

DISARMING Pax Christi TIMES

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TROUBLE IN THE BORDERLANDS – ANATOMY OF A MULTILAYERED WAR

Fr. Justin Glyn SJ

While Poland has been lobbying hard for greater support of Ukraine in its ongoing conflict with Russia, there was an interesting moment on New Year's Day when deeper tensions surfaced which shed much light on the history of this conflict. Poland condemned the declaration by the Rada (the Ukrainian Parliament) of support for Stepan Bandera. Who?, you may ask. This piece tries to provide some context on Ukrainian history and Bandera's role and afterlife.

What's in a Name?

Borderlands is the literal translation of the name Ukraine. This area has been a locus of conflict between competing empires from at least the seventeenth century until the present day. The result has been a land of competing identities and allegiances marked out from each other in blood.

Until about 1900, the term Ukraine was used principally for the former Habsburg province of Galicia – incorporating parts of what are now eastern Poland, southern Belarus and western Ukraine – and the western territories of the Russian Empire, known variously as Novorossiya, Malorossiya and Tavrida. While both groups spoke different dialects of the same language, there were cultural, linguistic and ethnic dif-

ferences – exacerbated as boundaries between Poland, Austria, Prussia and Russia were drawn and redrawn. While there were movements for Ukrainian autonomy or independence within both East and West, these were not coordinated and the views differed widely – very broadly speaking, Easterners like the novelist Nikolai Gogol or the poet Taras Shevchenko (widely hailed as the father of the literary language) called for greater autonomy and better social conditions within the Russian Empire (Shevchenko had been a serf), while Galician writers like Ivan Franko and Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, called for a specifically ethnic state – excluding Poles, Jews, Hungarians and Russians.

Ukrainian Nationalisms

This awakening Ukrainian identity in east and west was complicated by the settlements at the end of World War I. After short-lived independence under German tutelage, a new Ukrainian Socialist Republic was formed as part of the USSR. At the end of the Russian Civil War, as part of Lenin's attempt to make each Soviet republic self-sufficient, the Ukrainian republic was drawn to include the overwhelmingly ethnic Russian areas of Kharkov, Odessa, Kher-son, Zaporozhia, Donetsk and Lugansk in the east and south.

(The latter two are known as the Donbas/Donbass – a contraction of the Ukrainian/Russian for Don Basin.) The largely Ukrainian areas of Galicia and Wolhynia remained with Poland – which refused to grant them any autonomy.

In the 1920s and 1930s, nationalism in Polish-held western Ukraine was increasingly influenced by similar ethno-nationalist movements in other countries, especially in Croatia, Italy and Nazi Germany. The Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), was founded in the early 1920s. It produced a "Decoloque of a Ukrainian Nationalist" in 1929, authored by Dmytro Dontsov, who penned much of the OUN's racial theory (which distinguished supposedly Aryan Ukrainians from "lesser races" like "Asiatic" Slavs or Jews) urging "hatred and deceit" of

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DISARMING TIMES

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enemies and "enslavement of foreigners".

Stepan Bandera himself, after a meteoric rise in the late 1920s, came to uncontested leadership in 1933. He continued to lead the OUN, despite his imprisonment for life by the Polish state in 1934 for coordinating the killing of the Polish interior minister, Bronisław Pieracki. After the German occupation of Poland in 1939, he was released and formed strong links with German military intelligence. With the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, the OUN proclaimed a Ukrainian State under Nazi tutelage:

1. *By the will of the Ukrainian people, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists under the direction of Stepan Bandera proclaims the formation of the Ukrainian State ...*
2. *In the western lands of Ukraine a Ukrainian Government is formed, which is subordinate to the Ukrainian National Government that will be formed in the capital of Ukraine – Kyiv.*

3. *The newly formed Ukrainian state will work closely with the National-Socialist Greater Germany, under the leadership of its leader, Adolf Hitler, which is forming a new order in Europe and the world and is helping the Ukrainian People to free itself from Moscovite occupation. The Ukrainian Peoples Army which has been formed on the Ukrainian lands, will continue to fight with the Allied German Army against Moscovite occupation for a sovereign and united State and a new order in the whole world...*

STEPAN BANDERA. GLORY TO UKRAINE.

While Bandera's love was not immediately requited – Hitler had him imprisoned as an *Ehregefängene* (honour captive – people who were allied but not immediately useful) to the Germans in late 1941, the OUN killed somewhere between 60,000 and 100,000 Poles and at least a similar number of Jews during World War 2. Many of his men joined the Galician SS – a Ukrainian division, which escaped denazification after the war by moving to allied countries, notably Canada where several monuments to its war dead exist. Towards the end of

the war, when Germany's fortunes were waning, Bandera was released to assist the retreating Nazis against the Soviet army. After the fall of the Nazis, Bandera lived in exile in Munich, his network supported by Western intelligence agencies, until his assassination by the KGB in 1959.

Post World War II Developments. After the War, the Yalta conference took the historic Polish lands of Galicia and Wolhynia (from which many Poles had been "cleansed" in the OUN pogroms of 1943) and gave them to the USSR (Ukraine) in exchange for lands in eastern Germany.

In general, post-War Western attempts to fan Ukrainian nationalism against the Soviets were unsuccessful – partly due to brutal Soviet repression and partly because Western agencies themselves were heavily infiltrated. During this time, Ukraine's boundaries shifted again with Khrushchev adding Crimea (taken from Turkey by Russia in the 1780s and with a largely Russian population) to Ukraine in 1954.

In the chaotic years after the fall of the USSR, political divisions hardened. Fascist movements like Right Sector and the Azov Battalion emerged – with expansive militias often sponsored by newly-minted oligarchs. Monuments to Bandera and the OUN appeared in the west, while the Party of Regions and the Communist Party represented those 40 per cent or so mainly in the south-east whose linguistic and cultural identity looked to Russia. Crimea staged two referenda in favour of closer relations with Russia – both ignored by the central government.

