

DISARMING Pax Christi TIMES

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THE PANDEMIC IS A PORTAL'

Arundhati Roy:

April 3, 2020 – Who can use the term “gone viral” now without shuddering a little? Who can look at anything any more — a door handle, a cardboard carton, a bag of vegetables — without imagining it swarming with those unseeable, undead, unliving blobs dotted with suction pads waiting to fasten themselves on to our lungs?

The number of cases worldwide this week crept over a million. More than 50,000 people have died already. Projections suggest that number will swell to hundreds of thousands, perhaps more. The virus has moved freely along the pathways of trade and international capital, and the terrible illness it has brought in its wake has locked humans down in their countries, their cities and their homes.

But unlike the flow of capital, this virus seeks proliferation, not profit, and has, therefore, reversed the direction of the flow. It has mocked immigration controls, biometrics, digital surveillance and every other kind of data analytics, and struck hardest — thus far — in the richest, most powerful nations of the world, bringing the engine of capitalism to a juddering halt. The tragedy is the wreckage of a train that has been careening down the track for years

And what of my country, my poor-rich country, India, suspended somewhere between feudalism and religious fundamentalism, caste and capitalism, ruled by far-



right Hindu nationalists?

In December, while China was fighting the outbreak of the virus in Wuhan, the government of India was dealing with a mass uprising by hundreds of thousands of its citizens protesting against the brazenly discriminatory anti-Muslim citizenship law it had just passed in parliament.

The first case of Covid-19 was reported in India on January 30, only days after the honourable chief guest of our Republic Day Parade, Amazon forest-eater and Covid-denier Jair Bolsonaro, had left Delhi. But there was too much to do in February for the virus to be accommodated in the ruling party's timetable. There were the Delhi Assembly elections that the Bharatiya Janata Party was slated to lose unless it upped its game, which it did, unleashing a vicious, no-holds-barred Hindu nationalist campaign, replete with threats of physical violence and the shooting of “traitors”.

It lost anyway. So then there was punishment to be meted out to

Delhi's Muslims, who were blamed for the humiliation. Armed mobs of Hindu vigilantes, backed by the police, attacked Muslims in the working-class neighbourhoods of north-east Delhi. Houses, shops, mosques and schools were burnt. Muslims who had been expecting the attack fought back. More than 50 people, Muslims and some Hindus, were killed. Thousands moved into refugee camps in local graveyards. Mutilated bodies were still being pulled out of the network of filthy, stinking drains when government officials had their first meeting about Covid-19 and most Indians first began to hear about the existence of something called hand sanitiser.

March was busy too. The first two weeks were devoted to toppling the Congress government in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh and installing a BJP gov-

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DISARMING TIMES

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government in its place. On March 11 the World Health Organization declared that Covid-19 was a pandemic. Two days later, on March 13, the health ministry said that corona "is not a health emergency". Finally, on March 19, the Indian prime minister addressed the nation. He told us of the need for "social distancing" (easy to understand for a society so steeped in the practice of caste) and called for a day of "people's curfew" on March 22. He said nothing about what his government was going to do in the crisis, but he asked people to come out on their balconies, and ring bells and bang their pots and pans to salute health workers. He didn't mention that, until that very moment, India had been exporting protective gear and respiratory equipment, instead of keeping it for Indian health workers and hospitals.

Narendra Modi's request was met with great enthusiasm. There were pot-banging marches, community dances and processions. In the days that followed, men jumped into barrels of sacred cow dung, and BJP supporters threw cow urine drinking parties. Not to be outdone, many Muslim organisations declared that the Almighty was the answer to the virus and called for the faithful to gather in mosques in numbers. On March 24, at 8pm, Modi appeared on TV to announce that, from midnight onwards, all of India would be under lockdown. Markets would be closed. All transport, public as well as private, would be disallowed.

He said he was taking this decision not just as a prime minister, but as our family elder. Who else can decide, without consulting the state governments that would have to deal with the fallout of this decision, that a nation of 1.38bn people should be locked down with zero preparation and with four hours' notice? His methods give the impression that India's prime minister thinks of citizens as a hostile force that needs to be ambushed, taken by surprise, but never trusted. Locked down we were. Many health professionals and epidemiologists have applauded this move. But

surely none of them can support the calamitous lack of planning or preparedness that turned the world's biggest, most punitive lockdown into the exact opposite of what it was meant to achieve. The man who loves spectacles created the mother of all spectacles. As an appalled world watched, India revealed herself in all her shame — her brutal, structural, social and economic inequality, her callous indifference to suffering.

The lockdown worked like a chemical experiment that suddenly illuminated hidden things. As shops, restaurants, factories and the construction industry shut down, as the wealthy and the middle classes enclosed themselves in gated colonies, our towns and megacities began to extrude their working-class citizens — their migrant workers — like so much unwanted accrual. Many driven out by their employers and landlords, millions of impoverished, hungry, thirsty people, young and old, men, women, children, sick people, blind people, disabled people, with nowhere else to go, with no public transport in sight, began a long march home to their villages. They walked for days, towards Badaun, Agra, Azamgarh, Aligarh, Lucknow, Gorakhpur — hundreds of kilometres away. Some died on the way. They knew they were going home potentially to slow starvation. Perhaps they even knew they could be carrying the virus with them, and would infect their families, their parents and grandparents back home, but they desperately needed a shred of familiarity, shelter and dignity, as well as food, if not love.

As they walked, some were beaten brutally and humiliated by the police, who were charged with strictly enforcing the curfew. Young men were made to crouch and frog jump down the highway. Outside the town of Bareilly, one group was herded together and hosed down with chemical spray.

