ZADOK 168 SPRING
PERSPECTIVES 2025

CRONULLA RIOTS RECKONINGS:

MULTICULTURALISM 20 YEARS ON

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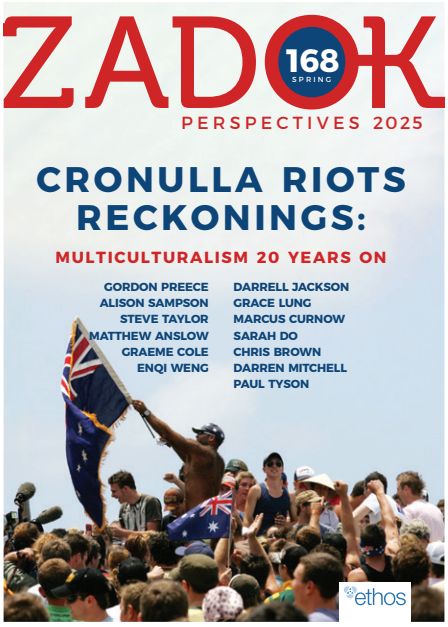

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'We Shall Fight Them on the Beaches': How Far Has Multiculturalism Come After 20 Years Since Cronulla's Race Riots?

Gordon Preece

We chose this topic a year ago in light of December 11's looming 20th anniversary of the Cronulla Riots. Shire boys Graeme Cole and I thought the anniversary provided a good historical measure of how effective multiculturalism has been in Australia since Whitlam's government adopted the term in the mid 70s, when Zadok was founded. The key speech was written by high-level public servant and Zadok member Jim Houston OAM for then immigration minister Al Grasby. Houston later became leader of Australian Anglican and ecumenical multicultural mission (see his *A Multicultural Odyssey*). It can, therefore, help measure the past 50 years of *Zadok* and how seriously we have taken one of our prevalent themes, Multiculturalism.

Even after 20 years an epochal event like the Cronulla Riots is bound to attract a range of strong feelings. The authors of '*We Shall Fight Them on the Beaches': Protesting White Cultures of Possession* (see note below) see the riots stemming from a white male, patriarchal and colonial 'rationality of possession'. That is certainly one aspect, but another non-white, Muslim mentality of possession, particularly regarding women, may have been at work. Its honour-shame ethic seemed to collide with Australian egalitarianism, including how much you can bare your body. There were many stories of Lebanese and others seeing and describing Anglo-Australian women as sluts. And ironically to our understanding, women's modesty in burkas or seeking separated time at pools may be felt by some as a significant equalising protection from the eyes of men. These are but two of the moral stereotypes our writers tackle, some engaging the riots specifically, others measuring multicultural issues with a wider lens.

I wonder what my adopted Indigenous cousins from the Shire's Kareena Hostel would have thought of the two rival forms of *possession*. A rare Indigenous man in the Shire said in truth after the riots: 'I'm the only real Australian here'.

Our columnists kick off with **Alison Sampson writing provocatively on eugenics in What We Learn from the Skulls**. Then Kiwi **Steve Taylor's A Riotous Life** plays with crowd psychology research and Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem, thinking theologically about crowds and protest – relevant to the Cronulla Riots and to current global mass protests.

Matthew Anslow provides a helpful introduction to Sutherland Shire Life where he lived and ministered, seeking to prevent the Riots as a high-school chaplain. He is honest, humble and critical of the Shire's racism, and his own.

Graeme Cole, who writes 'Surf and Turf: Reckonings of the Cronulla Riots 20 years on, still lives and surfs nearby and had a too close for comfort view of the riots and its violence. His personal, proximate and Christian contexts provide a deeper and different perspective than is common.

Singaporean Australian Academic Enqi Weng shares her recent well-received Ridley College Annual Mission lecture on Australian Churches and intercultural communities struggling to understand and welcome each other.

Her correspondent, Whitley College principal **Darrell Jackson**, offers an apt spacial typology of this struggle in **From arms-length toward embrace**.

Director of The Centre for Asian Christianity Brisbane School of Theology **Grace Lung, in Multiculturalism and the Chinese**, seeks to overcome some of the caution and misunderstanding between Anglos, Chinese Immigrants and in-between, Australian-born Chinese (or ABCs).

Marcus Curnow, a Baptist pastor with a passion for the vulnerable, traces efforts at cricket reconciliation with Indians after the murder of an Indian student in my old parish of Yarraville in 2009, in **Remembering the Stump**.

Sarah Do, a Vietnamese Baptist Director of TransFormation Programs, Whitley College, interviews Marbuen Diaz, a Filipino Australian pastor with 25+ years intercultural experience, including around Cronulla in **Envisioning and Engaging Multiculturalism**.

Our last author **Chris Brown** from Queensland meditates on **Christ Among the Ruins**, the title of a Lutheran Pastor's sermon now book, bearing witness to the Cross in the genocidal horror of Gaza. I was able to hear the pastor's moving keynote online at the Global Public Theology Network in September.

Darren Mitchell's movie review of *The Story of Souleymane* maintains his magnificent standards. His depiction of the frenetic life of an undocumented bike deliverer caught between his ailing mother and the lover cannot provide for compared to another suitor back in Senegal, is a poignant portrait of love in anguish and precarity.

Finally, **Paul Tyson's review of Musa al-Gharbi's *We have never been woke***, provides much-needed nuance concerning engaging across cultures and ideas.

In our Papers **Dzavid Haveric addresses the Disease of Islamophobia**, which, apart from the recent Federal Government Report seems to get little attention compared to anti-Semitism. Finally, Canadian **James Bruyn's From Canaan to Babylon** charts a biblical theology of work.

We hope that reading on this critical topic, Multiculturalism and the Cronulla Riots, episode 2 in ABCTV's *I Was Actually There* series (see iView), will not only challenge you but encourage you with the hopeful multicultural and reconciliatory work many Christians and fellow Australians are engaging in.

GORDON PREECE
is Director of Ethos and Commissiong Editor of Zadok: EA Centre for Christianity and Society.

Reference: '*We Shall Fight Them on the Beaches': Protesting White Cultures of Possession* (Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll), QUP.

What We Learn from the Skulls

Alison Sampson

I recently spent an afternoon at the Potter Museum at Melbourne University. There I drank in sixty thousand years of Australian art as curated by Marcia Langton. I danced with William Barak's figures and was entranced by Vicki West's bull kelp water carriers. I cheered on the Seven Sisters escaping Wadi Niru, an ancient story rendered fresh by the Tjanpi Desert Weavers. I was intrigued by the dialogue between early colonisers and the colonised, as artists from each side painted portraits of each other. Then I took a deep breath and entered the Scientific Racism room. There I was confronted by one of Julie Dowling's most powerful paintings, *The Pay-Back*; it is perfectly placed.

For in this room we have a brief history of the university's complicity in the eugenics movement. Senior members of the University of Melbourne arranged for the disinterment, theft, trade, dismemberment, measurement and cataloguing of thousands of Indigenous bodies, and they wrote papers and gave lectures on the so-called scientific results. Drawing on the discredited theory of phrenology, they unabashedly claimed that skull shape dictated intelligence, morals and character. They insisted that there is a thing called race that can be assessed by measuring people's bodies; according to their statistics, White people just happened to be vastly superior in every possible way.

These oh-so-convenient results would be laughable were they not so grotesque. These were not crackpot studies conducted in the shadows; they were published by public figures at a major university and shaped the national conversation. During this time, First Peoples were not considered to be fully human. They were spoken of in pejorative terms, treated like wildlife, and had very few protections under the law. It was not until the 1967 referendum that Indigenous people were counted in the population, and it was not until an adverse court judgement in 1985 that human remains began to be repatriated by the University. Even then, a second major collection of human remains stayed hidden in the bowels of the Anatomy Department for another twenty years.

Like lantana, we do not seem to be able to get rid of these attitudes even now, for this nation constantly judges people by their physical appearance. Popular commentators deny other people's identity based on the colour of their skin. The media goes wild with a trumped-up tale of African gangs terrorising Melbourne and, as a result, every dark-skinned young person is treated with hostility and suspicion. Northland Shopping Centre is picketed by neo-Nazis holding placards that reject Black people of African descent. A relative at my own dinner table spouts relentless racist generalisations and will not be silenced or challenged, and eight years of regional living taught me just how many people are utterly convinced of the superiority of White folk. Far from the inner-city bubble, I heard rednecks, liberals and oh-so-nice Christians constantly assume superiority on the basis of race. It was such a given that few were afraid to voice it, and they were bewildered when their assumptions were questioned or challenged. Back in Melbourne, I became attuned to White benevolence and its flip side, White frailty or defensiveness, which flies into action both in myself and others whenever White benevolence is called into question.

> **"SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE ARRANGED FOR THE DISINTERMENT, THEFT, TRADE, DISMEMBERMENT, MEASUREMENT AND CATALOGUING OF THOUSANDS OF INDIGENOUS BODIES..."**

It never seemed to occur to the eugenicists that digging up sacred burial grounds, or trading in human remains, or dismembering people and boiling them down to 'clean' their bones, or measuring skulls to assess criminality or hips to assess sexual morality, might be a form of evidence in and of itself. And it never seems to occur to people now that continuing to dismiss, diminish, patronise and police others on the basis of their physical characteristics is a form of evidence, too.

And what evidence would this be? I would argue, of a shallow, brutal and violent culture that objectifies people in the most obscene ways possible, treating all life as a competition. If anyone in this story should be disenfranchised and dismissed on the basis of intelligence, morals and character, it is not the victims. And if we learn anything from the skulls, it's that White culture will perpetrate any and every horror to achieve and maintain domination.

Perhaps there could have been one more thing in the Scientific Racism room: a mirror. Above it I would paint the words from 1 Samuel 16:7: 'God does not see as mortals see. They look on the outward appearance, but God looks into the heart.' Viewers might wonder, what is moral? What reveals good character? And does intelligence lie in bone size? Does it lie in the objectification of human bodies and the insistence on domination, or in the gracious dance of respectful conversation and mutual collaboration? Then perhaps those of us who are White could take a good hard look in the mirror and reflect deeply on the state of our hearts.

Marcia Langton is a Yiman and Bidjara academic and activist. William Barak was a Wurundjeri statesman, diplomat, artist and activist. Vicki West is a trawlwoolway artist. The Tjanpi Desert Weavers are a collective of women from NPY lands. Julie Dowling is a Badimara artist and activist.

ALISON SAMPSON

is a Cornish minister living on stolen Wurundjeri land. Find more of her work at alisonandthewhale.com.

A Riotous Life

Steve Taylor

Riots can be chaotic. Sometimes crowds gather and events spiral. 'Riot' can be used as a verb to describe a violent public disturbance. Protestors push, police intervene, and arrests are made. Here in Aotearoa, the 1984 Queen Street Riots, as they are now called, began as a free concert to celebrate the end of a university academic year. A power cut sparked members of the 10,000-strong crowd to start throwing bottles at police. The concert quickly descended into significant property damage on Auckland's main street.

At other times, crowds can gather and silence descends. 'Riot' can also be used as a noun to describe an impressively large or varied display. Serbia's largest-ever protest rally gathered to express solidarity for the victims of the collapse of the railway station canopy in November 2024. Breza Race Maksimovic and Srdja Popovic, scholars from the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies, observed how, for 15 minutes, a crowd of 325,000 people held cellphone flashlights aloft. It was a stunning experience of shared silence.

Sociologists and psychologists have sought to understand how crowds behave and events spiral. Sociologist Herbert Blumer identified four types of crowds: casual, conventional, expressive and active. Being with others as they walk toward a train station is a casual crowd. A group of people coming together for a lecture or play is a conventional crowd. People sharing their feelings, like at a political rally or religious gathering, is an expressive crowd. An active crowd shares action: sometimes violent, other times peaceful.

How do crowds shift from expressive to active? Psychologists have sought to explain how crowds can at times be silent and at other times be 'maddening'. The Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM) emphasises intergroup relations. Crowds provide a shared experience. This can result in the formation of common identities in ways that override differences, even in an otherwise diverse crowd. The ESIM model describes how crowds respond to perceived injustices by external groups, such as the police.

The model also explains how strangers in crowds can find ways to cooperate and activate new shared identities in the midst of a crisis. Norris Johnson researched events around the Who's Coliseum concert in 1979. Eleven people died in a rush of concert goers. Johnson observed that the crowd was composed of many small groups of people, mostly trying to assist each other. He concluded that crowds are safe as long as events are planned and contingencies are in place.

> **"JESUS NOT ONLY JOINED THE CROWDS, HE JOINED IN WAYS THAT CREATIVELY COMBINED ACTS, IMAGERY AND MESSAGING."**

The sociology and psychology of crowds as casual, conventional, expressive and active offer new perspectives on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. The Passover season would have generated an expressive crowd, willing to wave palm branches and ready to shout Hallelujah (Matt. 8:9).

Equally, religious leaders and Roman invaders feared the expressive crowd turning active. They had good reason. Israel during the time of Jesus was a hotbed of revolutionary movements advocating for armed rebellion. Groups like the Zealots agitated for military solutions. Movements like the Sicarrii, an organised group of Jewish assassins, concealed knives and stabbed their opponents in crowds during festivals.

All four gospels describe how Jesus and his disciples joined the crowds. Even the act of joining 'a very large crowd' (Matt. 21:8) challenges me. I would have advised Jesus to be cautious, given how events can spiral when crowds gather. I would have offered this advice when the 'Sons of Thunder' and Simon the Zealot (Mk 3:17–8) were out of earshot. Yet joining an expressive Passover crowd was clearly a risk Jesus was prepared to take.

Jesus not only joined the crowds. He joined in ways that creatively combined acts, imagery and messaging. Recent analysis of protesting crowds in Serbia has noted how crowds were drawn into silence through symbols such as a raised right hand and shared hashtags like #studentsintheblockade. Maksimovic and Popovic conclude that 'acts, imagery and messaging matter: they counter fear, attract broader support, and lower barriers to participation'. The three elements of acts, imagery and messaging make sense of how Jesus joined the crowds.