"Unprovoked" - Countdown to Invasion.

As I have written in *Eureka Street*, the Russian invasion of 2022 was not spontaneous. George Bush Jnr had, back in 2008, urged the expansion of NATO to include Ukraine – further violating promises made by the US to Gorbachev that the alliance would not expand "one inch" eastwards. A democratically elected (if corrupt) president, Viktor Yanukovich, was ousted by force with Western backing in 2014 and the eastern Ukrainians (the "Donetsk and

and Lugansk Peoples Republics") who had responded to this by declaring independence from the central government were met with military force. Ukraine banned opposition parties and legally restricted the use of Russian in all except domestic settings.

While two peace arrangements (the Minsk Accords) in 2014 and 2015 promised relief to the violence, these collapsed, unimplemented, over succeeding years. Last year, in a development which further poisons the air, Ukraine and Western parties stated that they only intended these agreements to buy the Ukrainian state time to build up forces for forcible reincorporation of Donbass.

Another illusory ray of hope was provided by the election of the tragic figure of Wolodymyr Zelensky. Formerly an actor and comedian, he walked a fine line to get where he is. A Russian-speaker, in 2019, he stood on a platform of peace and reconciliation. While his father was Jewish, he has spoken of Stepan Bandera as "a hero for a certain part of Ukrainians...one of those who defended the freedom of Ukraine." Ultimately, the triangulation failed. In an emotional encounter with fascist militias soon after his election, he was told by Dmytro Yarosh (head of the Right Sector), "If he betrays Ukraine, he will hang on some tree". Zelensky promptly backed down on his demand for a ceasefire.

Invasion and Aftermath

The Russian invasion, in theory at least, was in support of a plea for assistance by these two "Peoples Republics" of largely Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine which had unilaterally declared independence.

There is good reason to be cynical about this. Russia opposed similar justifications by the US of its own actions. Nevertheless, it is not unprecedented in international law. When the ICJ ruled against Russia in the case brought by Ukraine, it notably made no mention of its own previous judgment in the Kosovo case. The latter seems to permit military force in support of a unilateral recognition of independence as

legitimate self-determination – even against UN Security Council resolutions. In that case, too, an ethnic minority (Kosovo Albanians) unilaterally claimed independence from a larger entity (Yugoslavia). There, however, NATO backed the separatists and launched a war on Yugoslavia to support them.

This point is important because, while there is no doubt that Russia invaded and that that invasion has cost lives, the history above shows it did not attack a united country. As even Western outlets noted, many of the citizens of the areas taken by Russia see it as liberator, rather than occupier, see for example, France24's report.

In many ways, the fighting is a civil war between Russian speakers in Ukraine's South-East and the Ukrainian speakers of the North-West, with direct and proxy great power involvement imposed over it. The parties' narratives diverge accordingly. The Western Ukrainian narrative of Russian aggression in support of "terrorists" in the East who refuse allegiance to the central government fits with NATO's vision of itself as bulwark against Russian aggression. By contrast, the Eastern narrative of Kiev's oppression of Russian speakers following a NATO-backed coup ousting a legitimately elected leader in 2014 likewise gels with Russia's sense of itself of a nation under siege by an aggressively ever-expanding, anti-Russian, NATO which uses "Nazi" proxies to weaken Russia and encroach upon its legitimate borders.

To some extent, Western Ukrainian radicals have played into this – partly because most of the "muscle" needed to oust the Yanukovich government, came from the far right – as militia leaders have themselves boasted. Stepan Bandera's birthday, 1 January, was declared a memorial by the Ukrainian Rada (Parliament) in 2018 (setting the stage for the condemnation mentioned above), militia like Azov and Right Sector use symbols like the OUN blood and soil flag and the Nazi "Wolfsangel" and swastika. Opposition parties have been banned and their media shut-

tered. A Russian pronunciation of words with a distinctively Ukrainian pronunciation (notoriously "palyanitsya" – a type of bread) is used to justify public beatings or worse by pro-government militia.

Tragically, there is increasingly a religious dimension to this, too. Many in the West are Eastern Rite Catholics, while those in the East are largely Orthodox. Orthodox churches which remain in communion with the Moscow Patriarchate have been closed and their assets seized – most recently, the iconic Pechersky Lavra, the largest monastery complex in Kyiv. A Rada bill would ban the Orthodox Church in communion with Moscow – notwithstanding its condemnation of Russia's actions.

The Russian attack, too, has hit hard. Casualties have been low compared to US wars (e.g. Iraq or Afghanistan). Still, thousands have lost their lives, millions been internally displaced or forced to flee and the Russian destruction of the power network has made large parts of the country hard to live in. Many towns are devastated.

Where to now?

While all sides are committed to war, it is hard to see any hope. The US has committed over \$100bn in funding. Thousands of troops have died on each side. Even if one side makes a breakthrough, it is by no means certain that the other will not escalate to preserve its gains. That, in turn, raises the spectre of two nuclear powers in direct conflict. The fissure between East and West in Ukraine is stronger than ever after intense propaganda on both sides. A peaceful, multi-ethnic state seems tragically distant.