A few days later, worried that the fleeing population would spread the virus to villages, the government sealed state borders even for walkers. People who had been walking for days were stopped and forced

to return to camps in the cities they had just been forced to leave.

Among older people it evoked memories of the population transfer of 1947, when India was divided and Pakistan was born. Except that this current exodus was driven by class divisions, not religion. Even still, these were not India's poorest people. These were people who had (at least until now) work in the city and homes to return to. The jobless, the homeless and the despairing remained where they were, in the cities as well as the countryside, where deep distress was growing long before this tragedy occurred. All through these horrible days, the home affairs minister Amit Shah remained absent from public view. When the walking began in Delhi, I used a press pass from a magazine I frequently write for to drive to Ghazipur, on the border between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. The scene was biblical. Or perhaps not. The Bible could not have known numbers such as these. The lockdown to enforce physical distancing had resulted in the opposite — physical compression on an unthinkable scale. This is true even within India's towns and cities. The main roads might be empty, but the poor are sealed into cramped quarters in slums and shanties. Every one of the walking people I spoke to was worried about the virus. But it was less real, in their lives than looming unemployment, starvation and the violence of the police. Of all the people I spoke to that day, including a group of Muslim tailors who had only weeks ago survived the anti-Muslim attacks, one man's words especially troubled me. He was a carpenter called Ramjeet. "Maybe when Modi decided to do this, nobody told him about us. Maybe he doesn't know about us", he said. "Us" means approximately 460m people.

State governments in India have showed more heart and understanding in the crisis. Trade unions, private citizens and other collectives are distributing food and emergency rations. The central government has been slow to respond to their desperate appeals for funds. It turns out that the prime minister's National Relief Fund has no ready

cash available. Instead, money from well-wishers is pouring into the somewhat mysterious new PM-CARES fund. Pre-packaged meals with Modi's face on them have begun to appear.

As the lockdown enters its second week, supply chains have broken, medicines and essential supplies are running low. Thousands of truck drivers are still marooned on the highways, with little food and water. Standing crops, ready to be harvested, are slowly rotting. The economic crisis is here. The political crisis is ongoing. The mainstream media has incorporated the Covid story into its 24/7 toxic anti-Muslim campaign. An organisation called the Tablighi Jamaat, which held a meeting in Delhi before the lockdown was announced, has turned out to be a "super spreader". That is being used to stigmatise and demonise Muslims. The overall tone suggests that Muslims invented the virus and have deliberately spread it as a form of jihad.

The Covid crisis is still to come. Or not. We don't know. If and when it does, we can be sure it will be dealt with, with all the prevailing prejudices of religion, caste and class in place. Today (April 2) in India, there are almost 2,000 confirmed cases and 58 deaths. These are unreliable numbers, based on woefully few tests. Expert opinion varies wildly. Some predict millions of cases. Others think the toll will be far less. We may never know the contours of the crisis, even when it hits us. All we know is that the run on hospitals has not yet begun. India's public hospitals and clinics — which are unable to cope with the almost 1m children who die of diarrhoea, malnutrition and other health issues every year, with the hundreds of thousands of tuberculosis patients (a quarter of the world's cases), with a vast anaemic and malnourished population vulnerable to any number of minor illnesses that prove fatal for them — will not be able to cope with a crisis that is like what Europe and the US are dealing with. All health-care is on hold as hospitals have been turned over to the service of the virus. The trauma centre of the legendary All India Institute of

Medical Sciences in Delhi is closed, the hundreds of cancer patients known as cancer refugees who live on the roads outside that huge hospital driven away like cattle. People will fall sick and die at home. We may never know their stories. They may not even become statistics. We can only hope that the studies that say the virus likes cold weather are correct (though other researchers have cast doubt on this). Never have a people longed so irrationally and so much for a burning, punishing Indian summer.

What is this thing that has happened to us? It's a virus, yes. In and of itself it holds no moral brief. But it is definitely more than a virus. Some believe it's God's way of bringing us to our senses. Others that it's a Chinese conspiracy to take over the world. Whatever it is, Coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to "normality", trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

This is an abbreviated version of an article in [Online University Of The Left](#). It first appeared in the Financial Times

<http://ouleft.spmesolite.tilted.net/?p=2979&fbclid=IwAR08VkhoxX6yLCXW9TAtOZH0jdo-8kQJMCY5t-n8Igm2ZUmInAzaTBv5C3A>

QUO VADIS, COVID-19? THE CHALLENGE POST-CORONA

Caesar D'Mello

We are witnessing one of the most devastating pandemics in human history. Already shocked as the world is, COVID-19 is still very much alive and unfolding even as restrictions begin to be loosened.

True to the Greek origins of the word – *pan* meaning 'all' and *demos* meaning 'people' - the pandemic is affecting almost every country on earth at varying stages of its development. The incessant updating continues on cases and deaths, curves and vaccines, arrangements at home, work and everywhere, job losses, disrupted or slowing industry, thermal testing, economies shattered, life as we know changed, perhaps forever - faces of what has come to be known as 'dancing with the enemy'.

The deluge of information, statistics and expert views – while not overlooking the assortment of mindless fake news, crackpottery and conspiracy theories - provides analysis from a multiplicity of angles. However, the bulk of this remains focused mostly on measurable medical, sociological and econometric data, but skirts consideration of the root of the pandemic. Truly, is it sufficient to identify its material starting point - as is the purpose of the just announced WHO-oversighted inquiry - and ascertain whether it originated from wet markets, bats or a laboratory in Wuhan to understand it fully? Do name calling and finger pointing as the US and China engage in, or the lens of the stock market provide the total explanation? There seems to be an unstated but seemingly avowed attempt to limit examination of the virus to the immediate empirical factors surrounding its emergence. But we will not have gone far in coming to terms with the virus if our study does not venture beyond epidemiology and the economy.