The Gospels describe the act of Jesus entering on a donkey. It was drawn from ancient imagery of a king that is gentle (Zech. 9:9). The crowds used Hosanna slogans as messaging (Ps 118:26). Acts, imagery and messaging mattered as Jesus joined the crowds entering Jerusalem.

Personally, I am scared of crowds and their riotous life. Applying the example of Jesus and crowd psychology research offers new perspectives on crowds and protests. Will I take risks like Jesus did? Can I embrace how acts, imagery and messaging offer gentle ways that allow strangers to cooperate amid crisis?

For further reading:

Blumer, Henry. (1969). Collective behavior. In A. M. Lee (Ed.), *Principles of sociology* (pp. 165–221). New York, NY: Barnes and Noble.

Johnson, Norris. (1987) 'Panic and the Breakdown of Social Order: Popular Myth, Social Theory, Empirical Evidence.' *Sociological Focus* 20: 171-183

Maksimovic, Breza Race and Srdja Popovic (2025). 'How Serbian Students Created the Largest Protest Movement in Decades,' *Journal of Democracy*. https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-serbian-students-created-the-largest-protest-movement-in-decades/).

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SHIRE LIFE:

A LOCAL RETROSPECTIVE ON THE CRONULLA RIOTS

Matthew Anslow

It is commonly said that a frog, placed in tepid water being gradually brought to boil, will cook slowly to death. That this is a demonstrable fiction, one that declines to pass out of popular consciousness despite any empirical basis for its veracity, implies at least two things. First, humans do not like to let the truth get in the way of a good – or useful – story. Second, however fallacious this fable might be with respect to springy amphibians, it continues to have incisive explanatory power when it comes to human behaviour.

The Cronulla Riots of late 2005, of which we are about the mark the twentieth anniversary, did not materialise out of thin air. The conditions that gave birth to this reprehensible event were present, like a slowly boiling pot, for a long time.

The region of Sydney where Cronulla is located is called the Sutherland Shire. It is, in most respects, a beautiful place. Bordered by iconic beaches and rugged cliffs to the east, a remarkable river to the north, and the stunning Royal National Park to the south, 'The Shire' is a geographically enclosed delight. Its culture is laid back and leisurely, its people overwhelmingly friendly and concerned for their community. The Shire is an example of what the Australian imagination considers the perfect place to raise a family. Indeed, its locals refer to it as 'God's Country'.

I lived over half of my life in the Shire, from the age of four until 2011 when, as a newlywed, my wife and I relocated. During that period of my life, I enjoyed the significant benefits of life in an idyllic, beachside locale. For over a decade prior to the Riots, my family resided in the suburb of Caringbah, a few kilometres from Cronulla. In some ways the Riots were formative for me since I reached adulthood only a couple of years prior.

For all its beauty and prosperity, the Shire of the 1990s and 2000s had a dark side. It was, and remains, an overwhelmingly Anglo enclave. Its geographical borders isolate it from other parts of the wider city of Sydney, not merely physically, but also in the minds of its residents. 'Insular' is a descriptor often levelled against the Shire by outsiders. In the 1990s and 2000s, this was certainly a fair criticism. Indeed, when I lived there as a young person, I consistently heard complaints occasioned by residents having to leave their beloved bastion temporarily.

This insular culture lent itself to a narrow view of the world. Most people I knew had no real interest in other cultures. They seemed to have no desire or compulsion to learn another language. They were not belligerent about their culture, but they were quietly confident of its pre-eminence.

More perniciously, my early life was saturated by casual racism. I do not imagine for a moment that this experience was universal amongst the Shire's residents.

MORE PERNICIOUSLY, MY EARLY LIFE WAS SATURATED BY CASUAL RACISM.

Nor was such racism a unique feature of the Shire. But my social environments were abounding in a kind of unreflective prejudice that, though usually intended unmaliciously, was part of the proverbial furniture. Race-based jokes – about Asians, Africans, Arabs or Aboriginals – were common. Other Anglos in Sydney might have been stuck up, or 'Westies', or whatever, but at least they were not 'wogs', 'Lebbos' or 'gooks' (I cannot bring myself to type the derogatory three-letter abbreviation used for Aboriginal people).

I was not immune to the influence of this environment. I attended a high school that, because it was selective, attracted students from outside the area and was consequently far more multicultural than most neighbouring schools. I had many friends who were not Anglo. And yet racist language casually and often departed my lips, as it did most of my Anglo friends. Again, this was not intended maliciously, but it nonetheless signalled an attitude of arrogance and self-assurance with respect to the superiority of our Anglo racial and cultural identity.

If the geographical and demographic features of the Shire contributed to these dynamics, so, too, did its historical and political features.

As is well known amongst Australians, Kurnell, a suburb in the north-east of the Shire, was the landing place of a British expedition led by then-Lieutenant James Cook in April 1770. Later, Cook would claim the entire east coast of this land as British territory. I need not provide a history lesson, nor explore the legacy of British colonialism in Australia. But it is worth noting the effect of Cook's presence on the self-perception of Shire residents. Schooling was, for my generation at least, overshadowed by his mythology, perhaps even more so than that of British settlement itself, which commenced in 1788. But such mythology was amplified in the Shire since ours was the 'birthplace of modern Australia'. Shire schoolchildren could, after all, be driven down the road to experience this place of renown. Cook was a part of us in some way. To criticise him was to criticise us; a lesson I learned when, in later years, I dared raise questions about Cook's legacy.

In terms of politics, the Shire was and is, in the aggregate, deeply conservative. This was especially true in the 2000s. Such conservatism has, in some ways, been a source of social stability in the Shire. It is, for instance, a place that maintains a high value on family and, especially, on children. Community events are frequent and conserving this family-friendly culture has generally been a significant concern. But the flipside of this conservatism has been a wariness about outsiders, particularly those from non-European cultures.

In the 2000s the only meaningful expression of multiculturalism in the Shire was cuisine. The public debates about immigration and refugees that plagued Australia from the late 1990s (and still do) were hardly meaningful debates in the Shire. Most people may not have been antagonistic towards immigrants *per se*. But they were not necessarily supportive of their presence in the community, particularly if they were refugees. If the issue of refugees was ever raised, a safe majority at that time would have supported restrictive policies.

It is perhaps symbolic that the Shire's sitting Member of Parliament from 1998–2007, the Liberal Bruce Baird, was in 2007 replaced by Scott Morrison. Baird had opposed his own Party's policy of mandatory detention for people seeking asylum by boat. Morrison, on the other hand, was a chief proponent and architect of Australia's draconian approach to people seeking asylum in the 2010s.

Equally symbolic is the name of the Federal electoral division that occupies the bulk of the Shire: Cook. Such symbolism is hardly extraneous to the collective identity of the Shire or the story of the Cronulla Riots.

So far, I have painted a picture of the Shire as a mostly peaceful place, albeit overwhelmingly monocultural and with a significant presence of casual racism. This is not exactly a unique profile in the modern Australian context, particularly in the 1990s–2000s. What, then, led to the intensification of racism that made the Cronulla Riots possible?

The most obvious point of interest is September 11, 2001. The terrorist attacks that levelled the World Trade Centre in New York City had profound effects all over the world. In the Shire, as in many Australian locations, it hardened attitudes to those of Middle Eastern descent and Islamic devotion.

This was narrowly preceded by the Tampa Affair in August 2001. Here the Australian government refused

entry to 433 refugees, mostly Afghan Hazaras. The Norwegian vessel that had rescued them was boarded by Australian special forces, and a diplomatic dispute ensued. This event resulted in a political controversy in Australia, with the government attracting strong support for its hard-line approach. The Shire seemed to be overwhelmingly supportive at the time.

Also worth mentioning are the Bali bombings that occurred in October 2002. Islamist terrorists detonated two bombs in the tourist district of Kuta Beach, killing 202 people, including 88 Australians, seven of whom were from the Shire. A memorial was set up in Cronulla later that year.

As has been well-documented, Muslims in Australia became objects of fear in the subsequent years. In the Shire, this was felt keenly. I can recall a conversation with a family member during this period in which, referring to Muslims, they told me matter-of-factly, 'I hate them'. When I probed as to why, they admitted they were scared of them. I asked if they had ever met a Muslim, and they confessed they had not, but reiterated that this did not matter. I had many similar conversations during this period. And to be candid, prior to my own political coming of age after these terrorist acts, I held similar views.

It did not help that churches in the Shire were, for the most part, socially and politically conservative, not to mention overwhelmingly Anglo. The years following 9/11 were brimming with Christian hyperventilation and vehemence. Islamophobia was commonplace in churches. I recall hearing countless prayers petitioning God to protect our nation and to ensure victory in the wars that had been inflicted on the Middle East. I obviously cannot speak for every Christian context, but in those circles in which I travelled, calls for temperance and loving our enemies were hardly forthcoming. In some such contexts, the rhetoric was at times frenzied and fear-filled, even nationalistic. I remember on at least one occasion being encouraged to sing the Australian national anthem in a service of worship.

All of this and more generated something of a powder keg. It did not help that Cronulla Beach frequently played host to sizeable groups of young men of Middle Eastern appearance (often called 'Westies', among more disparaging names, by locals). Such groups gained a reputation for rowdy and disruptive games of beach football, as well as unwanted, harassing behaviour towards young women enjoying the beach. I am not sure to what extent this behaviour was radically distinct from groups of young Anglo men, if at all. But in any case, it became a source of frustration for locals.

For many people in the Shire, Cronulla Beach is about as close to a sacred space as one can get. 'Ownership' of the beach had been contested for a long time between different cultural groups. When, on 4 December 2005, two off-duty lifesavers were physically assaulted by a group of men of Lebanese appearance, the stage was set for the powder keg to erupt – or for the pot to boil over.

What followed has been well-documented. In response to the assault, talkback radio hosts went on the offensive. Text messages encouraging people to 'get down to North Cronulla to help support Leb and wog bashing day' spread around the community. Later reports suggested that over 270,000 text messages had circulated during that week (www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/cronulla-race-riots). 'Reclaiming the beach' became the imperative.

I remember teaching Special Religious Education in four schools in the days leading up to the Riot. Just about every student had received a text message. The mood among many students, particularly teenage boys, was one of eagerness and exhilaration. Many were amused by the possibility of going down to the beach to 'bash some Lebs'. More than a few indicated they were planning to attend the 'protest'. We SRE teachers went into an urgent frenzy, trying to defuse the situation and persuade students to stay away from Cronulla that weekend.

The rest is history. I trust that within this edition, others will have outlined the events of 11 December 2005 in detail. In the aftermath, I spoke with a few police friends who had been deployed to deal with the protest-turned-riot. They all reported it was the most scared they had ever been in the line of duty. For days afterwards there were reprisal attacks in Cronulla, during which much property was damaged and locals were frightened to go near their beachside hangout.

In reflection on the Cronulla Riots, then-Prime Minister John Howard asserted:

> *I do not accept that there is underlying racism in this country. I have always taken a more optimistic view of the character of the Australian people. I do not believe Australians are racist.*

My long-term experience was rather different. I have no doubt that racism played a significant part in what occurred in Cronulla at the end of 2005. What I have written here is but a selection of what I could have recalled.

The Shire was and is a wonderful place. But it's difficult for me to avoid the conclusion that racism, casual or otherwise, simmered for a long time before it boiled over into the shame and tragedy of the Riots. I recognise that such racism was present in the contexts, including Christian contexts, I frequented at the time. Indeed, I recognise that such racism was present within me. In some ways it still is; I will always be a recovering racist.

I do, however, think that we can be changed. I look at my own life and attitudes in 2005 and realise that, although I always have further to go, I have been utterly transformed by the patience and love of others, as well as the good news that in Christ dividing walls have been destroyed and there is no longer 'Jew nor Greek'.

This good news is as necessary as ever. Ours is a society of grievances, over rising inequality, falling living standards, eroding social power, and so forth. However misdirected they might be, these grievances are real and are not going anywhere. Christian nationalism and other divisive agendas, which threaten the fabric of our societies, provide a certain narrative about these grievances. We urgently need a different narrative. I hope the twentieth anniversary of the Cronulla Riots is an occasion to articulate it, and to learn lessons from our past.

MATTHEW ANSLOW

is the Educator for Lay Ministry with the Uniting Church's NSW/ACT Synod and Lecturer at United Theological College. He is the author of *Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets: The Prophetic Vocation of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (2022). Matt has published numerous articles in the areas of biblical studies and theology, philosophy, peacemaking, direct action and civil disobedience, preaching and agriculture. He lives with his wife, Ashlee, and their three children in Blackheath, NSW.

SURF AND TURF:
RECKONINGS OF THE 'CRONULLA RIOTS' 20 YEARS ON

It began as a murmur: something was brewing on North Cronulla beach. As the hot north wind fanned the sands in Sydney's south east on a pre-Christmas Sunday afternoon, word quickly spread of a brawl between off duty lifeguards and young men.

The only thing that flows faster than beer in my hometown is talk. And the chatter around the traps was not idle. It was 4 December 2005.

I heard a fight had occurred between off-duty volunteer lifesavers and some 'Middle Eastern' looking young men. There was an exchange of words, with the young men telling the non-uniformed lifesavers to get off the beach because they 'owned it.' The off-duty lifesavers told the lads, 'You can't swim.' In the ensuing scuffle one lifesaver was knocked down and another was hospitalised.

The tension between a large group of Middle Eastern men and local lifesavers had been fermenting for some time. Efforts to move the group on when they played footy on a large section of the beach, endangering other beachgoers, proved fruitless. Young women walking from the pedestrian footpath down the beach access felt vulnerable and intimidated by the group, who made brash comments about their appearance.

JONES, 2GB AND *THE DAILY TELEGRAPH* WERE AT IT AGAIN. THE DISCOURSE CREATED FEAR AND MORAL PANIC. IT SOLD PAPERS AND DROVE LISTENERSHIP

As media reports emerged, a young man of 'Middle Eastern background' was charged by police. Another skirmish occurred outside Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club between a few local young people and six men of 'Middle Eastern appearance' on 7 December. A photographer from the local newspaper had his camera snatched by one of the men who immediately smashed it on the ground. The police took no action.