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SLEEPWALKING ELITES

Marco d'Eramo

08 FEBRUARY 2023

When I studied modern history and the wars of the eighteenth century at school, it seemed absurd to me that hundreds of thousands of people had died for some remote fortress or a handful of small villages. Ten years ago, nobody could have imagined that Europe would risk such a catastrophe for the sake of the Donbass – a region that few of us would have been able to locate on a map. But now this is a plausible outcome of the constantly escalating conflict in Ukraine. Below is a list compiled by the State Department, of weapons systems, munitions, drones, missiles, etc. given by the United States to Ukraine over the course of the war. I provide it not out of fastidiousness, but to highlight the cumulative effect of arms shipment after arms shipment:

- Over 1,600 Stinger anti-aircraft systems;
- Over 8,500 Javelin anti-armour systems;
- Over 50,000 other anti-armour systems and munitions;
- Over 700 Switchblade Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems;
- 160 155mm Howitzers and up to 1,094,000 155mm artillery rounds;
- Over 5,800 precision-guided 155mm artillery rounds;
- 10,200 155mm rounds of Remote Anti-Armour Mine (RAAM) Systems;
- 100,000 rounds of 125mm tank ammunition;
- 45,000 152mm artillery rounds;
- 20,000 122mm artillery rounds;
- 50,000 122mm GRAD rockets;
- 72 105mm Howitzers and 370,000 105mm artillery rounds;
- 298 Tactical Vehicles to tow weapons;
- 34 Tactical Vehicles to recover equipment;
- 30 ammunition support vehicles;
- 38 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems and ammunition;
- 30 120mm mortar systems and approximately 166,000 120mm mortar rounds;
- 10 82mm mortar systems;
- 10 60mm mortar systems;
- 2,590 Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles;
- 545,000 rounds of 25mm ammunition;
- 120mm ammunition;
- Ten Command Post vehicles;
- One Patriot air defence battery and munitions;
- Eight National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) and munitions;
- Missiles for HAWK air defence systems;
- RIM-7 missiles for air defence;
- 12 Avenger air defence systems;
- High-speed Anti-radiation missiles (HARMs);
- Precision aerial munitions;
- 4,000 Zuni aircraft rockets;
- 20 Mi-17 helicopters;
- 31 Abrams tanks;
- 45 T-72B tanks;
- 109 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles;
- Over 1,700 High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs);
- Over 100 light tactical vehicles;
- 44 trucks and 88 trailers to transport heavy equipment;
- 90 Stryker Armoured Personnel Carriers;
- 300 M113 Armoured Personnel Carriers;
- 250 M1117 Armoured Security Vehicles;
- 580 Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAPs);
- Six armoured utility trucks;
- Mine clearing equipment and systems;
- Over 13,000 grenade launchers and small arms;
- Over 111,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition;
- Over 75,000 sets of body armour and helmets;
- Approximately 1,800 Phoenix Ghost Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems;
- Laser-guided rocket systems;
- Puma Unmanned Aerial Systems;
- 15 Scan Eagle Unmanned Aerial Systems;
- Two radars for Unmanned Aerial Systems;
- Unmanned Coastal Defence Vessels;
- Over 50 counter-artillery radars;
- Four counter-mortar radars;
- 20 multi-mission radars;
- Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems and equipment;
- Counter air defence capability;
- Ten air surveillance radars;
- Two harpoon coastal defence systems;
- 58 coastal and riverine patrol boats;
- M18A1 Claymore anti-personnel munitions;
- C-4 explosives, demolition munitions, and demolition equipment for obstacle clearing;
- Obstacle emplacement equipment;
- Tactical secure communications systems;
- Four satellite communications antennas;
- SATCOM terminals and services;
- Thousands of night vision devices, surveillance systems, thermal imagery systems, optics, and laser rangefinders;
- Commercial satellite imagery services;
- Explosive ordnance disposal equipment and protective gear;

The State Department goes on to say that *As of 9 September 2022, nearly 50 Allies and partner countries have provided security assistance to Ukraine. Among their many contributions, Allies and partners have delivered 10 long-range Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), 178 long-range artillery systems, nearly 100,000 rounds of long-range artillery ammunition, nearly 250,000 anti-tank munitions, 359 tanks, 629 armoured personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), 8,214 short-range air defence missiles, and 88 lethal UAVs. Since February 24, Allies and partners worldwide have provided or committed over \$13 billion in security assistance.*

Some may notice that the list doesn't specify exactly how many 'Puma Unmanned Aerial Systems' have been provided, nor does it provide any precise information on the quantity of several other pieces of military equipment. We can see that the 31 Abrams tanks, object of much discussion, aren't in fact the first tanks sent to Ukraine; 41 recycled ex-Soviet T-72Bs had already been sent, along with 1,700 Humvees and 109 Bradley Fighting Vehicles (not to mention naval drones). Faced with this avalanche of armaments, why is nobody talking about the profits of the defence industry? In the past, arms dealers would have been denounced for harvesting the spoils of war. Today, the *Financial Times* merely complains that US suppliers are reaching the limits of their productive capacities and would struggle to meet demand if another front was to open. An incredible torpor has taken hold of Western public opinion. 'Peace-washing' is the foreign-policy hawk's new pastime: accelerating the war through the ever-increasing provision of weapons is seen as the best way to accelerate peace – because, in the absence of those arms, Russia would supposedly invade the Baltic States, followed by Poland and Finland. Bombs and tanks are seen as essential to curb a dreaded Muscovite imperialism, even though the repeated failure of Russian offensives has undermined any notion of its might, and Russia's GDP remains

inferior to that of semi-peripheral countries like Italy.

What seems to have come back into fashion, at least in the US, is the military-Keynesianism Michael Klare has taught us so much about: the revival of the economy through war. It evokes the first two years of WWI, those months in which the US officially sat on the fence, furnishing the arsenals of the European powers locked in battle against the central powers (Germany, the Habsburg Empire, and later the Ottoman Empire), and witnessed the evisceration of the planetary supremacy of the British Navy, before intervening once the enemy was practically exhausted.