The public discourse concentrates on the pandemic as a health crisis, significant as this is for the community to consider seriously and

counter it. But it ignores what most can intuitively realise – that a pandemic reveals a society. It is a mirror that reflects society, the living threads of its social fabric – how it is formed and organised; its attitudes, priorities and values on life, on the place of material wealth and the spirit; the quality of its governance; how justly it allocates resources; how its poor are treated. A pandemic forces, or should force a society to ask serious ontological questions of itself, of its nature, its self-image and self-understanding, of the failings in the way it functions to better itself.

COVID-19 brings to the fore a focus on the centrality of life. Nevertheless there is an obvious disconnect: while we are desperate to preserve and save life even as we are struggling to do so during this health challenge, as humanity we have developed the technological and scientific capacity to destroy all or most life on the planet, if so desired! So why is life valuable in one sense, and not in the other?

Though the preservation of individual lives engages our best minds, this pandemic also appears to have emboldened some put forth a new form of eugenics, a contemporary Darwinism, an utilitarianism of the survival of the fittest. In their advocacy for an urgent and unannounced removal of most constraints suggested by medical experts, they ask why draw all of society under those constraints when it is the elderly, weak, sick and sickly who are most susceptible? Would it not be efficient to accept a certain level of their mortality as inevitable, as "a new normal", make provisions for their palliative care or isolation, and free everyone else and the economy to march on? A placard in an anti-lockdown demonstration in the US exhorted "**Let the weak go!**" Such voices would justify the mortality of a few for the many.

However, even though thankfully all may not project such reasoning, there are leaders, opinion leaders,

and sections of society who are urging a return as soon as possible to life as it was BC – before coronavirus. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has already used a term for this – snapback, or "not keeping Australia under the doona" (*quilt!*) Caught on the horns of a dilemma of saving lives yet reviving the economy, he has already defined "success" as less a matter of fewer cases, though important, than a return to a functioning economy as before. Such thinking is aptly expressed in the cartoon by Wilcox today: *Ok team. The world has changed drastically and our challenge over the coming period will be to shoehorn this new reality into our existing ideology...* (The Age, 19 May 2020)

"Snapback to what?" is a question that arises regarding a number of dimensions of our society, including the following two.

Experts advise us that we have not yet thoroughly understood the epidemiology of the coronavirus, and how enduring its impact will be. But given the enormity of what we have experienced, it would be naïve in the extreme to be fixated on a single event, cause or factor and the associated polemics to help us understand it completely. We have to come to grips with why the era we live in is called Anthropocene, wherein humanity's self-gratification is a serious player in shaping the nature of the planet and the environment. As The Guardian writes, "Humanity's influence is causing ... a drastic decline in the richness of life. Microbes are not exempt. Whether on coral reefs or in the human gut, we are disrupting the relationships between microbes and their hosts, often pulling apart species that have been together for millions of years." Totally comprehending COVID-19 is a long way off, but surely it is not beyond our wit to realise that life in all its forms must be respected and protected for the well-being of 'Our Common Home'.

but surely it is not beyond our wit to realise that life in all its forms must be respected and protected for the well-being of 'Our Common Home'. We have to reject our arrogant myths of our power and superiority bred through a political and economic system that is failing, and acknowledge the pervasive 'anti-life system', as Pope Francis calls it,

that violates 'the most universal law...the interdependence of everyone with everyone, that there is no being, much less us humans, that is an island disconnected from everything else.' In humility we have seriously to question the way we live.

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COVID 19 GOOD NEWS STORIES

From Anglican Overseas Aid.

Kenya

The situation

With confirmed cases of COVID-19, Kenya put in place a strict dusk to dawn curfew from March 27, including stay at home orders for all except essential services. This has put incredible strain on small businesses who rely on daily trade to survive and don't have the luxury of savings.

The response

Our partner, the Anglican Church of Kenya, Mount Kenya West Diocese (ACK), is working in multiple ways to prevent COVID-19 from spreading, improving the lives of those that are most impacted by lockdowns, and supporting households with essential supplies.

ACK is playing an active role in educating the community on hygiene, prevention measures and facts on COVID-19 through training local volunteer community leaders and Community Health Volunteers. These volunteers create awareness on how to prevent the spread of the virus and, at the same time, distribute items like soap and masks to the most vulnerable.

These vulnerable households, including those with disabilities are identified by the community lead-

ers and chiefs and are also assisted with food essentials, support to link with government services, and help with starting income generating activities within their homes.

With tensions running high, the leaders have also been equipped to report and deal sensitively with cases of women at risk of violence, to referring them to help as needed, offer counselling and if necessary, help organising a safe space for them to stay.

This work is supported by the Australian Government and AOA supporters through the Australian NGO Co-operation Program.

Mozambique

The situation

Mozambique has confirmed cases of COVID-19, including in the Diocese of Nampula where our work is situated. The government implemented restrictions on public gatherings and put in place social distancing measures. While this is not a complete lockdown, it has significant implications on people's movements and livelihoods.

The response

Our partner in Mozambique, the Missionary Diocese of Nampula, has been working towards the goal of improving health knowledge in

communities for a long time now through the Equipas de Vida (or 'Life Teams') initiative. The Life Teams are groups of community-based volunteers, who are trained to improve the quality of life through health and hygiene messaging.