Text messages began circulating about a rally the following Sunday at North Cronulla to 'reclaim the beach.' Labor Premier Morris Iemma condemned a vigilante response.

Many who lived in the area were unaware of the text messages and where they originated. They reached further than the Sutherland Shire as evidenced by large numbers of Anglo-Saxon/Celtic young people from outside the area who attended the 11 December rally. Text messages also circulated among young Middle Eastern men urging them to meet at Maroubra.

In local churches the violence and threats of payback seemed culturally distant. It was essentially a youth matter. The divisions of culture and class were evident.

Radio 2GB broadcaster Alan Jones had his finger on the mic button reading out one of the obscene messages on air. News Ltd's *The Daily Telegraph* published two text messages, including: 'this Sunday every Aussie in the Shire get down to North Cronulla to help support Leb and wog bashing day'. Jones, 2GB and *The Daily Telegraph* were at it again. The discourse created fear and moral panic. It sold papers and drove listenership.

Jones' largest listenership group was in Sutherland Shire. With his main demographic being the 50 plus age group, his message likely resonated with some parents and grandparents of those attending the violent rally the following Sunday, 11 December. Kinship networks are strong in the area, and no doubt for some the inter-generational support for the protection of 'our beach' was axiomatic.

When the Premier arrived at Cronulla on 9 December to condemn a vigilante response, he was embarrassingly shouted down by locals. This was an area once dubbed the 'red belt' due to the sheer number of ALP-held state seats and the Labor-dominated local council. Iemma immediately moved to mandate a 25-year sentence for anyone found guilty of assaulting a lifesaver.

The demographics of Sutherland Shire had changed enormously since the post-war years. It was once predominantly Protestant, white and working class. Young people completed a trade in the highly unionised industries of Kurnell, Taren Point, North Caringbah and Kirrawee. By 2005 the Shire boasted a higher-than-average number of tradespeople who were more likely to hold an ABN than a union ticket. These were John Howard's 'battlers' enjoying plasma TV prosperity and a new commercial liberalism without social reciprocity.

VISITING MY ELDERLY MOTHER IN CRONULLA WAS LIKE CROSSING CHECKPOINT CHARLIE IN THE OLD EAST GERMANY.

At the 2025 Federal election, the Federal seat of Hughes in the Shire's west returned to Labor. This was astounding. When it was last held by the ALP in 1996, the electorate had the highest household income for any Labor-held seat in Australia. As real estate prices surged, Sutherland Shire became more affluent. But 20 years ago, the 'Please do not Disturb' sign was already up.

Children and grandchildren of working-class people moving to the area from Sydney's west in the 1940s and 50s no longer had the same world view of previous generations. But the remnant of the post-war White Australia policy lingered in the language of unionist grandparents who traditionally voted Labor. In 2005 the

area was the 'comfortable and relaxed' icon John Howard had envisaged for Australia in his 1996 election pitch.

In 2005 my son's local junior rugby league team won its first premiership. A weekend away for players' families was organised for 10–11 December. We were glad to get out of town, catch a few waves, and celebrate our trophy. But as we returned on the freeway, our anxiety rose as news about the escalating violence at North Cronulla Beach was on radio. Little did we know that around 5000 people had gathered and the violence would escalate in the days and weeks ahead.

John Veage, a friend, a former cadet colleague and then chief photographer at the local *The Leader* newspaper, arrived early on 11 December. In an interview recorded for this paper, he recalls the mood of the morning was festive not aggressive. Most of those who attended prior to lunch were older adults keen to raise the flag. 'It felt more like Australia Day,' John said.

As the day progressed more young people arrived with cartons of beer. Northies (North Cronulla) Hotel was doing a roaring trade across the road. The proprietor and President of the Chamber of Commerce was happy to conduct business as usual until the violence escalated and the doors were shut. What could be more Australian?

John also raised another pivotal issue: young people attending the event looked lost. There was a distinct lack of leadership: it was 'an unruly mob looking for something to do.'

The smell of sausages and onions filled the air. Young people alighted from trains at Cronulla and nearby Woolooware station with stubbies and Vodka cruisers in hand. Key roads around North Cronulla beach were blocked by the crowds. Police established an observation centre from atop North Cronulla Surf Club but did little to disperse the crowds or curb the drinking.

A local bearded, middle-aged 'bloke of note' took

YOUNG PEOPLE ATTENDING THE EVENT LOOKED LOST. THERE WAS A DISTINCT LACK OF LEADERSHIP: IT WAS 'AN UNRULY MOB LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO DO.'

to an improvised stage and told the crowd that North Cronulla Beach was 'fought for' and protected by their fathers and grandfathers. I thought about the local indigenous Gweagal people and the ground lacking for his assertion.

The Gweagal, a clan of the Dharawal people, were the first Aboriginal people to encounter colonialism and Lieutenant James Cook's muskets at nearby Kurnell. Cook stole 40 Gweagal spears on his arrival in April 1770, which were held by Cambridge University's Trinity College for more than 250 years. But, according to our bearded advocate positioned on the back of a ute, it was time to reclaim the beach! After the fall-out from the events of that day, the bricklayer disappeared down the coast and laid low.

Word spread that a Lebanese gang was travelling to Cronulla by train. A large, unruly group of young men headed to Cronulla railway station, boarded a train and attacked two people of 'Middle Eastern appearance'. They were driven back by baton-wielding police officer, Craig Campbell. Campbell later retired from the NSW Police Force with PTSD.

A champion local surfer and son of a Cronulla Sharks Rugby League player began jumping on a police car near North Cronulla Surf Lifesaving Club. He was later charged

by police. After the Cronulla riots he died by suicide, overwhelmed by the costs of fighting his legal case. His family and surfing peers were shocked. One of my friends was asked to identify his body.

Another brawl broke out in the car park near North Cronulla Surf Club with six people injured. An ambulance arrived and police and ambulance officers were pelted with bottles. Windows in an apartment block were smashed.

Two young people from Sutherland, both born in the area and whose parents were Lebanese immigrants, found themselves under the protection of police and transit security guards as they waited for their train while 1000 people stood opposite. The pair had gone to Cronulla Beach, as they had done most weekends as children, 'just to get a tan'.

Watching and documenting everything was John Veage. He left the scene early, disgusted by the behaviour of people he knew. John was a veteran and award-winning photographer who had seen life and death in all forms. Yet on that afternoon he pulled over to the roadside mentally and physically overwhelmed.

As we arrived home we heard endless sirens and the low, deafening thud of police helicopters. Just a 10-minute walk from our house, in the carpark entry to Woolooware golf club, a man was stabbed by a group of men of 'Middle Eastern appearance'. Fifty metres from my home church a petrol station was vandalised and customers threatened.

A counter-call had been issued by text by western Sydney youth: 'All Lebo/wog brothers. Sunday Midday. Must be at North Cronulla Park. These skippy aussies want war. Bring ur guns and knives and let's show them how we do it.'

As light turned to darkness police helicopter spotlights filled the air. On the main thoroughfare into

TWO YOUNG PEOPLE FROM SUTHERLAND, BOTH BORN IN THE AREA AND WHOSE PARENTS WERE LEBANESE IMMIGRANTS, FOUND THEMSELVES UNDER THE PROTECTION OF POLICE AND TRANSIT SECURITY GUARDS AS THEY WAITED FOR THEIR TRAIN WHILE 1000 PEOPLE STOOD OPPOSITE. THE PAIR HAD GONE TO CRONULLA BEACH, AS THEY HAD DONE MOST WEEKENDS AS CHILDREN, 'JUST TO GET A TAN'.

Cronulla – The Kingsway – groups of young men from Sydney's west began smashing shops and attacking local people. The reprisals had begun.

During the following nights my family laid awake listening to sirens and police helicopters as they pursued cars following 'hit and runs' around our Caringbah home. Only a short distance away a woman was shot at, another followed home and threatened, tyres blown out, and a shopping centre locked down. Police check-points were established on main roads. Visiting my elderly mother in Cronulla was like crossing CheckPoint Charlie in the old East Germany.

Former NSW Police Commissioner Mark Goodwin and former NSW Police Minister Carl Scully were both sacked by the Premier in the wake of the events of December 2005. They recently released a joint authored book, *The Cronulla Riots, The Inside Story.*

Goodwin argues the media provided a selective

perspective, missing the most critical aspect – the series of coordinated retaliatory attacks and the context leading to the events of 11 December. He also believes many academics quickly accepted the notion that the beach protest reflected Australia's inherent racism, without considering history and context. It was an ahistorical snapshot. Having been a victim of this violence and intimidation by young men from western Sydney, I can understand this view.

In the 1960s Rockers from western Sydney fought local surfers, in the 1970s Sharpie gangs boarded trains to Cronulla and beat up surfers like me and my friends after attending a city cinema. There were demarcation disputes between surfboard riders and surf lifesaving clubs. Public perception was that surfboard riders sparked 11 December's events. In fact, the major disputes arose over beach safety and management involving surf lifesavers.

Brad Whittaker, a Christian, champion longboard rider and Beach Manager for Sutherland Shire Council at the time, said when young Middle Eastern men were asked to swim between the flags or to stop playing football among 2000 beachgoers the instructions were seen as attacks on their community and culture.

'When a lifeguard tells someone, "you're not allowed to swim here", they mean there's a rip here and you might drown here,' Brad said. 'All these misconceptions were brought into beach management, lifeguards, volunteer lifesavers, dangers, young people unsupervised from their parents ... all these things ... get portrayed that you're a Muslim and you can't go to the beach. The initial things weren't about that but maybe got perceived that way. How things were portrayed was a bit unfair, but it is how the talkback media decided to promote it.'

On 11 December Brad saw several young people making their way to the beach unaware of what was evolving. He and a police officer sheltered them inside his office until they were whisked to safety by ambulance.

As the reprisals grew, convoys of up to 40 cars, carrying as many as 200 youths of 'Lebanese descent', entered various suburbs intending to damage property and assault people. In response, the police deployed a fleet of riot-equipped cars. Groups of young men targeted the Bra Boys of Maroubra believing they were linked with Cronulla although Maroubra is 24 kilometres away. There was a perception that Cronulla had a surfing gang when in fact there were 13 different board riding clubs, including Christian Surfers. A surfing gang had never existed. 'People from all over Sydney came here on that day bringing all their views,' Brad said. 'Some of the things they wrote in Zinc (cream) on themselves would have been insulting to Islam.'

As the violence spread, police vehicles raced across southern Sydney. Officers reported receiving threats involving firearms being shown, though none were fired. Authorities said around 50 carloads of youths destroyed more than 100 vehicles with baseball bats and other weapons. In one of these suburbs, a young girl was punched in the face.

In Rockdale, police gathered in riot gear after reports youths armed with crowbars had gathered near the train station. Also reported was a car trying to run down an officer, and items being thrown at police cars in Bay Street, Brighton-le-Sands, which was then blocked off.

'These attacks were not only opportunistic and random but effectively terrorized entire suburbs', Goodwin noted. 'Weapons included metal bars, baseball bats, and even firearms'.

Goodwin said police received credible intelligence about a planned attack on a popular hotel, where gang members planned to use machine guns and throw a grenade into a crowded beer garden.

'Police were aware that Middle Eastern gangs were trying to acquire a hand grenade from the black market. On December 16, 2005, through an undercover operation, the police secretly bought the grenade, preventing it from being used', he states.

Another foiled plot involved 50 vehicles, each carrying four people, planning to converge on a busy shopping centre to assault many people. The drivers would stay with the cars while 150 attackers would enter the centre, vandalise stores, and assault staff and customers.

Scully and Goodwin's book also mentions intelligence reports revealing every store between Wollongong and Newcastle had sold out of baseball bats and golf clubs, and many shopping centres reported theft of hundreds of trolley handles as makeshift weapons.

At one point, Goodwin had 2000 police mobilised to deal with growing threats. Police prevented many attacks while Muslim leaders worked to regain control over Lebanese gangs.

I wrote for *Southern Cross* in 2005: 'Many of these young people are not comfortable in their own skin, have been disadvantaged and are struggling to find a place in the world where they can be accepted and loved for who they are. When significant adults are not part of the transition process to adulthood the peer group becomes the "significant other" with its "gangsta" and drug culture.'

As time passed, the discourse moved. Critics who had blamed the Middle Eastern youth for their behaviour at the beach and the locals who had protested, started to turn their attention toward the police.

In the weeks, months and years that followed, Sunday 11 December became the subject of media conjecture from Nine's *60 Minutes* to the ABC's *Religion Report* and SBS.

The name 'Cronulla Riots' soon became a topic for academic papers and theses on:

- multiculturalism;
- white Australian masculinity;
- sexuality;
- identity;
- social profiling;
- policing;
- alcohol;
- nationalism;
- the role of the state;
- media discourse and power; and
- talkback 'shock jocks' and racism.

During these dissertations and distractions Cronulla Christians and local leaders were leading much of the reconciliation: praying, meeting and dialoguing with others. Brad Whittaker along with the Sutherland Shire Mayor drafted an apology from the community. He believed it was a way forward. It was read in front of Lakemba and Islamic religious leaders. (See pictures)

High profile former rugby league player and Christian Jason Stevens called for reconciliation. A service was held on the Cronulla foreshore with former Cronulla Sharks

NRL chaplain George Capsis leading the occasion. Doves were released and prayers for peace said.

Brad remembers balancing his job as Beach Manager while bringing his Christian faith and worldview to the context. Not everyone was ready for an apology. 'It was difficult,' Brad said. 'The way of moving forward was some sort of apology ... 'and I was asked to do that... as a Christian I could see the hurt. I knew that apologising was the best way for both communities to move forward.'

Criticism came from conservative politicians. 'I took a lot of heat from that (the apology) from elected officials. It was the most impactful thing I was asked to do – not just an employee of Council – but as a Christian. It was required even though everyone wasn't ready for it. I had to step out in faith, willingly'.

Later surf schools and surf education classes were organised. Some young men from western Sydney undertook steps to complete their surf bronze medallion. Twenty years later one man is still an integral part of Wanda Beach Surf Lifesaving Club and an inter-club competitor.