Much like today, the US extracted profit from a war fought on a faraway continent (a situation that was to recur with the European and Asian theatres of WWII). Then, as now, there's something particularly vile about the US telling its proxy warriors: *we must be united in the defence of democracy and freedom against authoritarianism; we'll arm you, but you do the dying.*

The similarities don't stop there. The strongest resemblance between past and present lies in the elite somnambulism bringing us to the brink of world war and nuclear holocaust. I'm referring here to a work – often cited but rarely read – by the Australian historian Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (2013). The most charitable way to explain Joe Biden's assertion that sending tanks to Ukraine 'is not an offensive threat to Russia', is that he's become a Clarkian sleepwalker. Either that, or he is just brazenly, criminally reckless. Of course, the function of the media should be to underscore the potential consequences of such actions; but even the most respectable publications are currently engaged in out-hawking one another. On 30 January, *Foreign Affairs* published what looked like a promising article by Michael McFaul, the former US ambassador to Russia, entitled 'How To Get A Breakthrough In Ukraine'. The subtitle, 'The Case against Incrementalism,' was even more encouraging. Was this, at last, an argument against escalation

from a uniquely cool-headed outlet? Forget it. McFaul's point was that US should halt the gradual provision of arms and instead unload a massive amount of cutting-edge weaponry on Ukraine in the hope of securing a crushing victory. While conceding that 'there are risks to providing more and better weapons', he noted that these were outweighed by the 'risks of not doing so'.

What are the risks of escalation? Last May, *I wrote for Sidecar that Contrary to what common sense would dictate, the stalling of Putin's military advance has actually undermined the hopes for peace. The Kremlin could never expose itself to Russian public opinion and sit down for talks without having achieved any of its war aims, for that would highlight the failure of its offensive. And NATO, for its part, has no interest in de-escalating the conflict. It will not spare Russia from punishment, either for its atrocities in Bucha or its insubordination before the US hegemon . . .* As Russia comes unstuck in Ukraine, its enemies are no longer compelled to negotiate; they therefore become more intransigent and change the negotiating terms, leading Russia to intensify its efforts, and so on. The first victim of this cycle is the Ukrainian people. The outcome of stalling negotiations is the shelling of more cities and the death of more civilians. The West will continue to trumpet its values over their corpses (unless it decides to intervene directly and trigger a nuclear war). To paraphrase an old saying: it's easy to play the hero when someone else's neck is on the line.

Compared to the spring of last year, positions are even more entrenched. For Putin the war has become a matter of life and death, with Russia's very existence on the line. The proof of this lies in the position taken up by the ECR Group, the conservative bloc in the European Parliament, which claimed in a statement on 31 January that the only possible outcome of the war was Russia's break-up into different states:

It is naive to think that the Russian Federation can remain within the same constitutional and territorial

framework. Taking into account the national and ethnic map of the territories of the Russian Federation, we should discuss the prospects for the creation of free and independent states in the post-Russian space, as well as the prospects for their stability and prosperity.

The more likely this result, the more dangerous the 'Russian bear' will become. The US, meanwhile, is growing increasingly belligerent – not only towards Moscow, but towards Beijing. Let's not forget that Washington has initiated a de facto technological World War on China – with the head of the US Air Mobility Command, Miki Minihan predicting an all-out war in 2025.

Numbed by relentless propaganda, public opinion finds itself in a state of political catalepsy. Everyone since Dr Johnson has repeated the axiom that truth is the first casualty of war, but few have stopped to ask which

truths are being killed in *this* war. The Russians have surely been asked to swallow many lies. But what fables have we been told? For months, we heard that the Russians had bombarded a nuclear plant occupied by the Russian army: that is, that they had attacked themselves.

It was also suggested that they blew up their own gas pipeline last September. Only the Russians bomb infrastructure and civilians, force young men into battle and censor the realities of war – never our side. Once it was usual to discuss the role of 'embedded' correspondents on the frontlines. Now we unflinchingly accept their recruitment, replete with helmets and bulletproof vests.

As I'll never tire of saying: in war, the law of the excluded middle does not apply. It's simply not the case that if one side is wrong, the other must be right; the negation of a falsehood is not by definition true.

Everyone can be in the wrong, everyone can be lying. NATO's aggression and expansionism doesn't turn Putin into an innocent little lamb. And Russia's unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine doesn't absolve NATO of its responsibility in producing the conflict. In today's world, we rely on elites – technocrats, cognitive aristocracy – to pilot us through perilous waters with their superior wisdom. But what does this stratum of decision-makers really know? Judging from the shipwreck they're heading towards at top speed, the answer is: not much.

Read on: Susan Watkins' Five Wars In One, NLR 137.

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LEST WE FORGET, REMEMBERING AFGHANISTAN

Deborah Storie

Anzac Day @ St Paul's Cathedral, 25 April 2023

Readings, John 1:1–14; Isaiah 2:2–5

Lest we forget . . . Jesus did not grow up in a safe and stable environment. He did not live, work and die in a happy-ever-after make-believe world in which wars were just and only those who deserved it suffered.

Lest we forget . . . Jesus, a child refugee whose parents fled a murderous regime. A somewhat older child living under military occupation. A teenager watching his parents' courage in adversity, learning to keep his head down and mouth shut. The prophet killed because he would not keep silent in the face of injustice and oppression. The Son of God killed because he refused to call on the legions of warrior angels at his disposal (Matt 26:52–54).

Lest we forget . . . Christ Jesus rose from the dead in a world that, to all appearances, hadn't changed in the three days since his death. Inhabitants of first-century Palestine lived in the shadow of death. They walked in the darkness of dispossession, violation and humiliation, im-

prisonment and enslavement, fear and war. Death and darkness, that was their present. It was not, they believed, their future.