So respected is our partner and their Life Teams initiative, that the Government of Mozambique has recognised the Diocese and these teams as an essential service, and they are now a recognised part of Mozambique's official COVID-19 prevention response.

The Life Teams have been trained to deliver the life-saving health and hygiene COVID-19 prevention messaging door-to-door within the 98 vulnerable communities that they are a part of.

The Missionary Diocese of Nampula has also been distributing soap to the most vulnerable families in each of the communities, as well as teaching them about food storage and distributing vegetable seeds for home gardening to support social distancing.

This work is supported by the Australian Government and AOA supporters through the Australian NGO Co-operation Program.



INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY AND PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE ANZAC DAY REFLECTION 2020

Peter Griffin

*What Aboriginal people ask is that the modern world now makes the sacrifices necessary to give us a real future.... (to). Acknowledge that we have survived the worst that the past had thrown at us, and we are here with our songs, our ceremonies, our land, our language and our people – our full identity. What a gift this is that we can give you, if you choose to accept us in a meaningful way. (Galarrwuy Yunupingu, '[Rom Watangu](#)' in *Final Report of the Referendum Council*, 17 June 2017, p. 53)*

If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together. (Quote from [Lilla Watson](#))

Introduction

Every year, the Anzac remembrance gathering at the Marrickville Peace Park (Richardson's Lookout) in Sydney has always included the Frontier Wars. These wars refer to the violent conflicts between Indigenous Australians and white settlers from the earliest days of the colony. It is fitting on Anzac Day to look more closely at the significance of both the physical conflicts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians and also their deeper, seemingly endless repercussions.

Acknowledgment of the Frontier Wars is associated with an ineradicable truth, namely that the wars, massacres (on both sides) and a whole gamut of genocidal practices (dispossession of land including sacred and hunting grounds, devastation from introduced diseases, food poisonings etc.) all occurred on Australian soil. The irony is that none of the wars into which Australia has been drawn via one or other alliance in the name of "defence" and "democracy" has occurred on mainland Australia. The fact that the

Frontier Wars have been disputed and are still not officially recognised, only adds bitterness to the injustice of denial.

The primary focus of this essay will be on the difficult journey towards the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty from the time of Captain James Cook's landing in Botany Bay on 29 April 1770 to the present.

Indigenous versus British settler perspectives

Fundamental to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Australia is the divisive issue between those who view the British Crown's claim to the eastern seaboard of Australia as an act of *settlement*, compared to the First Nations people who see it as an *invasion*.

The [Final Report of the Referendum Council](#) refers to a division between "old" and "new" Australians. The invasion that started at Botany Bay is the origin of the fundamental grievance between the old and new Australians. This is a land that was colonised without the consent of its rightful owners. As the Final Report states, "their land and sovereignty was annexed without consent and without treaty with the country's rightful owners." This forms part of the Truth passionately called for in the [Uluru Statement From The Heart](#).

It is worth noting that the weaponised hostility from the colonial settlers toward the Indigenous people dates from the earliest contact in 1770. Peter Fitzsimons in his book *James Cook* reveals that in his own journal, Cook records that the entry of a strange vessel entering Botany Bay received an agitated response from the local people. Cook states that he fired three musket shots and one of these shot wounded an Indigenous man in the leg. So, from the very first encounter of "discovery", the unannounced and mysterious visitors made their intentions known with the force of arms.

Needless to say, none of this reaches beyond archival records to educate Australian children about their country's actual history.

The Frontier Wars

Much evidence exists to back up the claim that this initial antagonism set the tone and the template for the fighting which first took place several months after the landing of the First Fleet in Botany Bay in January 1788 and ended with the last clashes which occurred as late as 1934. According to Henry Reynolds, a minimum of 40,000 Indigenous people and between 2,000 and 2,500 settlers died in these wars.

The impact of colonisation on the Indigenous population is even more dramatic. Before 1788 there were an estimated 300,000 to 1 million Indigenous people in Australia. By 1920, this number may well have dropped to as low as 80,000.

Bruce Elder, in the preface to his book *Blood on the Wattle*, states that "the massacres of Aborigines ... should be as much a part of Australian history as the First Fleet, the explorers, the gold rushes and the bushrangers." Indeed for some years now a large and vigorous contingent of Aboriginal and Indigenous supporters have been a frustrated (blocked) presence at the annual Anzac Memorial Service in Canberra. Australia is still not ready to accept the truth of its own colonial history. Eventually the Frontier Wars came to an end around 1934. However as one form of violence and control subsided, governments employed new policies of control and discrimination. As stated in the Final Report, Aboriginal people were herded to missions and reserves on the fringes of white society and the Stolen Generations were taken from their families. This was the policy of assimilation. As emphasised by Australians Together, the assimilation approach "proposed that "full blood" Indigenous people should be allowed to

to "die out" through a process of natural elimination, while "half-castes" were encouraged to assimilate into the white community."

White Australia Policy

Coinciding with the latter years of the Frontier Wars, non Aboriginal Australia had formed itself into a Federation under a Constitution which, among other things, was heavily influenced by the White Australia Policy. This policy, based upon the assumption of the superiority of whiteness over non whiteness, allowed for the passing of the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* which effectively stopped all non-European immigration into the country and contributed to the development of a racially insulated white society.

While this legislation sought to protect whiteness from without, the Constitution sought to protect whiteness from within. From the beginning, white Australia believed that the Aboriginal people were a dying race and the [Constitution](#) only made two references to them. Section 127 excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the Census and Section 51 (xxvi) regrettably gave power over Aboriginal people to the States rather than to the Federal government.

It took 66 years and a referendum in 1967 requiring a majority of the voters in a majority of the States to include Aboriginal people in the Census of their own country.