'If someone wants to join a surf club they can. It doesn't matter where they live or their cultural background. All that matters is that they are willing to do the training and to volunteer on the beach... It was a way of showing everyone was welcome,' Brad said.

'... AS A CHRISTIAN I COULD SEE THE HURT. I KNEW THAT APOLOGISING WAS THE BEST WAY FOR BOTH COMMUNITIES TO MOVE FORWARD.'
BRAD WHITTAKER, BEACH MANAGER

Another initiative was *On the same wave*, a partnership between surf lifesaving clubs, Sutherland Council and the Lakemba community to provide surf education for schools 'and to bridge gaps and show that everyone is welcome.'

'It was also an opportunity to educate people and that when a lifeguard tells you 'you can't swim here' it's because there's a dangerous current or rip that you might drown in: not because you are a Muslim and you can't swim here,' Brad said. 'Everyone is welcome at the beach but there are some rules. Surfers can't surf between the flags, and you can't kick the football into young kids. It's a busy city beach and things have to be managed.'

Some people from Cronulla visited the Lakemba Mosque. 'I was challenged by that personally because it was very different from taking people from Lakemba to the surf club,' Brad said. 'I didn't think that this was about religion; it was about management of young people on the beach and those challenging dangerous environments.

'For me it was *not* about me forcing my religious beliefs on anybody it was just acting with a spirit of forgiveness and love and moving forward even when things were still raw.'

I have a distaste for the term 'Cronulla Riots' not because I seek to diminish the violence of the day but because the term undermines the history leading up to the events of December 2005, locking us into a pre-determined view of the future. The term paints a picture of a hegemonic, unified community when in fact there were very diverse views.

I recently watched the ABC's *I was actually there* episode on the 'Cronulla riots'. My friend John Veage was interviewed. The program relied on other interviews but also repetitious use of footage and photos. Its aim was not resolution but experiential narrative genre. It was also ahistorical and structuralist.

The events of December 2005 underlined a search for identity. Were they racist/nationalist events with youth overtones, or a youth matter with racist/nationalist implications?

Ernesto Laclau's book *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, notes that 'identity is always based on excluding something'. Our views of others are largely socially constructed and only make sense in relation to other identities. We know *who we are* because we learn *who we are not*. The search for national identity is always coming into being because its substance is *always conditional* and reliant on the absence of difference and conflict. How many times have we heard politicians speak of the 'national interest' and the activity of individuals or groups as 'un-Australian'? The national interest is a cure-all for conflict and obfuscates reality.

J. A. Walter's seminal book *A Long Way from Home* notes: 'Individuals do not simply pluck out of thin air the particular idols that they wish to worship; they are members of a society which has set up public shrines and altars at which people are either invited or cajoled into worshipping' (p. 14). He argues world views can become the sacred:'The sacred involves the elevation of a particular social institution or idea to such a level within a culture that it forms a major and indispensable part of people's identity' (pp. 14–15).

Paul's call to the people of Athens – 'I see you are religious in every way' (Acts 17:22) was a call to abandon those things which give relativist meaning and identity not grounded in the one true God 'in whom we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:25). It is a call to follow the God 'not made by human hands'. This same God is the great reconciler who brings love and forgiveness to those who seek Him and call upon His name. Those who know and love Him were building bridges of peace and hope in a fearful community in December 2005 and beyond. They had no fear because they knew to whom they belonged.

GRAEME COLE
is a veteran journalist and public affairs executive who grew up in Cronulla and ministered as a youth worker. He was the winner of the 2016 Guttenberg Award for Religious Journalism.

Photos:

Part of the crowd at North Cronulla on 11 December 2005. Credit: John Veage

The Wall at North Cronulla. Credit: John Veage

The reprisals began and southern Sydney had numerous police check points. Credit: John Veage

Former Sutherland Shire Beach Manager, and Christian, Brad Whittaker, (right) reads an apology to Muslim and community leaders on behalf of the Cronulla community. Credit: John Veage

Australian Churches and Intercultural Communities:
At Arms–Length or Embraced?

Enqi Weng

Since the implementation of multicultural policies in the 1970s, Australian churches have experienced increasing cultural diversity despite a documented decline in mainstream Christianity. Even though the 2021 census showed that Christianity was no longer a majority religion, other research indicates it is churches are growing, particularly through the migrant population. Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, are experiencing slow revitalisation through this steady migration growth, as the number of Australian-born Christians has been on a steady decline (Hughes, 'The impact of recent immigration on religious groups in Australia', 2012). Research from the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) documents this cultural diversity within churches: 23% of churches in Australia can be seen as multiethnic, and at least 20% of the congregation comes from the non-dominant ethnic group (Powell and Pepper, 'Ethnic diversity and congregational vitality in Australia', 2020). If we cast our eyes further into Australia's pre-colonial history, however, cultural diversity has always intersected with Australia's religious and spiritual landscape; Indigenous worldviews and spirituality are inherently diverse and varied in their expressions. There are always new opportunities for intercultural contact and interaction in contemporary Australia.

In recent decades, the global mobility of people and the emergence of security challenges have raised questions about the meaning of multiculturalism in Australia. Politically, there are ongoing debates that frame multiculturalism from pro- and anti-diversity perspectives, going to the heart of Australia's national identity (Weng et al., 'Navigating the ideological tide: Discourses on "Mainstreaming" social service provision for multicultural communities in Australia from 1996 to 2021', 2025). These questions about what multiculturalism means can be asked in the same spirit within Christian churches. Colic-Peisker and Farquharson suggest that multiculturalism in Australia can be viewed from four perspectives: it refers descriptively to Australia's culturally diverse demographics; it is an ideological orientation that normalises this diversity; it is a set of policies that support the equity, inclusion and justice of a diverse population; and it refers to the everyday interactions that Australians experience with a diverse population ('Introduction: A new era in Australian multiculturalism? The need for critical interrogation', 2011). Some have preferred to frame these everyday encounters as interculturalism instead, to emphasise 'the importance of contact and exchange', and for 'dialogue to be non-political and inclusive of all, including majoritarian groups' (Mansouri and Modood, 'The complementarity of multiculturalism and interculturalism: Theory backed by Australian evidence', 2021, p. 8).

Recent research shows that mono-ethnic churches are at risk of closing down, suggesting that the way for churches to flourish and thrive is if they comprise diversity (Kruithoff, *Extending the Lifespan of Migrant Churches: A Study Based on the Australian Christian Churches in Victoria*, 2022). In fact, this research shows that migrant mono-ethnic churches face a significantly higher risk than Anglo mono-ethnic churches in winding down. It is therefore imperative that Christian churches have strategies in place to support cultural and intergenerational diversity, whether they are already multicultural, increasingly diverse, or have a desire to grow in diversity.

This article aims to extrapolate findings from two contemporary Australian Research Council research projects that studied the opportunities and challenges of interculturalism in Australia through the experiences of multicultural communities. The first is a Linkage project that aimed to appraise the state of multiculturalism in Australia through its study of how well support are multicultural communities when they access mainstream, ethno-specific and multicultural service provision for health, housing and employment outcomes (see multiculturalsocialservices.com). The second is a Discovery project, where its Migration stream studied the interactions and sense of belonging for migrant communities and their experiences of religious communities. Drawing from these findings, this paper hopes Australian churches might understand, reflect, listen and practise well when engaging across differences with diverse groups within their church communities and Christian organisations.

One of the aims of the Linkage project was to map the variety of service providers in the highly diverse Cities of Hume and Greater Dandenong and to consider how these services might be experienced by multicultural communities. In particular, the project was interested in these service providers' depth of understanding of community members' cultural and religious needs, the continuity of care experienced by the community and the support these communities received (Mansouri et al., 2022). It was particularly interested to see if these experiences might differ depending on whether the organisation type is mainstream (that targets a general population without differentiation), ethno-specific (targeting a specific cultural or religious community) or multicultural (targeting communities from diverse backgrounds). A point system was used to calculate two key instruments that determined these service providers' multicultural capacity and how securely funded they are. Multicultural capacity is defined by factors such as diverse leadership, staff diversity, frequency of cultural competency training, and provision of in-language services. Funding level is determined by their annual income and their funding model, specifically, how securely

funded they are. For instance, federal funding tends to be more secure (such as the Humanitarian Support Program) than local funding that is more program-based and subject to the tyranny of short funding cycles.

Findings from this project reveal that mainstream organisations tend to score lower on the multicultural capacity metrics, but have more access to secure sources of funding. In contrast, though ethno-specific or multicultural service providers tend to have higher multicultural capacity, they often experience a lack of adequate resources to provide continuity of care. In interviews, these ethno-specific and multicultural service providers also offered substantial care work for these communities, above and beyond what is required of them as service providers.

A closer look at some of these mainstream organisations included in the project, such as Uniting Vic. Tas, Catholic Care and Brotherhood of St Laurence, shows that they have existing targeted programs that cater to and support specific communities. Uniting Vic.Tas has a program that supports Afghan communities, Catholic Care provides support specifically for African and Pasifika communities, and the Brotherhood of St Laurence has a program targeting communities from refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds. Though these team-based groups tend to be run by community for community, on the outset their leadership appears Anglo-centric. The image of this leadership is significantly different for ethno-specific and multicultural service providers. This raises questions about whether similar dynamics exist within churches: Are multicultural communities in their silos within churches? Do they bear the burden within their own cultural communities and is there an integrated approach that diversifies their support within church congregations?

Interestingly, even though the Linkage Project did not intentionally include religion as a source of support for new migrants, interviews with community members revealed that religion played a significant role in supporting for new migrants. Religious communities foster social capital in bonding, bridging and linking. They support same-ethnic friendships, cross-cultural friendships and provide connections outside these parameters, and across institutional and class boundaries.

A case study approach was undertaken in the Discovery project to examine the experiences of an emerging community in Australia. The project interviewed members from the pan-African community, and although there were only three Christian representatives in the dataset, their experiences provided rich insights (Weng et al., 'Whiteness, Religious Diversity and Relational Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for African Migrants in Australia', 2021). Some anecdotes are highlighted here to show the joys and challenges of their relationships within churches – as leaders, members and as part of these church communities. Two mentioned arriving in Australia as refugees and asylum seekers and acknowledged often-understated role that Australian churches play in such support. Nelson Lodiong, an elder of St John's Presbyterian in Hobart, Tasmania, recalled the warm welcome he received in 1999 on arriving as a refugee from South Sudan. Lodiong fondly remembered how his church received him at the airport. He continues to worship at this church, views church members as his extended family, and is now involved in giving back through caring for the elderly within his congregation.

Two church leaders discussed the challenges they faced, particularly when they assumed leadership positions within the church. They often encounter invisibility, discrimination, and a lack of cultural understanding within broader church structures. These experiences were framed through an unsaid and seemingly common understanding within these institutional spaces that 'migrants do not know how to run a parish'. The Reverend Paul Aleu Dau, a Uniting Church minister of South Sudanese background, was rejected after his second interview at a church, because he did not have heritage building experience and a member of that congregation had issues with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

They often encounter invisibility, discrimination, and a lack of cultural understanding within broader church structures.

Another African-Australian Christian leader felt as a 'black person' he was expected to 'minister to the blacks' even if his assigned congregation did not share his linguistic background. He further reflects that when parishes are 'run by whites', with 'not many black Africans within these congregations', he would not get the roles that he applied for within these churches.

In sum, their experiences refer to the invisibility of discrimination, of a subtle yet unspoken requirement to perform to a particular script cast within these religious institutional spaces. Both these Christian leaders were left to conclude, quite similarly to broader societal experiences of discrimination – in media discourses, political rhetoric, in schools and everyday interactions – these are experiences encountered at a significantly painful level within the confines of their own communities. Such findings call for the need for deeper engagement with cultural diversity within Australian churches and for a more integrated approach to support multicultural communities effectively.

In conclusion, let us ponder three key points for reflection. First, is there meaningful, inclusive leadership within our churches? Are ethnic/non-Anglo pastors, ministers, and leaders given a genuine platform to contribute, or are they merely following a predetermined script? Second, religious communities continue to hold significant roles and should be encouraged to adopt an outward-looking perspective rather than an inward-focused one. We have a vital part to play in multicultural Australia. Finally, I want to suggest multicultural churches are an imperative, not an afterthought. They are not merely a pragmatic solution for survival; they are essential for us to thrive and flourish as Christians.

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This paper was delivered as the Alf Stanway Lecture on 8 September 2025 at Ridley College, Melbourne. The Lecture is a collaboration of CMS Victoria and Ridley.

From arms-length toward embrace:

a theological response to Enqi Weng's 2025 Alf Stanway Lecture

Darrell Jackson

'Recovery of sight for the blind': congregations and the invisibility of ethnic and cultural discrimination

Dr. Enqi Weng's research findings from two major Australian Research Council projects document some uncomfortable truths for, and about, Australian churches. As communities that proclaim radical welcome and divine love, we appear to be perpetuating discriminations we should surely be challenging.

Weng interviewed South Sudanese pastor, Paul Aleu Dau, and records his rejection as a congregation's pastor because he lacked experience with 'heritage buildings' and because one member 'had issues with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.' Another African-Australian Christian leader discovered he was expected to 'minister to the blacks', regardless of whether he shared their linguistic background, while being systematically excluded from roles in predominantly white congregations.

> *When the lawyer asks Jesus 'Who is my neighbour?' he is essentially asking for ethnic or religious boundaries - clear definitions that will limit his obligations and justify his selective compassion.*

These are not isolated incidents but symptoms of what Weng identifies as 'the invisibility of discrimination' within Australian churches – a 'subtle yet unspoken requirement to perform to a particular script' that mirrors broader societal patterns of exclusion. Her research reveals that while 23% of Australian churches can be classified as multiethnic, many operate with 'euro-centric assumptions' in their leadership structures, leaving culturally diverse members feeling under-appreciated, misunderstood and invisible.

This is not merely a sociological problem requiring better policies or cultural sensitivity training, though these may help. It is fundamentally a theological crisis that demands a theological response. The stakes might be practical and ethical, but they are inescapably missiological. If the church – the community called to embody God's reconciling love – reproduces the same discriminatory patterns found in secular institutions, what does this say about our understanding of the gospel?