Their hope, remembered and enacted through Scripture, festival and prayers, was hope born of the knowledge that God had acted in the past, that God was acting even now, and that God would act again. No question: God would save God's people. The burning questions: When? Through whom? How?

* * * *

And so the Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word.

The Word was with God.

The Word was God.

In the Word was life, and that life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

* * * *

Lest we forget . . . Two-thousand years later much of the world still lives in the shadow of death. Too many ordinary families still walk in the darkness of fear.

Yet we confess:

In the Word is life, that life, the light of all, shines in the darkness.

And the darkness has not overcome.

* * * *

This is a Service of Lament, Repentance and Hope. My invitation to participate came as an invitation to share stories of people overtaken by war, a war in which Australia participated from the start.

I first lived in Afghanistan before the international military intervention when Afghans still welcomed foreigners as guests. I spent the first six years in rural villages. That shaped my perspective. During that and later seasons, I worked with humanitarian agencies that were intentionally impartial in the conflict. That shaped my perspective too.

We most often hear from educated urban or diaspora Afghans, and we respect and honour them. Yet

respect and honour them. Yet half the population is illiterate, three-quarters reside in rural areas, and less than fifteen percent use the internet.

I am not Afghan. I do not speak for Afghanistan or any of its peoples. I share the following conversation fragments and memories to resist the rhetoric of fear and the militarization of international relations, and to encourage the way of peace, the way of Jesus.

* * * *

Ten stories encompassing thirty years

1993, Mazar-e-Shariff. Each Friday, a friend sends a message telling me what parts of town to avoid. Public amputations and executions are scheduled on Fridays. Brutal justice was not invented by Taliban.

1996, a Hazara village. A messenger interrupts an adult literacy party: "Taliban have taken the town." A voice breaks the silence, "We are dead men." The village locks down. Wheat fields stand unharvested. Flocks are not taken out to graze. Children do not play outside.

I visit mothers mourning sons on military duty. They don't wait for news; they know that their boys are dead. Then, one by one, the lads return, each with a story. "Taliban were everywhere . . . and I was in uniform. I crouched, unmoving, behind a wall until . . . I coughed! I was terrified, but they gave me bread and water and told me when it was safe to leave. The Talibs I met, they don't want to hurt us. They're village boys, like us."

I sit with neighbours huddled inside. There are no phones, no radios, no one comes or goes, yet suddenly we know that Taliban is looting neighbouring villages. Only later do we discover that no villages were looted, no men killed, no women violated, no children abducted. Fear breeds fear.

1997, remote mountain communities describe their lives. "During peace, they take half our grain, the best of our animals, our rugs and yoghurt, our wood and

trees. They take our sons as labourers and our daughters as maids. They take everything, give nothing back, and expect us to be grateful. During war, the government cannot tax us, landlords cannot collect. If we're unlucky, we may be looted, our crops burnt, our sons killed. But, God willing, fighting won't come our way. We may lose one or two sons as soldiers but, God willing, we'll feed and clothe our other children. During peace, the cities grow fat while we grow food and starve. During war, no-one is fat, but we starve last. We long for peace, but not any peace."

2005, village women reminisce about the Taliban years. "We sent our husbands and sons out to work each morning confident that they would return come evening, confident that we wouldn't be looted and raped in their absence. That was then, not now." Women's experiences and perspectives vary with class, geography, language and culture, and their lived experience under different regimes

2006, a rural elder speaks. "From my youth, my weapon never left my shoulder. It was part of me. You see this man beside me. He is closer than a brother. Yet, with a gun on my shoulder and a gun on his, we were one against the other, forever trying to get each other in our sights. I would have killed him if I could; he would have killed me. People say many things about Taliban, but I say this. When Taliban disarmed us, my neighbour became my brother again. We are no longer one against the other. Without guns, we live together, side by side."

2007, a village in Eastern Afghanistan. "It's always the same. Those in power hold the cities and the plains, the resistance hide in the mountains, we're caught in between. We risk our lives to plough, tend sheep, collect water. Women and children, they are not safe inside or out. Young men? The army conscripts them by day; the resistance take them by night. Either way, our sons are killed and maimed in wars that have nothing to do with us."

2015, a US gunship shells a hospital in Qunduz. Overnight, Af-

ghanistan becomes the most dangerous place for humanitarians to work. A quiet exodus of senior Afghan staff ensues: "When even hospitals are attacked . . ."

Frank speech is a luxury few Afghans can afford. As they say, *AsmAn rA sail kO, lungI buposh*: "Look at the sky, put on your turban." In other words, do and say whatever it takes to reassure whichever drones, satellites, planes, soldiers or spies are watching.

2017, a watchman's farewell.

You are sad to leave. You wish you could stay. I would not stay one minute if I had any way to leave. I love my country but it breaks my heart. All I ask is to eat one meal without worry, to sleep one night without fear. You speak of hope, yet without peace and justice there is no hope. You say that God is kind and you are right: God is kind. Yet, for all our prayers we see little sign of God's kindness. How long must we wait?

2021, the international military withdraws; Taliban controls the cities.

I feel the panic of the crowds at Kabul airport. I feel the dismay of Kabuli and expatriate Afghans. But theirs are not the only stories. I am grateful that Biden had the courage to end this unnecessary, unwinnable war. A hard call. It went against military advice, cut across defence industry interests, admitted that promises could not be kept, and acknowledged that lives had been lost and lives and landscapes devastated . . . for what?

This year, 2023. *Afghan friends and colleagues, some in hiding, seek asylum, their lives on hold, imagined futures dissolving before their eyes.*

Drought and sanctions drag on. Famine bites as international sanctions against the government and constraints imposed by that government frustrate humanitarian assistance. Yet, public statements and reports never tell the whole story. Whispers of hope arrive, good news spread underground, news I cannot, must not, share. In times like these, silence keeps hope alive.