The Aboriginal people and their calls for recognition, in contrast to official and unofficial expectations, refused to go away. People of particular note who have fought for Aboriginal rights, include William Cooper who was one of eleven signatories to the Maloga Petition in 1887. During the 1930s, William Cooper and other leaders from the [Australian Aborigines' League](#) collected 1,814 signatures and petitioned Prime Minister Joseph Lyons and King George VI to intervene on behalf of Indigenous Australians "for the preservation of our race from extinction and to grant representation to our race in the Federal Parliament."

Other Aboriginal activists such as Fred Maynard and Tom Lacey founded the Australian Aboriginal Progress Association in February

1925 which advocated for the right of Aborigines to determine their own lives.

Lack of a Treaty

Australia is the only Commonwealth nation where a treaty does not exist between the colonisers and the Indigenous people. An Indigenous Treaty was first promised by Prime Minister Bob Hawke back in 1988 after receiving the [Barunga Statement](#) from Aboriginal elders which called for such a treaty to be concluded. No treaty eventuated.

The absence of a treaty is at the very heart of the historical injustice in Australia. The continued lack of a treaty with Indigenous Australians shows an ongoing denial of the prior occupation and dispossession of Indigenous people and a general disregard for their rights and aspirations. It is a reminder that oppressive colonial attitudes still have not been addressed.

Sovereignty

In the 1990s, Australia sought to redress its colonial origins by instituting a policy of reconciliation. Reconciliation processes are often criticized for demanding that the victims of state repression relinquish their legitimate claims to justice for the sake of national unity. One notable Indigenous spokesperson, Kevin Gilbert, expressed his view this way:

What are we to reconcile ourselves to? To a holocaust, to a massacre, to the removal of us from our land, from the taking of our land? The reconciliation process can achieve nothing because it does not...promise justice. It does not promise a Treaty and it does not promise reparation for the taking away of our lives, our lands and our economic and political base. Unless it can return to us those very vital things...what have we? A handshake? A symbolic dance? An exchange of leaves and feathers or something like that?

For Gilbert and many others, the possibility of breaking with the colonial past depends on the recognition of Aboriginal *sovereignty*. But there is an elephant in the room, namely

that the legitimacy of the Australian State rests on the presumption that there was no recognisable legal or political organisation on the continent prior to the arrival of the British Crown. Consequently, the insistence on Aboriginal sovereignty fundamentally contests the basis of the constitutional order i.e. it is the polar opposite of terra nullius.

A common misunderstanding from a legal perspective is that the Mabo decision of 3 June 1992 recognised Aboriginal sovereignty. It did not.

[While] the court demolished the concept of Terra Nullius in respect of property, it preserved it in relation to sovereignty ... For 200 years Australian law was secured to the rock of Terra Nullius. One pinioned arm represented property, the other sovereignty. With great courage the High Court recognized native title in the Mabo judgment and released one arm from its shackles. The other remains as firmly secured as ever and seems destined to remain there for some time but in the long run the situation will prove unstable. What is more, the resulting legal pose will become increasingly uncomfortable as time passes.

In Australia, critics claim that the formal reconciliation process was a further stage in the colonial project of assimilating the Aboriginal population into the colonizing society. Against reconciliation, many Aboriginal people insist that their sovereignty was never ceded. This claim represents both an assertion of the right to self determination and a refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the settler-colonial state that has incorporated them as citizens.

Henry Reynolds claims that in any discussion about the ongoing evolution of Australian nationalism, the issue of sovereignty is inescapable. But this discussion comes with a caveat. This common word belies the fact that for each collective, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, sovereignty refers to a reality comprising different values. For Aboriginal Australia, sovereignty predates the arrival of the First Fleet and has never been ceded. According to the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#), sovereignty is a spiritual notion, a concept that is unfamiliar to

non-Aboriginal Australia. Rather than being a philosophical notion, it is the “ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’ and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”. And again, as the Uluru Statement emphasises, Aboriginal sovereignty “has never been ceded or extinguished”.

Postscript

Fiona Nicoll argues that Indigenous sovereignty claims “come less from a

desire for European concepts, institutions and values than from a refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the sovereignty in the name of which (the British) invasion was and continues to be justified.” In other words, the quest for Aboriginal sovereignty challenges non Indigenous Australia to let go of its right to define just what sovereignty is and for whom. This, I suggest, is the reason why the Uluru Statement includes the

assertion that Indigenous sovereignty “co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.” Sovereignty then has a dual character: one that is non-Indigenous and another that is Indigenous. The search for liberation through sovereignty can only be achieved by both sides working together.

Peter Griffin is a member of Pax Christi New South Wales

BERNARD COLLAERY’S BOMBSHELL

Hamish McDonald

With the release of his book detailing the sorry saga of Australia’s negotiations with less well-equipped neighbours over oil in the Timor Sea, Canberra lawyer Bernard Collaery has dramatically raised the stakes in his impending trial for breaching secrecy laws. *Oil Under Troubled Water*, published this month by Melbourne University Press, is a trenchant and deeply researched account of those negotiations. It shows how the Australian government and its lawyers unscrupulously misrepresented petroleum discoveries in the seabed and used high-pressure tactics to push the cash-strapped UN administration and then the new Timor-Leste government into premature and disadvantageous agreements. And it recounts Australia’s March 2002 decision to withdraw from the jurisdiction of international courts on questions of maritime boundaries, a move that continues to jar with Canberra’s admonitions about a “rules based international order.” The bombshell in this book is that the Australian government, with the Coalition in power at the critical times, neglected to include in production-sharing contracts any mention of the helium component of the gas flow from discoveries in the area of joint exploitation.