Weng's research reveals mono-ethnic churches face higher risks of closure while churches that genuinely embrace diversity are more likely to flourish. The consequences in each case are carefully documented by Weng, but a theologically comprehensive response has to focus on more than simply the question of how churches can survive in multicultural Australia. Our theology compels us to ask ourselves whether we are willing and equipped to embody the reconciling love of God that breaks down the walls of hostility between peoples.

A theological response is necessary because discrimination within churches represents a fundamental contradiction of Christian identity. When cultural diversity becomes grounds for exclusion rather than celebration, when ethnic minorities experience the same marginalisation within churches that they face in broader society, the church fails in its calling to be a sign of God's coming kingdom where 'every tribe and language and people and nation' will worship together (Rev. 7:9).

Learning to see: A theology of neighbourly love as counter-practice

Weng documents what biblical scholar Ruben Zimmermann describes as 'cultures that look the other way'. These are characterised by the subtle yet systematic overlooking of culturally diverse leadership, the unspoken assumptions about who can 'run a parish', and the expectation that ethnic minorities should care only for 'their own.' In his reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25–37), Zimmermann identifies Jesus as advocating for 'an ethic of seeing in cultures that look the other way' – a radical counter-cultural practice that directly challenges the comfortable blindness that allows discrimination to flourish unexamined.

When the lawyer asks Jesus 'Who is my neighbour?' he is essentially asking for ethnic or religious boundaries – clear definitions that will limit his obligations and justify his selective compassion. Jesus' response subverts this boundary-making project entirely. By asking instead 'Which of these three became (Gk: *ginomai*) a neighbour?' Jesus shifts the focus from categorical thinking to relational engagement, from defining who deserves our care to asking how we can embody neighbourly love across difference.

This shift is precisely what Australian churches need in response to Weng's findings. The priest and Levite in Jesus's parable are religious leaders with the right theology but who have cultivated practices of 'looking the other way' when confronted with unapproachable need. They see the wounded man but choose not to see. How different is this from church search committees who see a qualified minister of South Sudanese background but choose not to see his suitability because he lacks experience of 'heritage buildings'?

The Samaritan, by contrast, practices Zimmermann's 'ethic of seeing' a way of seeing motivated by gut-level empathy that transforms mere visual recognition to feeling and then to acting (Gk. *splanchnizomai*). The Samaritan sees the wounded man, feels, is moved by compassion, and responds with costly care that crosses all potential or actual boundaries of difference. Significantly, Jesus asks which person 'demonstrated empathy' (literally 'became mercy'), suggesting that neighbourliness is not a static identity but an active practice.

David Livermore's work on cultural intelligence (CQ) aligns contemporary cultural competencies with this ancient wisdom. His concept of 'CQ drive' – the motivation of 'neighbour love' to lean into and engage with cultural difference – represents exactly the kind of intentional cultivation that Jesus's ethic of seeing requires. Rather than viewing cultural difference as an obstacle to be managed or a threat to be contained, CQ drive reframes difference as an opportunity for growth and mutual enrichment. In light of Jesus' command to love one's neighbour, Livermore suggests that leaning into cultural difference becomes a Christian virtue rather than an optional preference.

This reframing is crucial for addressing the patterns Weng identifies. When churches approach cultural diversity with what we might call 'cultural anxiety' – fearing loss of familiar traditions, comfortable communication styles, or established power structures – they inevitably create the arms-length dynamics that leave ethnic minorities feeling marginalised.

Dorottya Nagy interprets Jesus's 'love of neighbour' command (Mt. 22:39) as an expression of what she terms 'recognitive love', hence her interpretation 'love your neighbour because they are like you in every way that matters' rather than a demonstration of comparative love ('love them in the same way you love yourself'). Nagy's interpretation does not erase ethnic diversity but locates commonality at the deeper level of shared humanity and divine image-bearing.

This theological foundation points toward what I want to call an ecclesiology of embrace – a way of being church that actively draws the duality, unpredictability and sometimes the discomfort of being a 'neighbour', into the centre of our missional identity as 'Samaritan neighbours' rather than leaving such matters unaddressed at the margins of our congregational engagement with ethnically diverse communities.

Exclusion of neighbours can be seen in the overt rejection that Weng documents in some of her examples. The use of *arms-length* suggests the more subtle forms of discrimination – the polite inclusion that nonetheless maintains comfortable distance and familiar power structures. *Embrace* speaks of the risky, transformative engagement that genuine neighbourly love requires.

Embrace is not a destination, it is a practice, a way of continually opening ourselves to the inclusions invited by our encounters with difference. In these we are invited to reflect on Jesus' demonstration of these things in his ministry: a willingness to be surprised, challenged and even transformed by those whom conventional ethics marginalise or exclude.

Congregational life and ministry: contingent realities and eschatological futures

The theological vision of embrace outlined above requires our churches to discuss their ministry, community and leadership in ethnically diverse contexts. My own research suggests that most Australian churches fall somewhere along a continuum between what I call 'contingency' and 'eschatology' – between practices shaped primarily by contextual and individual limitations and those oriented toward the ethnically diverse multitude that will worship the glorified Lamb of God (Rev. 7:9).

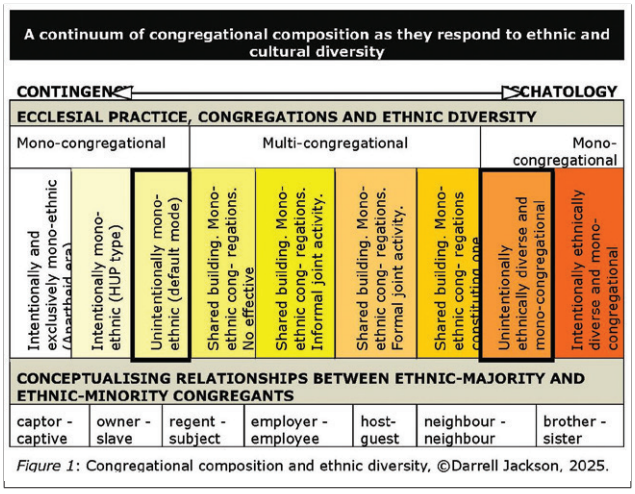

Figure 1: Congregational composition and ethnic diversity, ©Darrell Jackson, 2025.

Understanding this continuum helps illuminate why the discrimination patterns Weng identifies are so persistent and why transformation requires more than good intentions.

Acknowledging the pull of contingency

Many Australian churches find themselves shaped more by contingent factors – geographic happenstance, inherited and familiar cultural patterns, or the sheer reality of our human brokenness – than by intentional theological reflection on diversity. This is not necessarily malicious, but it creates the conditions where discrimination can flourish through our looking away from the ethnic and cultural beauty to be seen in others.

Weng demonstrates how mainstream Christian organisations maintain 'anglo-centric leadership' even while running targeted programs for Afghan, African or Pasifika communities. Churches operating from this contingency-driven approach often display what I term 'unintentionally mono-ethnic' patterns. They may welcome diversity in principle but maintain worship styles, leadership selection processes, and decision-making structures that systematically advantage those from dominant cultural backgrounds; those who do have experience of 'heritage buildings' for example!

Multi-congregational models: promise and limitations

The mid-section of my continuum represents various multi-congregational approaches – different ethnic communities sharing facilities while maintaining separate worship and leadership structures. These models address some practical challenges (language barriers, cultural worship preferences) but can also inadvertently institutionalise the segregation that Weng identifies.

Her research reveals how this plays out practically: multicultural service providers demonstrate higher cultural competency but struggle with resource access, while mainstream providers have better funding but lower multicultural capacity. Similarly, churches that create separate ethnic congregations may provide culturally appropriate ministry while simultaneously relieving the main congregation from the uncomfortable work of cultural adaptation.

> *...in ethnically diverse cities like Melbourne, the persistently mono-ethnic congregation represents an anomaly requiring theological justification.*

The African-Australian leader who was expected to 'minister to the blacks' regardless of his linguistic background illustrates how multi-congregational models can become sophisticated forms of segregation. When ethnic diversity is managed through separation rather than integration, it reinforces the assumption that cultural difference is a problem to be contained rather than a gift to be shared.

Toward eschatological practice

The far end of my continuum represents churches that organise themselves around eschatological vision: the biblical picture of diverse peoples worshiping together. These 'intentionally ethnically diverse and mono-congregational' churches don't emerge accidentally but require what I refer to as the 'miraculous and organic convergence of emergence and intentionality.'

Such churches actively cultivate what Weng's research shows is often missing: integrated approaches that 'diversify support within church congregations' rather than leaving multicultural communities to 'bear the burden within their own cultural communities.' This means diversifying not just congregational membership but also our leadership structures, decision-making processes, worship styles, and especially our theological frameworks.

The Challenge of Transformation

Why do so few churches achieve this integration? Weng suggests moving toward genuine embrace requires us to confront 'the invisibility of discrimination' – the unconscious assumptions that make arms-length relationships feel natural and comfortable. Churches serious about transformation must ask uncomfortable questions: Why does our leadership 'look like' only one part of our community? What cultural assumptions are embedded in our worship, governance, and theology? How might we need to change, not just accommodate difference, but be transformed by it?

This is where my continuum becomes more than descriptive; it becomes a diagnostic. If churches can identify their ethnic composition honestly, they are better equipped to explore how their congregational composition reflects their contextual location – often geographic. A church in a highly diverse neighbourhood that has remained mono-ethnic, for example, should be exploring the question 'Why?' with a degree of urgency.

Perhaps more provocatively, can I suggest that in ethnically diverse cities like Melbourne, the persistently mono-ethnic congregation represents an anomaly requiring theological justification. There are legitimate exceptions – refugee churches serving as cultural sanctuaries, safe spaces to process trauma and maintain language. But for established churches in diverse contexts, mono-ethnicity may signal not cultural preference but cultural blindness.

A final thought: living and ministering together in the continuum

The relationships between ethnic-majority and ethnic-minority congregants that I map alongside the main continuum – from 'captor-captive' through 'employer-employee' to 'brother-sister' – do not necessarily correlate with the categories on the main continuum. They reflect not just organisational structures but theological understandings. Churches that conceive of diversity through host-guest metaphors will create different dynamics than those operating with sibling imagery.

Weng's research suggests that too many Australian churches remain stuck in host-guest or employer-employee dynamics, where ethnic minorities are welcomed conditionally and expected to adapt to existing structures rather than being empowered to shape them. Movement toward brother-sister relationships requires the kind of theological transformation that positions diversity not as challenge to be managed but as gift to be received.

The practical implications are significant: genuine embrace cannot be achieved through better programs or sensitivity training alone – it requires structural change, power sharing, and the willingness to be transformed by God's Spirit in the encounter with difference.

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Multiculturalism and the Chinese

Grace Lung

As I reflect on the anniversary of the Cronulla Riots, I was reminded of the Chinese's own race riot incident at Lambing Flat in the Burrangong goldfields of New South Wales. In 1861, *The Courier* reported:

> *Upwards of a thousand men, most of them armed with bludgeons or pick-handles, headed by a band, and carrying several large flags, one inscribed with the words 'Roll up – no Chinese!' formed into procession and marched into Lambing Flat ... They rounded them up the same as they would a mob of cattle, struck them with their bludgeons and whips ... I noticed one man who returned with eight pig-tails attached to a flag, glorying in the work that had been done.*

This is not dissimilar from sentiments expressed at recent 'March for Australia' protests. Thankfully less violently, protestors' signs said, 'send them back' and 'stop the invasion'.

Afterwards, a group of protesters were reported to be enjoying Yum Cha (Christian, 'Full, untold story of viral yum cha protest pic', 2025). Many observers could not fathom the cognitive dissonance required for protestors to be so anti-immigration, yet rely on the Chinese to provide them with sustenance. Indeed, many self-professed supporters of migrants proudly demonstrated their solidarity – by also eating at migrant-owned restaurants that night. How is it that both protestors and supporters were eating at migrant establishments that day? What is happening here?

While we can be thankful that riots such as Lambing Flat and Cronulla are no longer being repeated, as we consider the March for Australia, is multiculturalism failing? In this article, I will answer this question of Australia's multiculturalism through a Chinese-Australian lens. We may think that these actions are confined to the radical White few, but I argue that even Australia's

multiculturalism has always had the dominant white majority in the centre.

Multiculturalism is working?

On one hand, multiculturalism has been incredibly beneficial for Chinese in Australia. In fact, many Australians of Chinese heritage would say they hardly experience racism, if at all. One telling example is the staff at the Yum Cha establishment who reportedly insisted that 'the diners were 'nothing special' and 'did nothing in particular to offend or cause trouble'.

Inclusion can be or feel conditional on being the 'good migrant', one that contributes to society, one that assimilates.

You will find many Chinese are relatively indifferent to racism as long as they are safe and able to work for themselves and their families. My own mother would deny real experiences of racism, as recognising such racism would entail accepting a mental weight she could not bear. One might consider this response short sighted, or just pragmatic, borne out of survival. Others point to the U.S. and are grateful that anti-Asian hate is much less violent in Australia as proof of our Multicultural success. In the face of failing multicultural societies in Britain, Germany and France, we Australians of Chinese heritage ought to have a lot to be grateful for (Jakubowicz and Ho, *For Those Who've Come Across the Seas*, 2013). In contrast to their mostly mono-ethnic ancestral countries, recent migrants marvel at the opportunity to interact with different cultures and worldviews in our campuses and neighbourhoods. They proudly share their food, cultural practices and celebrations with the wider Australian public.

Precarious Multiculturalism and Conditional Inclusion

However, as the longest established migrants in Australia, the Chinese thought they had finally made it to the top, proved themselves worthy, but found they would never be 'true blue'. One might hear it from a new acquaintance: where are you from, where are you really from? as if they could not fathom that their home could be yours, too. This is termed *perpetual foreigner*. You might feel it in the workplace. After decades of sacrifice within a so-called 'meritocracy', you realise the C-suite is off limits, unless you leave your culture at the door and assimilate. This is termed the Bamboo Ceiling. So, the Chinese had to accept their place as 'honorary White' or 'second-best' in the racial hierarchy. Some participate in self-orientalising, where they 'perform their ethno-cultural identity for the white gaze', finding their value and reward in being a good ethnic guide for their Anglo institution (Liu, 'Beneath the White Gaze: Strategic Self-Orientalism Among Chinese Australians', 2017).