* * * *

Lest we forget . . . It is not our place to dictate or shape Afghanistan's future. As outsiders, we need to walk humbly and respectfully alongside other countries and their peoples, affording them time and space to negotiate their own futures. It is our place –our calling as Christians – to live and work for peace and justice, resisting the rhetoric of vengeance, retribution and pre-emption. Similar impulses start wars and drive other forms of terror, escalating and perpetuating cycles of violence. Flooding the world with weapons neither builds peace nor makes us safer.

There is a better way. The way Jesus taught and showed us. It is a costly way, the way of the cross. As someone once put it,

*"In so far as it depends on you,
live at peace with all . . .*

*Do not be overcome by evil;
overcome evil with good"* (Rom
12:18, 21)

Some dismiss Jesus' teaching as naïve and idealistic, not fit for purpose in a world of real and present danger. They are wrong. Yes, the technology has changed, ramping up the violence, devastating broader landscapes and ever more lives. But the fundamentals, root causes and consequences, darkness and light, the things that make for peace, remain.

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for
they shall be called
the children of God"* (Matt 5:9).

*"Love your enemies and pray
for those who persecute you"*
(Matt 5:44).

*"Do not be overcome by evil; over-
come evil with good."*

The prophetic vision inspires us "swords into ploughshares" and "spears into pruning hooks"; nations neither "taking up weapons" nor "training for war" (Isa 2:4). Are we willing to learn and pursue "the things that make for peace" (Rom 14:19)?

*The light shines in the darkness
Darkness will not, cannot, overcome.*

*"Come, descendants of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the
Lord"* (Isa 2:5).

*Rev. Dr. Deborah Storie is Senior
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narian, and in humanitarian and
community development in Afghani-
stan. She lectures in New Testament
at Stirling Theological College, Uni-
versity of Divinity and is an Honorary
Research Associate with Whitley Col-
lege.*

THIS IS MY BODY; IT IS ALL I HAVE.

Glenn Loughrey

When you have been completely dispossessed of all that has meaning you have no-thing left but your body. You have no voice, no language, no country, no hope – all has been taken from you by those who possess you and you are left with only what you have on – your body.

You wear your body as both a form of defence and of attack against those who continue to commit genocide through policies designed to embed our hopelessness and voicelessness. We are all people of place and context and once the connection to these has been severed without any hope of reconnection, a deep sense of powerlessness sets in. You are powerless to be who you are when you are taken from the place that defines your language, tradition, lore, and spirituality.

This is not just the experience of first-generation exiles but is handed on in the DNA of those who follow. Cross-generational trauma or powerlessness continues and is experienced both consciously and subconsciously by those who come later.

Some know why they are the way they are; others are never sure. They just know the shame of being wrong, not grounded, not belonging, and don't know where it comes from.

Your body carries the memory of a past home and desires to return. It carries the memory of the hurt and grief involved in losing such a precious possession and strives to be heard as you wish to be heard. Yet you have no voice, it has been stolen and given to another to speak on your behalf, to decide if you are worthy to be heard, and when and on what matters you will be heard.

You are in exile, not heard, not seen and invisible to the rest of society which only sees you as an issue to be resolved and not as a person to be respected, not as a person with a voice. What do you do with the trauma, all the grief and loss, all the anger and anxiety if there is no one who recognises you as a real human, not an object to be used to fund the Aboriginal industry – welfare, medical, prison, police and more? The statistics on prison numbers and children in out-of-home care remind us

that our bodies fund an entire industry for non-Aboriginal institutions to profit from.

It is our bodies and our children's bodies that society values, not because we are human but because they can be used to fund the 'helpers' it has been decided we need. It is our bodies that universities and private schools seek to black-clad their profit-making exercises when It is our bodies and our children's bodies that society values, not because we are human but because they can be used to fund the 'helpers' it has been decided we need. It is our bodies that universities and private schools seek to black-clad their profit-making exercises when

black-clad their profit-making exercises when when our young men and women, run fast, kick goals, score tries or achieve a feat that makes us proud.

These are the same bodies heckled loudly and without fear with racial abuse, or whitesplained to when you think they need white knowledge to put them straight, or question the colour of their skin, or how they got their degree or house, or challenge their lived experience with your considered opinion. And more.

These are the same bodies who are blamed for the overcrowding in communities, poor diets while they are being charged exorbitant prices for fresh food, and living in grossly substandard housing without proper facilities – no fresh water, roads and more. Somehow these bodies who are the victims of dispossession become the cause of the situation they find themselves in.

My body is my country. Sovereignty is relational – it is bound by my relationship to country and kin. It is a sacred bond that is never to be relinquished or taken. It is never to be given up or left behind. It cannot be cancelled from the story of my life because it is me – all of me. Despite being ripped from the bosom of my mother by colonial invasion and kept in exile by neo-colonialism I remain Wiradjuri at my centre.

It is to your body you retreat when there is nowhere else to go. Your body becomes the battleground, the last gathering place in your and your country's fight for survival. It is all you have:

- To protest with, to shout aloud the pain within you and country. *Persona nullius* means you are not heard or seen and therefore do not exist as a human being, only as a chattel in a possessed land.

- To identify you as existing, as being here – a person, invisible and unseen – but a person, nonetheless. A person without agency for the power to define who has agency now belongs to those who possess you and all that has meaning for you.

- To touch the air, to feel the subtlety of existence and resistance, to take away the claws of power tearing at any hope remaining in a life

without purpose or possibility other than becoming another cross in the graveyard, another notch on the colonial matrix of power.