The price of this inert lighter-than-air gas — a critical component in high-tech processes including magnetic resonance imaging and liquid crystal displays — has shot up in recent years. Helium is mostly recovered from flows of natural gas, and the Bayu-Undan field in the Timor Sea



East Timor’s prime minister, Mari Alkatiri (second from left) and his Australian counterpart John Howard (second from right) watch as their respective foreign ministers, José Ramos-Horta and Alexander Downer, sign the revenue sharing agreement for oil and gas reserves in Sydney on 12 January 2006.

had more than enough to justify extraction. ConocoPhillips, the operators of that field, got it for free, and sent it via pipeline to a liquified natural gas plant in Darwin. The US oil major then sold the helium fraction to BOC Australia, owned by the multinational industrial gases group Linde, which opened a plant next door to the Darwin LNG terminal in 2010. By 2015, according to Collaery, the annual output of the plant, which cost perhaps \$50 million to build, was an estimated 200 million standard cubic feet. At prevailing prices, that’s \$2 billion in revenue per year. When I enquired, BOC Australia refused to comment on these claims, saying it cannot reveal confidential information about agreements with suppliers or customers. As Collaery’s account stands, both the Australian and Timor-Leste governments have neglected to obtain any revenue

benefits for their people from a resource whose value seems to be greater than the petroleum gas in which it has been hidden.

The same will go for the much larger Greater Sunrise field unless its production-sharing agreement with the Woodside Petroleum consortium is modified. Timor-Leste’s negotiators, initially led by then prime minister Mari Alkatiri, were advised by a Norwegian expert to add the words “and inerts” to the Bayu-Undan and Greater Sunrise contracts, but did not pursue the point. They were bound by a statement — signed by Alkatiri, Xanana Gusmão and José Ramos-Horta — that the holders of contracts signed under the Indonesian–Australian regime would continue to enjoy the same rights under an independent Timor-Leste on terms that were “no more onerous.” The statement was drafted and signed in September 1999 at a meeting in Darwin with officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Phillips Petroleum, later ConocoPhillips. Australian-led peacekeepers had barely begun securing East Timor from the rampaging of departing Indonesian troops and militias, and the Timorese had no legal advisers with them.

Collaery’s book will upset many of Timor-Leste’s friends. It is bitterly critical of Alkatiri and other Fretilin leaders, whom Collaery accuses of adhering to undemocratic doctrines and Leninist organisation and rushing to sign unfavourable agreements to secure revenue flows. He is comparatively soft on Gusmão, whom he

has advised for twenty years. Most of all, though, he paints an invidious picture of Alexander Downer, who was foreign minister for all the period from Timor's move towards independence to the ratification of treaties in 2006 deferring any re-drafting of the maritime border for thirty years and giving Australia half the revenue from Greater Sunrise. Downer was in thrall to Woodside Petroleum, Collaery believes, and came to identify its commercial interest with the national interest. Warned about further prosecution and a possible ten-year jail term under post-9/11 intelligence laws, Collaery studiously avoids the matter that has him facing trial in the ACT Supreme Court: the Australian Secret Intelligence Service's bugging of Timor-Leste's cabinet room at the height of the maritime treaty negotiations in 2004. Collaery is charged with conspiracy to communicate secret intelligence information to the government of Timor-Leste between May 2008 and May 2013, and with sharing some of this information with ABC journalists. One of the ASIS operatives involved in the Dili bugging, known to the public only as Witness K, is charged with breaching the Intelligence Services Act by discussing the operation with Collaery, even though he had been cleared to take his misgivings about the operation to Collaery as a legal adviser. Collaery, deputy chief minister and attorney-general in the ACT government between 1989 and 1991, has spooky elements in his own early background. His book mentions training in commando-type operations while at university, an activity ASIS pursued with trusty potential recruits at least until the bungled "hostage rescue" at Melbourne's Sheraton Hotel in 1983. He also worked for a little-known security section of the immigration department, and was a first secretary of the Australian embassy in Paris. This and his later political experi-

ence seem to have gained him the security clearances that led Witness K to his office.

Whether or not it was Collaery who told them, the Timorese informed then prime minister Julia Gillard in December 2012 that they knew of the 2004 bugging operation and were intending to use it as evidence of bad faith in negotiations to annul the treaties reached with Downer. Not long after, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (then led by the ASIS chief at the time of the Dili operation, David Irvine) raided Collaery's office and seized material. Later, the government withdrew Witness K's passport to prevent him from testifying at the proceedings. Timor-Leste had launched at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. After years of manoeuvres ended with Timor-Leste's decision to withdraw its bad-faith case (to Collaery's great disappointment), Canberra agreed to mediation supervised from The Hague. The result was a vastly more favourable carve-up of Great Sunrise for the Timorese.

