing much unease. Witness “K” and his

lawyer Bernard Collaery are being scapegoated for exposing a crime officially endorsed, planned and executed by instruments of the State. Asylum seekers and refugees have become easy prey for scapegoating. Christ was an innocent victim in a troubled society seeking to "explain it all" by pointing to a "culprit". The death, expulsion or turning the back on scapegoats is less likely to bring about revenge or violence, while giving the community a sense of release.

Violence We know that dominant groups sideline the scapegoat through connivance, collusion, and even acting with legitimacy within the social, belief or legal systems and mores of the day. Participants in the Conference's "Our Unfinished Response to Indigenous Australians" working group recreated a horrific picture of violence done to the First Peoples with the declaration of *terra nullius*, massacres with impunity, stolen generations, and the violence of European organisation that ignored indigenous spirituality. Contemporary policies still disadvantage indigenous people today. Action against a common enemy brings about some harmony and a sense of relief. As Sr Susan ex-

plained: *"The scapegoat was sacrificed, removed from the community by killing or expulsion. Scapegoating a victim was therefore a way of using violence to quell violence. Religion, culture and myth grew out of bringing groups to peace and harmony through scapegoating...Myths were the narratives of scapegoating events, but told from the perspective of the scapegoaters. All myths place the blame for crises on the victim"*.

Girard and the Gospels

The unique insight of Girard's reading of the Jewish and Christian scriptures is to help turn upside down the structure of a myth. Against the usual pattern, the responsibility for the violence is placed on the perpetrators. Jesus says to those who demanded that a woman caught in adultery be killed in accordance with the "Law", "if any of you have never sinned, then go ahead and throw the first stone at her". (John 8: 7). The powers that be of his time acting in concert with an aroused people are held responsible for the death of Christ, a blameless victim. Scapegoating exists in our times, but we can see and know that it is a lie, even if those in legal, moral and social authority assert to the contrary.

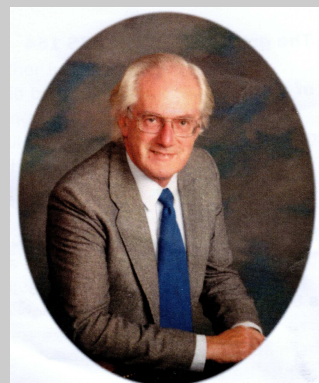
To conclude, a single Confer-

ence cannot do justice to the full gamut of the depth, nuances and the multiple ways Girard's thinking can be employed to penetrate the roots of our multi-faceted human violence. Much less can a single article like this one provide complete comprehension. Even if it may not explain every permutation and combination the human character is capable of, Girardian thinking still provides a wide-ranging sweep of ideas and concepts to help us intuit kaleidoscopic human violence, and hence lends itself to rewarding specialist study and investigation. For the participants, however, the Conference opened a window on the richness of a method to be further examined in relation to their specific concerns. "Identifying features of scapegoating in current world situations assists in interpreting events as they happen", said Sr Susan. This was appropriate for Pax Christi, an international peace movement, one of whose focal areas is the Pope Francis-inspired "Catholic Nonviolence Initiative". In the words of Sr Susan, "Girard provides a valuable tool to challenge us to deeper reflection on how to respond as Christians".

Alan Hardie 1929-2019

The **Why we are violent?** Conference saw Alan in our midst for the last time. His interventions during the discussions were passionate, but this was the Alan we always knew.

Always exercised by the stubborn reality of violence and injustice in our times, he suffered with people reeling from the destructiveness of power held in the hands of a minority. Whether the Chernobyl crisis in 1987, the excesses of the Marcos era in the Philippines in the 70s and 80s, or the struggle of Timore Leste for self-determination in the 80s and 90s, he stood for the victims and spoke with conviction. As a Minister of the Uniting Church, he enabled his congregations to link their faith with the environment around them locally, nationally and globally. He was a strong advocate of ecumenism in the spirit of the "The Basis of Union" of 1977, the founding document of the Uniting Church in Australia. He served for eight years as Victorian Secretary for World Christian Action, a Commission of the then Australian Council of Churches, undertaking justice education and promoting the Christmas Bowl for Third World churches and communities in the state of Victoria. He was also involved with concerns of the local community, such as better public transport. One association threading many years of his life was that with the Pax Christi movement which he, with his wife Rachel, cherished deeply and supported to the best of his ability.



We will remember his active engagement with the issues of the Conference, and his heartfelt appreciation of the gathering which he attended despite his very limited mobility. At the end of the second day, he went home for the night. The next morning he suffered a massive fatal heart attack. His advocacy for a better and non-violent world remained with him till the very end. May he rest in peace and rise in glory. Caesar D'Mello

NOTICE BOARD

NEW SOUTH WALES

Pax Christi Meetings

We normally meet on the First Monday of each month at 6.00pm for shared meal that members bring and the meeting follows at 6.30 pm.

**Contact: Claude Mostowik
(02) 9550 3845 or 0411 450 953**

The venue: 209A Edgeware Road, Enmore.

QUEENSLAND

Pax Christi Meetings

Pax Christi Queensland

Contact:

Pancras Jordan OP 0415 461 620

pancrasjordan@gmail.com

International Day Of Peace

Saturday 21st September.

1 pm IPAN RALLY

Federation Square, Melbourne

No War on Iran -

No Australian support for US wars

Wave Goodbye to Dinosaurs

2-4 pm @ Kildara,

41 Stanhope Street Malvern

Pace e Bene invites you to a special screening of the story of the Catholic & Protestant Women's Peace movement in N. Ireland

Global Climate Strike September 20

People around the world standing up to confront the climate crisis when our politicians won't.

Three days before the UN Emergency Climate Summit, school students invite us to join them for our biggest ever global #ClimateStrike.

Melbourne

Treasury Gardens 14:00-16:00

Sydney

The Domain, 12:00-14:00

Brisbane

Queens Gardens, 13:00-16:00

Canberra

Glebe Park City 12:00-14:00

Pax Christi Film Evening

SLAM

is an Australian feature film written and directed by Partho Sen-Gupta.

A young Muslim activist and slam poet goes missing

in this tense Sydney-set mystery with a sharp perspective on Islamophobia

**Sunday 10th November,
Cinema Nova, Carlton.**

VICTORIA

October Agape

Sunday 20 October 2019

Shared meal 1 p.m. Meeting at 2 p.m. at Kildara,

39 Stanhope Street Malvern

ABORIGINAL THEOLOGY

AND ANTHROPOLOGY

and Just Ecological and

Sustainable Peace

Naomi Wolfe

Faculty of Education and Arts,
Australian Catholic University

November Agape & Annual Meeting

Sunday 17 November 2019

Shared meal 1 p.m. Meeting at 1.45 p.m. at Kildara,

39 Stanhope Street Malvern

THE AMAZON

The political ecological, indigenous and community background to

THE AMAZON SYNIOD AND ITS

OUTCOME.

Fr. Peter Woodruff

Fr. Peter is a Columban Priest who has worked for many years in Peru

I/We wish to apply for or renew membership of the International Christian Peace Movement - Pax Christi Australia.

(Membership is from January to December)

(Please tick box if you wish to receive your copy of **Disarming Times** by e-mail)

New South Wales Members please return your membership application/membership renewal to PO Box A 681 Sydney South 1235 NSW

All others: please return your membership application/membership renewal to P.O. Box 31 Carlton Sth Vic. 3053

Name..... Address.....

.....P'code.....Phone.....

Email..... Mobile.....

ENCLOSED \$..... (Single \$35; Low income \$20; Family \$45)