- To offer to society, to add value, to be a part of the Holy Grail of economy and genocide. It has value when it is used to provide collateral for the profiteering of those who capitalise on our destituted existence, the creation of the very system they worship. It is not ours, never was, and never will be.

- To communicate your protest to those who are deaf to your words, blind to your predicament and ignorant of their place in your non-existence. They listen when you self-harm, abuse alcohol, act violently to those close to you and steal from those who first stole from us. These are not acts without meaning. They are the cry of the powerless and demand a different response than paternalism and patriarchal universalism. They ask for eyes that see, ears that hear, and hands that free.

- To grieve for your Mother, country from which you have become estranged, from whom you have been stolen and for whom you pine. You, like water, have a perfect memory, you always desire to return to where you once ran free. Nothing can sate that desire.

As we come to Holy Week and the Easter Triduum (the three days of Easter) we witness the power and importance of the body in the triumph of Jesus. Jesus is a member of an invaded and occupied people. Power and might now sit in the hands of the invaders and those who have collaborated to retain their power over ordinary citizens.

People live in fear of those whose brutal rule sees people crucified, imprisoned, and taxed out of existence. They watch as the religious and the powerful capitalize on the situation to maintain their institutions and their traditional place in society. They find themselves powerless, unable to change either the system under which they live or to rid themselves of the Romans and their corrupt representatives.

Jesus protests the injustices through his body, the incarnated body of an ordinary citizen. He remains from his

birth to his death fully connected to his body in relation to all other bodies he shared space with. His miracles and acts of prophecy and teaching are rooted in his body and the bodies of those around him. In the Sermon on the Mount, he desires to be bodily alone only to find himself surrounded by bodies in need.

Wherever he goes it is his body people come to see, touch and witness in action. It is his body that acts when he clears the temple, challenges those who try and trap him, and weeps when friends die. His birth and baptism, like his death and resurrection, are all acts of the body.

His body was all that Jesus had to offer on behalf of a dispossessed people. His body was all he had to identify with them in their pain and their forlorn but undying hope of rescue. It was in and through his body that Jesus defied the powerful and the wilful, ultimately giving up his body to their torture in order to redeem his people.

Jesus is emblematic of the challenge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who protest their situation, the blindness and deafness of society through tortured bodies. Bodies beset by the ravages of dispossession resulting in the stereotypical typecasting of those who do to want to see. The harm we do to our and others' bodies is a desperate cry to be seen and heard, it is our protest against the wilful destruction and genocide that continues.

We await the third day, a day when our bodies and our country will be healed.

*Canon Associate Professor Uncle Glenn Loughrey is a Wiradjuri man, priest, artist and author. In 2021, He became the first Indigenous canon in the 142-year history of St Paul's Cathedral, He has been seconded to enable further reflection on the **Statement from the Heart** across the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. His Paintings can be viewed at the Murnong Gallery, 100High St., Glen Iris Vic.*

Book Review: ACTS OF CRUELTY

Reviewed by Ian Kerridge

ACTS OF CRUELTY

Sister Aileen Crowe, Palaver,
Melbourne 2022

All Australians know about our approach to so-called 'unauthorised maritime arrivals' seeking asylum in Australia - to 'boat people'. All Australians know something about mandatory detention, about offshore processing, about refugee swap-deals, about the Pacific Solution and about Operation Sovereign Borders. But while Australians know about Nauru and Manus Island the experience of people who apply for refugee status after they have arrived in Australia, with visas, and by authorized means is much less widely known about.

Aileen Crowe's remarkable and harrowing book - *Acts of Cruelty* - examines the system of immigration laws and policies faced by refugee claimants who arrive in Australia by plane with a valid visa.

Aileen brings the credibility, rigor and humanity fomented by working for decades with people seeking asylum, as a nun, advocate, companion and researcher, to bear on this important issue.

Aileen does this in two ways - firstly by staying close to people and to families who are already vulnerable, threatened, and traumatized, as they are processed by Australia's immigration system. By treating them with respect and by telling their stories and describing their trauma, their suffering, their frustration, anger, fears, and sorrow. But Aileen is more than simply a storyteller as, while she is quick to note that she is not a lawyer, she also describes in *Acts of Cruelty* the various obstacles that the legal system places in the way of people seeking to stay in Australia.

What *Acts of Cruelty* reveals, through stories, through text and even through graphics, is a system that is not only highly complex, arcane and labyrinthine, but also contradictory, capricious, inefficient, underfunded and unpredictable.

Indeed, the layers of complexity, and the opportunities for politisation, discrimination, conflict of interest, and random acts of cruelty are almost impossible to explain, let alone justify. How does one explain a system that preferences negative outcomes; that provides opportunity for political assessment over assessment based on merit; that is likely to be more, or less, successful, depending upon one's ethnicity or religion; that requires payment for processing or legal representation but that doesn't allow applicants to work in bona fide employment; that isolates people from the communities that may support and nourish them; and that requires that applicants pay fees for simple community services, like schooling, that no Australian parent must pay.

In each chapter Aileen describes in accessible terms the processes surrounding initial applications for a protection visa to the Department of Home Affairs, for making appeals to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or the Immigration Assessment Authority, for requesting judicial review at Federal and Family Courts, and for seeking ministerial intervention are all carefully documented. Importantly, Aileen also describes the *experience* of these structures and processes - the waiting, the disappointment and rejection - whether that comes in a brown envelope or managerial email.

In doing so, *Acts of Cruelty* makes abundantly clear that the processes that have been created for managing immigration are manifestly inadequate, may leave people in limbo for years, and have created a backlog of applications that runs to 10s of thousands of people.

And here's the point, these applicants are people.