While Canberra's lawyers were fighting the bad-faith accusation in the International Court of Justice it would have been counterproductive to prosecute Collaery and Witness K for leaking about the ASIS operation. The threat of international condemnation removed, attorney-general Christian Porter authorised the director of public prosecutions to go ahead with charges against both. In a hearing scheduled for mid-April, Witness K is ready to plead guilty, apparently in return for not having a conviction recorded and being free again to travel. Collaery's case will go to a jury trial, possibly in May if Covid-19 does not disrupt court schedules. But a preliminary hearing will test Porter's invocation of the 2004 National Security Information Act, which allows intelligence material to be revealed only in closed court. So far, it seems, even Col-

laery's own defence counsel have not been allowed to see the evidence being brought against him. Affidavits have been given to the court by former foreign minister Gareth Evans and former defence forces chief Chris Barrie. According to Justice David Mossop, both men challenge Porter's assertion that the evidence, if disclosed, would threaten national security. Both Gusmão and Ramos-Horta are ready to testify as defence witnesses. Whether or not Collaery's lawyers manage to have the trial held in the open with Downer and officials cross-examined, this book has given the case a wider moral setting that will greatly influence the court of public opinion. If they manage to have it introduced as evidence, it might well sway the jury. The Dili operation taints not just the diplomatic and intelligence figures involved, but also the entire government of the time. Could Downer and his department head, Ashton Calvert, have authorised the bugging without seeking approval from cabinet's national security committee, whose other members would have been prime minister John Howard, deputy prime minister John Anderson, treasurer Peter Costello, attorney-general Philip Ruddock and immigration minister Amanda Vanstone? Why, one wonders, has Porter chosen to pick at this scab? The fact the prosecutions were launched confirms the ASIS bugging happened. With its 2015 decision to return to international jurisdiction, the Labor Party ended the shameful bipartisan effort to rob the Indonesians and Timorese. Porter is inviting a royal commission by a future government.

Hamish McDonald is a former foreign editor and China correspondent of the Sydney Morning Herald and former regional editor of the Far Eastern Economic Review. This article first appeared in Inside Story)

Fire Blessing from the Kimberley

May the fire be in your thoughts
making them good and just
may it protect you from all harm
may the fire be in your eyes
may it open your eyes to see what is

good in life
may it protect you from speaking
against another.
May the fire be in your ears
we pray that you may hear with
deep listening

so that you may hear the flow of
water and of all Creation and of the
Dreaming.
May you be protected from gossip
and from those things that harm
and break down your family.

BOOK REVIEWS

Rockefeller and the Demise of Ibu Pertiwi, by Kerry Collison, Australia West Papua Association Melbourne.

Copies of this new novel about West Papua is an informative read by an author who knows the story (and the back-story).

The 'Rockefeller' of the title is Michael Rockefeller, the only son of the New York Governor in 1962, who drowned in West Papua while collecting Asmat sculptures for his father's museum. 'Ibu Pertiwi' is how Indonesians fondly refer to their homeland (*ibu* - mother, *pertiwi* - earth). After reading a review copy, here's what Major Ross Himona (New Zealand Army) wrote:

'A work of political fiction based in the real events leading in 1969 to

the deeply flawed United Nations sponsored plebiscite that disenfranchised the peoples of West Papua and placed their futures in the hands of the Indonesian government; and in subsequent events involving the total subjugation of the indigenous peoples, that have relentlessly robbed them of any control over their own lives and destinies, and of any access to the riches of their own country.

'Central to these events in the novel is the greed and corruption underlying the mining operations in West Papua that have enriched both their American shareholders and corrupt Indonesian officials and businessmen. The novel pulls no punches in its portrayal of the gross inhumanity visited upon the West Papuan peoples not just by the Indonesian gov-

ernment, but with the complicity of the USA, the UK and Australia. This is the real story of a totally colonised and brutalised people held together by an intriguing fictional story line. It is also the story of their struggle for freedom and of their courageous resistance that continues to this day.'

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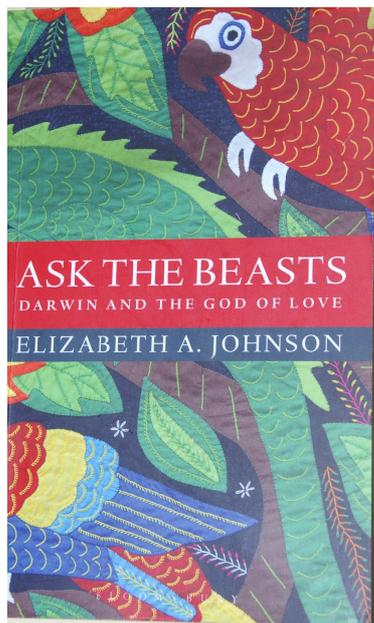
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Ask the Beasts, Darwin and the God of Love, Elizabeth A Johnson. Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014

This is a demanding book but a very worthwhile one. A group from Pax Christi Victoria is studying it as part of the *Theology of the Environment* project. Elizabeth Johnson is Distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham University, New York and a Sister of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood, New York as well as being a leading feminist theologian.

She deals with an issue which has used up a much time and energy among Christians as well as causing deep division: the supposed conflict between the creation stories in the Book of Genesis and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution as an account of the origins of life on earth. The arguments this "conflict" has generated have been a complete waste of time and energy because they rest on a fundamental misunderstanding about what the Book of Genesis and what Darwin say.

Professor Johnson shows that Darwin's theories need not stand in against a religious belief in the God who created the universe. In fact



they are integral to it. The title of the book comes from the Book of Job chapter 12: *'But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has*

done this?

In his hand is the life of every living thing

and the breath of every human being.

Commenting on this text she suggests that: *If you interrogate the flora and fauna of land, sea and air, the text suggests their response will lead your heart and mind to the living God, generous source and sustaining power of their life.* This is not the way contemporary Christians have been taught to think about God, humanity and creation. We think of God as the one who created the earth in order and set it going but who was primarily concerned with engaging humanity. God has given the creation to humanity to use for humanity's benefit. God is separate from creation. God is static. God lives in heaven from which God sent Jesus to save us and where we eventually join him and leave creation behind. Professor Johnson sets out to challenge these beliefs.