The Chinese are also seen as the link to regional prosperity. Unlike Eastern European migrants, Chinese are the largest migrant group 'linked with regional economies that are crucial to Australia's economic survival'. 'Australians felt warmly toward China, enhanced by the glow of the increasing prosperity it afforded us' (Jakubowicz, 'Chinese Walls: Australian Multiculturalism and the Necessity for Human Rights', 2011). Indeed, then prime minister Julia Gillard proclaimed the Asian Century so that Australians could 'seize the economic opportunities that will flow...I want our region to be a winner as our region changes ('Australia in the Asian Century', White Paper, 2012)'.

Inclusion can be or feel conditional on being the 'good migrant', one that contributes to society, one that assimilates. This is contingent on bringing prosperity to the nation and being grateful. Our differences are contained and commodified for the consumption and comfort of the dominant majority (Liu 2017): Lunar New Year celebrations, Chinatowns, SBS, and our visibility as excellent doctors, chefs or performers.

Nowhere is this conditional inclusion more evident than in the celebration of Harmony Day. While recent migrants often join with gusto, longer established migrants know that societal discourse never goes much further. Senator Faruqi asserts:

> *March 21st is not celebrated as Harmony Day anywhere except in Australia .... It represents a superficial, self-congratulatory celebration of diversity which completely ignoring the point of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – the urgent, pressing need to recognise racism and eliminate it in all forms. "Harmony Day' whitewashes historic and ongoing racism in Australia.' (Haydar, 'Calls to ditch Harmony Day amid accusations it "whitewashes historic and ongoing racism" in Australia', 2023)*

Asian-Australian scholar Helena Liu calls this 'precarious multiculturalism' where 'the political program of multiculturalism has relied on selecting migrants for their economic utility, tolerating their cultural diversity with strict limits, and ensuring the inclusion of the Other does not jeopardize the vested interests and privileges afford to white Australians'. Multiculturalism is not opposed by just 'fringe groups', but has itself an ethno-centric basis.

This precarious multiculturalism and conditional inclusion in Australian society can be mirrored in the church. Occasional international days of food, dance and song can be consumed for the comfort and enjoyment of the dominant culture in a self-congratulatory way without talking about the racial microaggressions and sins of racism and ethnocentrism.

To put it cynically, Chinese can be useful to prove the Australian church is biblical: to prop up the image of Revelation 7, where all nations gather around worshipping the lamb. While the Global North declines, Chinese and Asian Australian Christians are seen as ethnic guides to the Global South, crucial for survival and relevance of the Australian church.

Racialised Capitalism

As we consider the riots, colonialism and even multi-culturalism, what were they really about? Surprisingly,

recent scholarship suggests that the root problem is not racism, but actually money: land and the power of whom keeps it. Jonathan Tran says, 'Americans at the end of the seventeenth century devised race in order to ideologically justify political economic domination and exploitation' (Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*, 2021). When there is a need for 'more', an 'other' will be exploited to obtain it. Before racial pseudo-science was invented, the first slaves were Europeans. After, 'lower' races, classes and genders were exploited to support this system.

Thus we also see some coloured people join these protests. They, too, feel their livelihoods threatened and join in the scapegoating of racialised others. Hence, wealth disparity is a problem that many new migrants and struggling whites both share. In fact, in *A Hole in our Gospel* (2009), Richard Stearns interviews President Jimmy Carter, finding that:

> *He did not speak about climate change, globalization, nuclear tension, HIV and AIDS, political corruption, or ethnic and religious tensions. Neither did he mention hunger, illiteracy, or disease. Instead, he saw 'the growing chasm between the richest and poorest people on earth' as a root cause of many of these other problems. It is also of note that he did not cite poverty itself as the most challenging problem facing the world but instead the disparity between the rich and the poor.*

Racism and ethnocentrism have always been tightly intertwined with money and power

In Australia, the wealthiest 20% own over 80% of all investment property wealth (2018); and the top 20% of households have 63% of the country's wealth (2024). This perhaps shows us that greed and inequality is the root problem.

Racism and ethnocentrism have always been tightly intertwined with money and power. To put it simply, racism is likely foregrounded by economic interests. Hence, being merely anti-racist will not resolve our problems. We need to deal with the wealth disparity which creates and maintains systems of racial disadvantage. This disparity leads the 'haves' to continue to use racialised others; to increase and maintain their housing, assets and dominance, while consuming the food prepared by the other to prove their anti-racism. The 'have-nots' will continue to scapegoat racialised others for their suffering.

The Evil of Greed and the Unconditional Inclusion of Christ

> *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.* (1 Tim. 6:6–10, NIV)

The apostle Paul reminds us that those who pursue wealth have forgotten that godliness with contentment is great gain.

I want to believe in the altruism of my brothers and sisters in Christ toward me and my community. But until these honest and uncomfortable conversations about racism can be had, I cannot help but wonder whether we are being used, whether for economic gain, gaining Christian tribal 'territory', or proof of successful cultural diversity in and outside the church.

For those affected by racial and economic forces, Dr. Siu Fung reminds us that we are not alone: 'In the days of Paul, the Empire enjoyed relative peace and economic prosperity .... And economic prosperity was the reality for the rich and powerful only, while the rest of the population lived in poverty. Living in the Roman Empire would have been challenging for the followers of Jesus' (Wu, Finding God in Suffering, 2023). Along with the early church believers, we are comforted by Jesus's words as we live in service of a dominant culture:

> *Blessed are the poor in spirit,*
> *or theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
> *Blessed are those who mourn,*
> *for they will be comforted.*
> *Blessed are the meek,*
> *for they will inherit the earth.*
> *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*
> *for they will be filled. (Matt. 5:3–6)*

But more than mere comforting, Jesus ultimately deals with the problem. Rather than conditional inclusion, Jesus values me, an Australian of Chinese heritage, in His image. Jesus pursues us not when we were 'good', but still sinners. Jesus has removed the wall of hostility so that Jew and Gentile can be one (Eph. 2). Rather than needing to contribute to the Kingdom, my only contribution was my sin, and what we do for Him now is fully provided and empowered by Him. In him, I am free to be average; heck, I am free to be weak, sick and a drain on resources because he does not need me to contribute. He invites me to in His strength so I can willingly serve in His kingdom.

God offers us an abundant life in Him so that we no longer need to exploit others for gain, but rather, give up our rights, material possessions and follow Him. I invite privileged and/or dominant cultures then, to trust the generous God, to de-centre, share and relinquish power so that those who have been subject to our greed can also flourish.

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Remembering the Stump:

Life, Death, Cricket, Re-creation and Reconciliation

Marcus Curnow

Cue: Bollywood Ringtone sounding out over a backdrop of the Melbourne City skyline.

'Yeah, hello Mum, I can't really talk right now. I'm out in the middle... of... something.'

"Is it Cricket? Are you playing cricket Anuj?'

'Ahh...Yes, Mum.'

'Didn't I tell you if you went to Australia, you would sacrifice your studies for cricket?'

'I know Mum, but I can't speak now, I'm batting with the Premier of Victoria!'

From my many years journeying with South-East Asian students in Melbourne's inner city as both a Pastor and a cricket coach, I have learnt that no matter what, no one ever hangs up on Mum!

Even if you are the non-striker and Shane Warne is standing at the top of his mark, pondering his best ball to the (then) Honourable Premier John Brumby, who is facing up before a bevy of cameras on the banks of Melbourne's Yarra River.

But cricket waited.

Media, celebrities and the Premier all waited for the anxieties of Anuj's mother to be heard, via mobile phone back in India. Her anxieties were not misplaced. In fact, they were the very reason for the cricket match.

I first met Anuj the day after the murder of Nitin Garg on January 5, 2010. The Indian community at home and abroad had been gripped by fear and grief as the 21-year-old was fatally stabbed on his way to work at a fast-food outlet in West Footscray where I live.

The stabbing followed a series of attacks on Indian students in the previous year that prompted the Premier to travel to India to promote Melbourne as a safe city after complaints of systemic racism and police inaction.

In response to this random act of local violence and having been shaped by our inner-city church experiments in community safety, we attempted a random act of cricket kindness and took to the streets to set up a 'listening station' with some of the symbols of student life. A beat-up old couch, Indian and Australian flags, and a cricket bat and ball.

Anuj was walking home to his student share house from a pop-up game of 'gully' cricket with other newly arrived students in a local park not far from where the murder had taken place.

It was the start of a beautiful, generative and transformative friendship.

In getting to know Anuj and his friends I learned that due to restrictive visa conditions many foreign students were exposed to exploitative and dangerous jobs like taxi driving and late-night convenience stores, and reporting exploitative 'trial' or 'under the table' work arrangements left them fearful of authorities and visas cancelation. The result was a group of people ripe for victimisation and under extreme pressure both here and at home, where whole villages had sometimes raised collective fortunes to send them abroad.

Anuj was one of 115,000 Indians who had journeyed to Australia that year after an Aussie university publicity blitz targeting India's growing middle class had made the lucrative higher education industry our fourth biggest export economy. However, revelations of migration scams, inadequately regulated courses and dodgy providers, combined with street attacks and tragic suicides had built up pressure like the final session of a cricket match.

Perhaps in an echo of the infamous 2008 Sydney Test between the two nations where the 'Ugly Australians' were accused of conduct against the Spirit of the game, Garg's murder threatened to become a partnership breaker; a wicket-taking moment that threatened to spark a much bigger collapse.

And so from a random street meeting in Footscray, Anuj and I found ourselves in a series of high publicity, strategically curated, 'street' cricket matches.

T20 star Brad Hodge, had just returned from the revolutionary new Indian Premier League and played with the Federal Immigration Minister, Police and Indian students in Melbourne's Hosier Lane, painted up in all its iconicity graffitied, multicoloured glory like a Holi Festival. The powerful images made newspapers as far away as Argentina and Northern Ireland.

On the perennially contested 26 January we played a match with the Police Commissioner where the teams

wrapped Australian and Indian flags around their necks to co-opt and redeem the image of the 'Cronulla cape', made iconic in previous race riots. One concerned 'patriot', obviously threatened at seeing a 'mixed race' gang of happy but cricket bat wielding youth travelling home through the city together on Australia Day cried out, 'Wrong flag today mate!' The team replied 'Happy Indian Republic Day!'

As a religious activist my own participation was motivated by traditions that interpret the healing ministry of Jesus not simply as private medical cures but as team building, boundary smashing, socially symbolic acts of inclusion that function across cultural divides. This involves combining physical acts and cultural symbols to restore wholeness to marginal people's status, resist dominant narratives, and mobilise myths to reverse ideas of contagion, so that visible acts work to inspire others and shift social norms.

When seven students were co-sleeping in a boarding house room which had previously been used for homeless people we started an indoor cricket team for new arrivals called The Footscray 'Allrounders'.

Of course, random acts of cricket kindness have their limitations. These symbols can be used by Governments keen to protect the status quo via feel good 'sports washing' or by a corporate cricket industry keen to support the government for their own funding ends. It is also true that 'Good Samaritan' personal helper type mindsets can distract from real change even if the context and substance of Jesus' telling of that story implies the necessity of a broader structural justice.

Perhaps questions about the efficacy of these 'acts of cricket kindness' are best answered in how they might enable ongoing habits that may lead to lasting change.

Stanley Hauerwas emphasises how any values formation depends on visible, ritualised practices and habits preserved by community. As he puts it, 'Saints cannot exist without a community, as they require, like all of us, nurturance by a people who, while often unfaithful, preserve the habits necessary to learn the story of God'.

These street cricket moments were enabled by connections created by our communities' previous efforts to distract drug addicts with cricket and promote safety by having a different kind of 'hit' in Melbourne's laneways during Melbourne's heroin crisis. This eventually brought users, corporate supporters and welfare providers together to play in teams and tournaments.

When seven students were co-sleeping in a boarding house room which had previously been used for homeless people we started an indoor cricket team for new arrivals called The Footscray 'Allrounders'. A term often used as self-description by students, no matter their cricket ability, as a means to get access to community sport teams in the highly populated and competitive sub-continent.

Eventually Anuj became a saint of sorts at our century old, ex-Anglo Protestant church cricket club where his cultural connections and recruiting saved our dying club. Despite the occasional on-field racism complaint, the club has been renewed, celebrating Diwali curry nights and perhaps more pre-game prayers to Mecca from its South Asian players than were ever said in its previous spiritual institutional form.

Such local sporting habits makes me wonder what temple or cricket club the Good Samaritan might have been formed in when he chose to stop for his own 'random' act of kindness.

For Anuj the journey to graduation and then to permanent residency was long, fraught and expensive, with many forays in the then nascent but now ubiquitous gig economy. Having navigated employers and migration agents, Anuj is now married, employed and settled in one of those new 'affordable' satellite suburbs, 90 minutes' drive from where we first met. It has one road in and out and has exploded from paddocks to a suburb of 9000 people in a short time and embodies all the tensions around access to resources of our economy reliant upon, but also persistently resistant to migration.

Recently these tensions once again 'broke through', coalescing in the 'March for Australia' rallies where the Indian community was again singled out in promotions. One Indian commentator described it as feeling like 'Cronulla 2.0' and subsequent media storms led to a high-profile Federal politician's demotion.

Thankfully what seems to be becoming spring 'protest' season in troubled times is also the start of cricket season and at the height of it all I received a phone call from Anuj saying, 'We would like you to be our child's cricket coach and for him to play for the club that cared for me.'

I was moved by the suggestion but replied 'Wouldn't it be better if he played for a local cricket club and made local friendships?'

I learned that while their suburb expects to grow to 70,000 people by 2040 it is only now in the process of building a cricket ground, let alone having a functioning cricket club.

As so Anuj's boy joined me in the pre-game huddle for our cricket club at the start of another season and as I work my well-worn coaches' cliches about 'team work that makes the dream work' I'm thankful...