And this is one of the central messages of *Acts of Cruelty* - Australia's asylum system is fundamentally dehumanizing - it reduces people to objects through its bureaucratic process, and its language of appli-

cants and delegates, processes and systems. People who, as Aileen notes, are not objects without a name, devoid of deep feelings, or without agency, but people like you and me - a neighbour, a person in the checkout queue at the supermarket, the driver at the traffic lights.

This is a deeply disturbing book. And one of profound importance. It describes the personal, social, political and ethical consequences of a system that is breathtakingly inequitable, unjust and inhuman. It also describes how governments of all ideologies, acting in our name, can mine the depths of Australia's xenophobia and exclusion to advance their own political interests. And in so doing create extraordinary suffering.

But this book is also uplifting because it describes the possibility and impact of compassion and the ways in which one woman - using what she describes herself as her 'dominant, white woman, Catholic nun power' - can assist people, real people, negotiate the arcane bureaucracy of Australia's immigration system and find a home.

And finally, this book is incendiary because it reminds us that, as is the case with our treatment of First nation's peoples, we cannot look away, we cannot deny the culpability of our governments, but we also cannot ignore our own role in the creation of systemic injustices.

Ian Kerridge is Professor of Bioethics and Medicine Sydney Health Ethics, School of Public Health and Northern Clinical School

Acts of Cruelty can be ordered from Amazon, www.amazon.com.au/ for \$13.84

From the Publisher, Palaver, www.palaver.com/order-form for \$29.99 or from <https://www.booktopia.com.au/> for \$29.84 postage not included or from Readings or Dymock's Bookshops for \$29.99

Book Review: SACRED NATURE

Reviewed by Harry Kerr

Sacred Nature, by Karen Armstrong, The Bodley Head, London 2022

The climate crisis shows us that the natural cycles of our planet are being undermined by human activity. It challenges people of faith and others to ask fundamental questions about the nature of our world and humanity's place within it. Most religions believe that humanity has come from creation and indeed is part of it. How then have we got it so wrong? Karen Armstrong needs no introduction to most readers of *Disarming Times*. She is the author of numerous books on religious affairs, including *The Case for God, A History of God, The Battle for God, Holy War*. In her writings she seeks to examine the fundamental questions about human existence which are implicit in all religions and challenges believers and non believers to come out of their comfort zone and confront fundamental realities which unite rather than divide them. Armstrong shows how Christian belief in particular has developed a distorted view of the natural world. We have come to believe in God in a far off heaven who expresses Godself in relation to humanity through Jesus Christ. Earth is seen as being inert, dead and there for humanity to exploit. Reality therefore is limited to what humanity can see and experience. Faith relates only to the God above and is expressed in pleasing God through right behaviour. This is a relatively modern understanding, probably going back to St. Thomas Aquinas and his contemporaries who sought to marry Christianity with the teaching of Aristotle which depended on reason and logic. Yet Aquinas himself suggested that God was not confined to a supernatural heaven but was *present everywhere in everything*. This points us back to an earlier tradition in which perceives as God as creator who is wholly involved in God's creation and links God, humanity and creation in a creative partnership. Creation points us to God. The mys-

tery of creation invites us into the mystery of God. However this is only one side. It is not just about understanding. It is also about worship and awe in the presence of the divine.

Armstrong points out that we have become so focussed on reason and logic, on being able to calculate and explain reality in a logical manner. We see creation as something to be explained, harnessed and used without regard to the consequences.

We have overemphasised the scientific of creation at the expense of another deeper understanding expressed though *myth*. Professor Brian Cox's programmes on the boundaries of the universe, fascinate us by his journeys into the depths of the universe and his discoveries about how it all fits together. However he himself admits that there are more questions than answers. He comes to a point where a scientific understanding can go no further but there are questions about the nature an origin of the universe which are simply beyond us not just because our scientific understanding is insufficiently developed but because a scientific understanding us unable to deal with the questions. *Myth* is commonly understood to refer to stories which are not "true" as opposed to rational theories and explanation which can be demonstrated and proved. Armstrong shows how so far from being untrue, myth points us to truths which are beyond rationality, truths about humanity God and creation which cannot be proved but which are beyond rational understanding. Myths are stories, expressed in ritual about how the world came to be, about who humanity is in relation to the world and to the creator, about why their is conflict, about love and betrayal, about life and death. They are not factually true. They are true at a much deeper level.

Armstrong examines creation stories across a spectrum of faith and finds in them a common thread, that the divine is present in the natural world. The natural world is not dead. The

divine is present in the same way as the divine is present in humanity. Different faiths express this in different ways. The common thread is that the world is a holy place. It leads us to awe and worship in the presence of divine. In the Christian tradition this is best expressed in the letter to the Colossians: *Christ is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

We relate to the world not to use or exploit but where we meet the divine in worship

Armstrong goes on to explore some of the basic themes of religion: sacrifice, self giving, love and thanksgiving in terms of our relationship to God-in creation across the spectrum of faiths.

This book is a timely challenge to our faith and understanding as we face today's challenges of life on Earth

\$28.50 + postage from Booktopia
\$35 from Dymock's or Readings

The Pax Christi Victoria Environmental Theology Group is beginning a study of *Sacred Nature*. We meet on the fourth Wednesday of each month at the Bridgine Ministry Centre, 54 Beaconsfield Parade, Albert Park 12.30-2.30 pm All welcome. BYO lunch

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: Pam Nair (Secretary): 07 3711 3273 pamnair@hotmail.com

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NOT WAR –
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ALP National Conference,
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Public Forum

NO
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Friday 23 June @ 6 pm Trades
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Speakers:

PETER GARRETT -
former Environment Minister

ARTHUR RORRIS
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Dr MARGIE BEAVIS
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for the Prevention of War.

Free ticket:

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. Direct transfer to Pax Christi Victoria Inc **BSB 063-161 Account number 00900935**

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