She investigates Darwin's book *The Origin of Species* against the background of his diaries and the notes of his explorations as he travelled around the world studying the ani-

around the world studying the animals and plants which he found. She describes in great detail how Darwin discovered how living organisms change and adapt to changes in environment, how some species flourish and others disappear, what happens when catastrophe strikes, how variations develop and much more. However this is not raw science. She unfolds it like the development of symphony, the deeper reality behind the life of the universe.

Darwin's theories created uproar at the time. However Professor Johnson points out that this was not what we might expect. Most of the criticism of Darwin came not from the church but from fellow scientists who were wedded to the traditional reading of the Genesis creation stories. On the other hand some leading Christians, including a future Archbishop of Canterbury, were very interested in Darwin and wanted to know more.

It is worth noting at this point that Genesis 1 & 2 does not claim to be a scientific explanation of the origin of creation at all. Genesis was written when the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon, in a foreign culture with very different values. It was written to draw the people to what

their own faith said about the origin of creation: that it came from God who created a world of harmony in which every part was related and humanity was has a special part of play but was no separate form everything else. This picture contested the Babylonian creation story. They believed that creation was the result of conflict between the Gods and that therefore conflict and violence was an essential part of being human, an idea which is alive and well in our world today.

Professor Johnson goes on to look at the origins of the universe itself, how it developed from the original Big Bang. How galaxies and planetary systems developed, who the right conditions came together to let life grow on earth. She speculates on whether similar conditions may have led to the development of life elsewhere in the universe, something we will never know.

She asks how God might relate to all this. She suggests that we have to change the way we think about God. God is not apart from the life of the universe, reigning from his throne in the skies. She suggests that God *is* life and that God is there wherever life is and that his life is expressed not in distance but in presence, not

in authority but in love. Jesus is the ultimate expression of the life and love of God. *All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.* (John 1.2) The Holy Spirit is life proceeding from the father and the son. God's life is not fixed but is always evolving and becoming as God draws us into his evolving and becoming. Our life belongs in the life of earth and creation and in the life of the Universe itself. The iron in our blood takes us back to the great eruptions of energy at the beginning of time. We live and belong in the living entity which is Earth and the whole universe, which is itself the expression of the life and love of God which becomes real in the life death and resurrection of Jesus.

I cannot do justice to this remarkable book in a brief article. I can only commend it to you and invite you to read it for yourself.

You can get the book from www.bookdepository.com for \$29AUD

Reviewed by Harry Kerr

BETTY WILLIAMS, IRISH PEACE MAKER

Ivan Little

Laureate Betty Williams, a co-founder of the ground-breaking Peace People movement in Northern Ireland who has died at the age of 76, has been hailed as "a true soldier of peace". The tribute from an international peace organisation was just one of dozens of messages of sympathy for the west Belfast woman who, along with Mairead Corrigan, was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1976 for the work they did to try to bring peace to Northern Ireland. One of Mrs Williams' last public appearances was in Belfast in January when she accompanied Hollywood film star Sharon Stone to the City Hall where they signed a book of condolence for the late SDLP leader Seamus Mallon. Mrs Williams said the former MP from Markethill was one of the first politicians to support the Peace People movement began after the deaths in west Belfast of three chil-

dren in August 1976. They were struck by a getaway car driven by IRA man Danny Lennon, who lost control of the vehicle after he was fired on by a soldier. Mairead Corrigan was the aunt of the three youngsters and she went on television after the deaths to make a deeply emotional plea for the killings to stop. Two days later she and Mrs Williams, who was one of the first people on the scene of the tragedy set in motion the organisation that would become the Community of the Peace People, along with former journalist Ciaran McKeown. Mairead Corrigan's sister Anne Maguire, who was the mother of the three young children, took her own life in 1980 after a failed attempt to start a new life in New Zealand. Mrs Williams and Mairead Corrigan's marches for peace were backed by upwards of 35,000 people despite attempts by

the IRA to discredit the organisers as 'dupes of the British' and to disrupt their events. Betty Williams, nee Smyth, was born to a Catholic mother, a housewife, and a Protestant father, a butcher, in May 1943. She said her background imbued her with a sense of religious tolerance and a "breadth of vision" which motivated her to join an anti-violence movement that preceded the Peace People. Mrs Williams insisted that the Nobel Prize wasn't awarded solely for what a recipient had done but what they would do in the future. And she certainly lived up to her words, travelling the world to campaign for justice, especially on behalf of children who had been the victims of horrific abuse, hunger, cruelty and violence. She repeatedly demanded that governments globally should listen to the voices of the young victims who were going hun-

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from p.11

hungry, pointing out that up to 40,000 a day were dying from malnutrition.

Mrs Williams once spoke passionately of her shock at discovering that so many children were living under the threat of death, and called for safe havens to be established for them to save them from attacks by armed forces and others. One such haven was built in southern Italy by the World Centers of Compassion for Children International organisation (WCCCI) who praised the woman whose pioneering efforts were the launch-pad for their movement, which she formed in honour of the Dalai Lama in 1997. In 2006, Mrs Williams captured worldwide headlines when she denounced US President George W Bush in front of an audience of hundreds of children at a forum in Brisbane City Hall in Australia on innocent casualties of the Iraq War. She said: "I have a very hard time with this word 'non-violence', because I don't believe that I am non-violent. Right now, I would love to kill George Bush. I don't know how I ever got a Nobel Peace Prize, because when I see children die the anger in me is just beyond belief. It's our duty as human beings, whatever age we are, to become the protectors of human life." *Ivan little writes for the "Belfast Telegraph*

QUEENSLAND Pax Christi Meetings Pax Christi Queensland

Contact: Pancras Jordan OP
0415 461 620

pancrasjordan@gmail.com

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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.

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