For random and strategic acts of cricket playfulness that responsively counter and proactively defend against random and strategic acts of violence...

For the fruit of multicultural friendships that create moments like this...

For the extra player our club needs and for the distance this family has been willing to travel, today and over years of struggle, to make both this cricket club, but also our nation's multicultural dream work.

And I am thankful that there on the boundary, lovingly watching on is Anuj's Mum, recently arrived to this country, and a little less anxious about cricket these days.

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ENVISIONING AND ENGAGING MULTICULTURALISM:

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARBUEN DIAZ

Sarah Do

Twenty years after the December 2005 Cronulla riots, we as Australians, Christ-followers, and Christ communities are being invited to reflect on how we are going as a society in our responses to multiculturalism and justice, especially racial justice. In this article I reflect on an informal interview with my good friend Marbuen Diaz, a Filipino Australian from Sydney who works for NSW and ACT Baptists.

MARBUEN'S MULTICULTURAL UPBRINGING

Marbuen highlighted how his experience as a young migrant was shaped by a rapidly changing context. Having arrived in Melbourne at age 10 and soon afterward moving to Sydney, he lived in some of the most multicultural pockets of both cities. What was a historically Anglo community was increasingly diversifying, with a growing prominence of Middle-Eastern, Lebanese, Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders in the wider community. Marbuen picked this up in his schooling years, too. He remembers moving schools about eight times in his adolescence, many being reputed for 'violence, trouble and multiculturalism, all wrapped together'.

Marbuen noted the real presence of teenage gangs, many representing their cultural/ethnic groups (including Anglos). These gangs held great importance for young people then. He empathised especially with refugee migrant young people, who found in these gangs a place to belong, to be accepted, to find community. 'They found each other', he says, 'and I think – in hindsight – that there was much trauma. A lot of these youth (if they didn't come with parents) were working out the trauma, the issues, the stress that was going on. And they were finding it in like-minded people, or people looking like them.' There was no language around trauma, migrant stress, and the challenges in working that out during the early 90s and 2000s. I wondered whether alternative outcomes for these young people would have occurred with increased local supports; but unfortunately, some who Marbuen personally knew often ended up involved in serious crimes or even lost their lives due to gang involvement.

Because of the revolving door of relocating schools, Marbuen quickly learned to adapt. While navigating the challenges of school life, he learned about the 'beach life' and what it meant to be Australian: 'it felt like it was the thing you're supposed to do as an Aussie teenager. Like you go to the beach … so we would go to Miranda Westfield Shopping Centre, and we would go to Cronulla Beach'. The demographics were predominantly Anglo, and Marbuen remembers the awkwardness, suspicion and growing tension he felt, including the experience of being followed around by security. This was the awkward reality not just for himself but for many other non-Anglo groups who were learning what it meant to live the 'Aussie life'.

Marbuen's remarks on his teen years cast important light onto the realities that came with rapid change towards multiculturalism. He simply desired to belong and longed for the security that comes with seeking out like-minded others. Yet his experience was marked by significant tension and hostility and, without cultural awareness and sensitivity, and without tools and language around trauma and support for the vulnerable, increased hostility, violence and segregation was the reality of being multicultural.

CHURCHES, CRONULLA RIOTS AND A CHANGING MENTALITY OF ENGAGEMENT

The conversation continued, reflecting on the local churches' responses of the surrounding the area during the aftermath of the Cronulla riots. Marbuen recalls a conversation that he had with the former pastor of Cronulla Baptists regarding the church's response but found that both the Baptist Union and local church 'didn't really respond or do anything'. It seemed there was a prominent mindset that 'whatever happens in the church, and what happens outside of the church. Our focus was on inside the church.'

HE SIMPLY DESIRED TO BELONG AND LONGED FOR THE SECURITY THAT COMES WITH SEEKING OUT LIKE-MINDED OTHERS.

However, Marbuen insisted on looking more carefully at the post-riot events. He shared the response of Thomas Schmidt, another former Cronulla Baptist Church pastor, who actively went into the streets to make sure people were feeling safe. 'He was very community minded,' Marbuen remarked. 'He landed the gig of being a chaplain in one of the surf life-saving clubs. They didn't have a chaplain before. But because of the riots and his community work, they gave him that role. And he still has it, I think.'

Marbuen also saw an important shift in his own community over time. Although there was a prominently inward church focus shared especially by the older demographic, some important elders encouraged Marbuen to take a lead in reaching out into the community. Marbuen underscored the significance of the permission of the elders to let him lead the church in this direction.

PUNCHBOWL ENGAGEMENT

Marbuen's church initiated community engagement in Punchbowl, a heavily Muslim area, through barbeques and outreach events. They tried to connect with Punchbowl Boys (a well-known local high school), because Punchbowl Baptist Church is not far from Punchbowl Boys. Marbuen said in the years after the riots they needed to do things around what was happening outside the church, the people that they were supposed to be 'salt' and 'light' to. This deep sense of conviction led Marbuen to take up additional church roles, becoming a missions pastor where community engagement continued to be a key focus, and eventually also taking on the lead pastoral role in his community. Interestingly, Marbuen admitted that he was initially critical regarding the church's lack of response. But in remembering the pioneering efforts of those such as Thomas Schmidt, and also the ways his own community was formed by these events over time, he emphasises that these responses were by no means insignificant.

A MOVEMENT TOWARD MULTICULTURISM

This interview was being conducted only a week after nation-wide anti-immigration marches in Australia. Marbuen and I shared sentiments of disappointment and hopelessness regarding the progress of multiculturalism. Yet Marbuen offers a counter-balancing perspective: 'one can be tempted to look at [Australia today] and go, "nothing has changed. It's gotten worse." But if you were to go to Cronulla Beach today, it is so multicultural … It is this really nice community vibe happening now. If you were to look at that, then there has been a whole lot of improvement'. Marbuen's adolescent experiences of Cronulla beach, including the suspicions and underlying tensions that he and his friends felt, are a striking contrast to the sea of colour and community that fills the beaches today.

A FINAL VISION – IN MARBUEN'S WORDS

Another reaction is what I see in Revelation 21–22, where, as the nations are all coming into the city of God, they're bringing the honour and glory of their cultures and their nations. It's being paraded in as its been redeemed. Everyone, every culture, every tongue, every nation. So there's that invitation for us, a response of, 'how do we do that well?' How can we have it like Revelation 21–22? How can we have a response marked by compassion, where there are no more tears, no more pain, no more crying? God himself will wipe their tears. There's healing for the nations. here is a response of seeing all these things of celebration and joy, and this opportunity to do that.

There's a response of fear and dread, and therefore, your actions might line up with that. Or there is this alignment with the way God imagines the world, which is celebration and honour and glory for nations coming together. It's marked by compassion, of justice, of healing. It is marked by celebration and joy. There is no night there, so none of the unredeemable aspects of culture make it in, but all the beautiful aspects will. It talks about honour and glory, [which] means it's like a reflection. We add that glory, because that is a reflection of God's wider glory. So as much as I can look hopeless looking at all these marches and things, I remember: that's the direction that God is actually leading us towards, and therefore is asking the church to come, and join that imagination instead. Act accordingly to that.

Marbeun's reflections were a sobering reminder of what it means to be the church and what it is that we are being invited to participate in. It is easy to lose that beautiful vision. We are invited to choose this vision, over and against the fear and dread that can often consume and control us.

MARBUEN'S ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES OF CRONULLA BEACH, INCLUDING THE SUSPICIONS AND UNDERLYING TENSIONS THAT HE AND HIS FRIENDS FELT, ARE A STRIKING CONTRAST TO THE SEA OF COLOUR AND COMMUNITY THAT FILLS THE BEACHES TODAY.

Marbuen currently works in intercultural spaces, pioneering leadership and training for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse, and Language Other Than English (CALD-LOTE) leaders and communities in his role with the Baptist denomination in Sydney. He has a strong conviction that these communities make a significant contribution to the fabric of society. He encourages them to contribute their difference and culture. He believes in doing so we will have a better society and community.

He continues to challenge the CALD-LOTE communities to be more creative, engaged, and more intentional about the ways they participate in God's redemptive vision for the world. He once again recalled his own experience with the elders of his own community: 'because of certain good adults [in the leadership] who wanted to give permission, in time, there were shifts and changes that happened that made us more and more connected with our local community… the opportunity really is for us 1.5 and 2nd generation to step into that, and to thank and honour our pioneering generations.'

Marbuen's story and reflections remind us that it is God's mission that must be the organising focus that guides us forward, rather than our own. We are continually called to be committed to God's vision and work in the world: one that is marked by love, justice, compassion and peacemaking. We are called to be salt and light to the vulnerable, poor and hurting, and we are being invited to participate in this vision of shalom, reconciliation and healing for those God has placed around us.

SARAH DO

is a second-generation Vietnamese Australian, involved in a local Vietnamese church in Footscray. She also works at Whitley College as the Director of TransFormation, a diploma-level program for CALD-LOTE leaders.

MARBUEN DIAZ

is a Filipino Australian minister with over 25 years of experience in intercultural contexts, and is deeply passionate about discipleship, community development and biblical justice.

Christ Among the Ruins –

A Reflection, Story and Response

Chris Brown

PART ONE: CONCERN

The good news, proclaimed with luminous clarity in John's Gospel, tells of the Messiah who comes in glory from the Father, 'full of grace and truth', offering light to those in darkness and life to a world wearied by death (Jn 1:4,14). His is the light no shadow can overcome.

Yet we live amid sobering news. Each day on our pixelated screens we witness leaders claiming to speak in the name of the people but act in service of power. Their speech is laced with half-truths; their sacrifices are demanded of others. Once again, the sword is drawn, and the suffering falls upon civilians: upon children, women and men whose only crime is being in the way.

Where a semblance of democracy remains, the movements from disbelief to concern, horror, anger and outrage can be channelled into protest. In Australian society, where multiculturalism and social cohesion are valued by many, and where ethnic divisiveness, racism, Antisemitism and Islamophobia are called out politically, there is still space for public remonstration. Given the staggering scale of human suffering and infrastructure destruction in the Hamas–Israeli war, protest at home has been organised, focused, noisy, targeted and met with considerable public and political accord. While human suffering across numerous war zones remains the focus of our prayers for a fracturing world, the fragility of social cohesion at home deserves mention. The power of protest is often brittle. There are those who seek power through disruption. We can see how easily the progression from disbelief to outrage can morph into vengefulness and rioting, a dissipated power where minority ethnic groups and those at the margins of society invariably suffer most. We know this in our own history. Somehow lost in this tragic mélange of war, suffering, politics and protest, is the word 'Holy': a word used by some to designate Israel as the 'Holy Land'.

But how can prayer ever be too political when the Prince of Peace is found among the broken? Must we silence compassion for fear of division?

In this aching contrast, Christ offers another kind of power. Not the might of missiles or the pride of parades, but the persistent, cruciform power of love. This love does not crush but carries. It does not boast but bends low in solidarity. What anguish must tear at Christ's heart when the broken are dismissed as 'collateral'? He sees not statistics, but stories. Not rubble, but souls. He knows every name.

To follow Jesus is to live in tension: the dissonance between the Gospel's promise and the world's pain. We may be tempted to place Jesus safely beyond history, enthroned somewhere untouched by our turmoil. But this is not the Christ of the Gospels. He came into our world clothed in dust and vulnerability, and by the Spirit, he remains, still walking through the ruins, still weeping with the wounded.

Our world groans: it groans beneath the weight of war, beneath the grief of displacement, beneath the tremors of injustice. At times it feels as though the very earth beneath our feet is shifting. In the flood of news and images, our hearts grow heavy. We fear. We mourn. We grow numb. And yet, a prayer rises:

> *From the ends of the earth I call to you,*
>
> *when my heart is faint.*
>
> *Lead me to the rock that is higher than I...*
>
> *(Ps. 61:2)*

This is not the cry of escape, but of anchoring. The rock is Christ – solid and sure – who does not stand apart from the storm but within it, bidding us join him there. Even when the anguish is distant, in lands we may never walk, in tongues we do not speak, our prayers cross every border, because Christ already stands in their midst.

When asked recently where my prayers take me, I found my heart drawn to the Middle East: to Gaza's shattered streets, to the people, including hostages, whose names we may never know. It steadies my prayers to believe that Christ stands with them all, holding together what the world seeks to tear apart.

And still, I grieve. I grieve that in some Christian spaces, public prayer for Gaza is seen as too political, too fraught. But how can prayer ever be too political when the Prince of Peace is found among the broken? Must we silence compassion for fear of division?

The Spirit of Christ is not confined by our discomfort. He moves freely, always toward the suffering, always toward the cross. My hope, my longing, is to follow him more nearly there.

So I write the following story – not to explain, but to encounter. Not only to understand, but to draw near. Story invites me to see with the eyes of the heart. My believing imagination becomes a doorway into another way of knowing: a knowing shaped not by doctrine alone, but by

love, by presence, by shared pain.

And in this place, I glimpse him again: Christ, among the ruins, his light undimmed, his love undeterred.

My story is entitled: **'The Stranger Amid the Rubble'**.

PART TWO: THE STORY

An old man and his grandson returned to Northern Gaza to find their home reduced to rubble. Amid the devastation, they pieced together a makeshift shelter. One day, while searching for food near a relief convoy, the boy encountered an unusual but friendly man. When he returned, his eyes sparkled with excitement as he told his grandfather about this stranger – barefoot, wounded and weeping – wandering the ruins of what had once been their neighbourhood.

'I asked him why he was crying,' the boy said, 'and he told me, "Perhaps I cry the tears you, at this moment, cannot."'

The old man listened closely. As the boy vividly described the open wounds on the stranger's hands and feet, recognition stirred within him. He had known this presence his whole life.

'Pa, can you see him?' the boy asked, pointing toward the distant figure, forgetting for a moment that his grandfather was almost blind.

'Yes,' the old man replied, 'I see him clearly. I see him in my spirit.'

Looking out at the skeletal remains of homes and hopes, the old man asked, 'Where are those who still pray for us?'

Weeks earlier, the boy had found a charging outlet for his Grandfather's phone. Through it, the old man, once a leader in his community, was able to catch-up with recent news. The stories it relayed spoke of a nightmare that he and the boy were already experiencing: the ceaseless destruction, the unimaginable suffering and casualty counts too high to even countenance. Superpowers, militant factions, and theological narratives collided in a brutal storm. He grieved for his people, for the innocence lost, and for the voices buried beneath rubble and conflicting political ideologies. And yet, he clung to one truth as one might to a lifeline in a raging storm. Christ, the Wounded One, would not desert them. It was to him that the old man cried out.

One report particularly haunted him: a newly elected U.S. President had suggested annexing Palestine, resettling its people elsewhere, and remaking the land into a 'Riviera of the Middle East'. The old man burned with anger, but held his emotions in check. He refused to let hatred define him. He refused to be buried in the volcanic ash of vengeance. Demonising others would only block the light of Christ's kingdom.

Looking out at the skeletal remains of homes and hopes, the old man asked, 'Where are those who still pray for us?' In his spirit and on the inner screen of his active imagination, he saw Jesus just as the boy had described: barefoot, wounded, and weeping. But another figure had also become visible: the figure of the US President. To the old man's surprise, the President was trying to steal Jesus' threadbare cloak. Yet instead of resisting, Jesus calmly removed it, folded it, and placed it in the President's hands. The President, who considered himself a 'dealmaker', is flabbergasted. The old man wondered if this commanding world leader was being confronted by a power of love he found hard to comprehend.

The old man realised that the boy had felt shame for not being able to offer the stranger even a scrap of bread. 'We had nothing,' he contended.

The wise old man knew that Christ could be welcomed not only at a table, but within the soul. In what he called his 'inner temple of abiding presence', he prayerfully opened a gentle and welcoming space for the one who, in that inner place, was not a stranger. In his spirit he could visualise tending to the wounds of his holy visitor. Jesus, in response, revealed the gash in his own side. Through the portal of Jesus' wound the old man was drawn deeper and gathered into Christ's very being. From within that holy intimacy, he could see the world anew: not with fear, but with understanding. If he were to contemplate the powers that shaped his world, from presidents to militants, he would first need to comprehend the redemptive vision and gift of Christ.

His people were returning to ruins, many mourning those who would never return. But the wounded Christ was not absent. Through the Spirit, Jesus was moving among them, whispering to every broken and suffering soul, bearing their pain, and taking their despair into himself.

The old man marvelled that Jesus had revealed himself to a young boy. The humility and gentleness of the Messiah could not be stolen – not by rulers, not by war, not by despair. His kingdom was alive, even here, among ash and anguish.

He felt his calling affirmed. He would help form his grandson in the ways of the Stranger and teach others as well. He would pray: not for revenge, but against the spirit of vengeance so often glorified by leaders. The word 'vengeance', he believed, belonged only to God.

And then, another vision: an explosion nearby. Chaos. Screams. Dust. But through the smoke, he saw Jesus again – amid the wounded and dying – drawing them close, then into the open wound in his side.

He bowed his head. The Stranger, who was light in this great darkness, was still intimately present among them.

PART THREE: THE RESPONSE

Christ is here. He walks among the ruins, receiving pain I cannot carry alone. He invites me to see with the heart, to know him in the sorrow of others. In this knowing, prayer becomes a sharing of grief, of protest, and of hope.

When my prayers feel small, when I grow weary, he stands with the broken. His light endures. The darkness has not overcome it.

I remember the old man – how he welcomed the wounded Christ into his 'inner temple'. In the rubble he was called to pass on this sacred knowing, to carry the Light.

And now I pray, not with fear, but with faith. For Gaza, for Israel, for the world. The Spirit is not contained. And in the stillness, I hear: *Be not afraid.*

CHRIS BROWN

is an honorary research fellow of Trinity College, Queensland and a spiritual director. His two books are: *Reflected Love: Companioning in the Way of Jesus* (2012) and *Guiding Gideon: Awakening to Life and Faith* (2015). Chris contributes to holyscribblers.blogspot.com.

The Story of Souleymane

A film directed by Boris Lojkine

Reviewed by Darren Mitchell

Precarious is an essential adjective for bike-courier Souleymane's plight in this edge of your seat film set on Parisian streets, the third feature from director Boris Lojkine (*Hope, Camille*) each of which have been garlanded at international film festivals.

Souleymane (Abou Sangare), a recently arrived Guinean asylum seeker, works as a food deliverer navigating the night-time economy's demanding customers and restaurateurs. Without independent means and only those who have come before him as guides, Souleymane's working life is a helter-skelter of responding to the relentless phone-app and other people's impatient expectations.

Although his colonial French is an asset in dealing with others, Souleymane is invariably vulnerable to complaint or random encounter with authorities, the latter not only with the police but also with his 'employer'. The nameless food delivery company has a sporadic face-check system to weed out illegal workers and Souleymane finds himself each night having to scoot across the city to meet up with his middleman, Emmanuel (Emmanuel Yovanie), the registered account holder, to satisfy the phone-app. Emmanuel controls all the income as the owner of the licence and like all middlemen wants his cut first before Souleymane can fund his own needs. In the eyes of the state and the market Souleymane is both undocumented and invisible.

Although in limbo, a recent arrival with no social security and a gig worker with no employment security, Souleymane conducts himself with dignity – he is diligent, hardworking and careful with his paperwork. The phone is also his emotional lifeline back to home, whether phoning his mother to assure her he will send money, or his fiancé, where in one extended conversation he attempts to convince her to take up a marriage offer from another man in the village. He will not judge her if this is what she chooses. They share graceful exchanges over the distance. We are only privy to their voices, never meeting his family, heightening our awareness of the loneliness involved in seeking a better life far away.

These are rare moments where Souleymane is not subject to the judgement of strangers – the instantaneous star-ratings of his app constellation, and the less hasty but inveterate bureaucracy that is OFPRA, the French office for the protection of refugees and stateless persons.

Tutored by another middleman Barry (Alpha Oumar Sow) in how to convince the unnamed OFPRA asylum interviewer (Nina Meurisse) of his plight, Souleymane wrestles with his conscience hoping he can choose honesty over concoction. Inevitably, through forgetfulness or nervousness, he confuses some details as he relates his version. Although the interviewer has heard all the conceits and embellishments before, her gentle questioning to get to his story, to listen to his experience, her compassionate preparedness to be convinced, leaves hope as the film draws to a close.

As well as the feature earning the Cannes 2024 Jury (second) Prize in the *Un Certain Regard* sidebar showcase for innovative filmmaking, first-time actor Sangare was awarded best performer. Drawing on his own streetwise immigrant experience, he is soulful and kinetic. Sangare's steely, committed performance, coupled with the fast-paced street-level camera work and the narrative drive, draws the viewer alongside Souleymane's precarious ride.

Exploitation of others and a careless transactionalism are the default settings of many that Souleymane encounters during his shifts, and his long working hours, unsafe conditions, and demanding managers with their 'timepieces' are a bane shared with many across the world.

Although French colonialism lurks in the shadows, the film is a universal story of self-interest and greed. Exploitation of others and a careless transactionalism are the default settings of many that Souleymane encounters during his shifts, and his long working hours, unsafe conditions, and demanding managers with their 'timepieces' are a bane shared with many across the world. These commonplace workplace ingredients are not new subjects for film; in *The Story of Souleymane* they are merely updated. In fact, Souleymane's invisibility and his mode of transport hark back to the advent of screened moving images.

In 1895, in Paris, the Lumière brothers screened the world's first exhibited film, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyons*. As well as bodies shown in continuous movement, there are cyclists also finishing their shift, winding their way through the crowd of men and women spilling through the gates onto the street. These people are not characters, they are anonymous, depersonalised, like cogs in a machine that ironically produces the cinematographic equipment that the Lumières

The Story of Souleymane

invented. They maybe from another time, but these late-nineteenth century work-a-day images are akin to the unvarnished subsistence of Souleymane who must remain in constant movement on his bicycle, an invisible cog in a virtual world.

In the twenty-first century micro-economy of food services and entertainment, rather than eat out or get take away in the company of others, we consume food delivered to the door. Rather than gather in cinemas we watch the digital screen at home, alone or on our handheld device with its apps that now distract as well as connect us to our world. It is as though the screen must be satisfied first, its ubiquity and curation demanding our attention before we attend to our own needs. In *The Story of Souleymane* Lokjine gives his character a name and invites us to put aside our self-interest and to pay attention to his story.

Darren Mitchell is a member of St Barnabas Broadway, Sydney, and *Zadok* film reviewer. His PhD was on Anzac commemoration rituals.

We Have Never Been Woke

We Have Never Been Woke.

The Cultural Contradictions of a New Elite

Musa Al-Gharbi, Princeton University Press, 2024, Hardback, 421 pages.

Reviewed by Paul Tyson

This is a very interesting sociological book about public morality surges conducted by, and for, symbolic capitalists. 'Symbolic capitalist' is a turn a phrase invented by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Let me briefly outline what a symbolic capitalist is.

I am a symbolic capitalist. That is, I do not earn my living from making things, producing food, doing physically necessary jobs, entertaining, or caring for children, the sick, or the aged. Rather, it is the *symbolic* meaning of my knowledge credentials that gives me 'capital' that I can convert into an income. And – should I secure a respectable knowledge-worker job – I will have a sedentary job, a good income, and high status, which will enable me to become a comfortable upper middle-class elite.

In the post-industrial West, the symbolic economy has become huge. We still have builders, fixers, carers, fighters, healers, transporters, luxury providers, entertainers and retailers, but manufacturing, agriculture and natural resource exploitation are now tiny employers, and everything else is symbolic capitalism.

Now, despite having a PhD and being well published, I myself have not secured a tenured academic job. Thus, I am in a surplus knowledge elite. There are a lot of us out there at present. I have not died under a bridge in poverty, but I am likely to be resentful of the professors I aspired to join, because they have an income of $120,000 a year, and get all the perks of travel, status and paid research that I wanted, but could not achieve. Al-Gharbi points out that it is disgruntled symbolic capitalists trying to turf out and replace established elites, and insecure symbolic capitalists under threat from (or coopted into) a symbolic virtue coup, who are the prime movers in what he calls 'Great Awokenings'. These are periodic episodes of intense professional virtue signalling within the symbolic capitalist world. When a Great Awokening is on, there is serious competitive survival pressure among knowledge elites, and the need to show that you are in a good knowledge elite becomes integral to your symbolic capital.

Al-Gharbi identifies four Great Awokenings over the past century; the 1930s, the late 1960s, the late 1980s, and from the early 2010s to the present. These awokenings focus on anti-racism, anti-sexism and protecting the environment. They are supposed to be about egalitarianism, justice for the oppressed, responsible and fair living, and the empowering of previously disenfranchised people. Using carefully unpacked sociological evidence, al-Gharbi points out that Great Awokenings are the opposite of what they claim to be. In reality these moral sounding causes are used as a means whereby privileged symbolic capitalists retain or secure their elite privilege at the expense of symbolic capitalist rivals, and without any actual benefit to actual oppressed and marginal people.

The data backing up al-Gharbi's analysis is bullet proof. Great Awokenings – and particularly our present one – are symptoms of self-protecting elitism, not egalitarian reform movements. We symbolic capitalists might sincerely believe we are fighting for justice and humanity, but in reality we are promoting the opposite at the same time as we protect or enhance our own elite advantage.

Al-Gharbi notes that recently in the U.S. symbolic capitalists have strongly identified with the Democratic Party. Unsurprisingly, the symbolic capitalist hubs of California and New York State are firmly Democrat. And rich. One in every 12 Californians and one in every 13 New Yorkers are millionaires (or above), for these Democrat states are where the rich and elite symbolic capitalists live. They are also the states with the highest inequalities and starkest segregations in the US, even though

– controlling state politics – the Democrats could presumably change that if they wished to. But they do not. Low-paid women and racial minorities do the cooking, cleaning, delivery, childcare and so forth for these symbolic capitalist elites – supporting their elite lifestyle – and there is no genuine political interest within elite Democratic circles in materially changing the elite-facilitating under-economy. In reality, rich and powerful symbolic capitalist elites of deep Democratic conviction have never actually been woke. They are neoliberal free marketeers when it comes to economics, and are only symbolically interested in diversity, inclusion and equality in practice.

So it seems like everything we moralistic symbolic elites do is self-interested elite preservation, no matter what we think we are doing, and what we say morally motivates us.

As mentioned, al-Gharbi's work is sociologically very rigorous. His aim is descriptive not prescriptive. But while his book is highly illuminating and gives a very valuable perspective on the institutional power of DEI righteousness, and explains why vitriolic online mobbing, cancellation and litigation are currently being inflicted on anyone who can be made to look anti-woke, reading this book does give one a decidedly sinking feeling about human social reality itself. This has to do with the theoretical limits of the sociological perspective, which al-Gharbi acknowledges. But let me give you my philosophical and theological take on the limits of Sociology.

Sociology is a reductively positivist science of social behaviour, operating within what Charles Taylor calls 'the immanent frame'. It presupposes that there are law-like statistical patterns that are determinative of human social behaviours, and good empirical knowledge and careful statistical analysis can uncover these laws. It presupposes that all social meanings are social constructions that serve the physical necessities of survival and power. It observes that there have always been elites, and that those elites always act to preserve their positions of privilege, status and power. So it seems like everything we moralistic symbolic elites do is self-interested elite preservation, no matter what we think we are doing, and what we say morally motivates us. This book performs a serious moral deflation of academic and justice activist vocations, and it is hard for people like myself (surplus to employment requirements though I be) to swallow.

Prior to the twentieth-century ascendence of the materialist psychological and sociological human sciences, Western intellectual elites operated in a culturally Christian context, even if they were atheists. In this cultural context, Truth, Freedom, Justice and the Common Good were still understood to be (in some sense) divine realities that transcended human wealth and power interests. This did not mean that elites or activists were pure and noble, but there was some Classical sense of a divinely sanctioned cosmic order that human knowledge and power should be submissive to. So Enlightened and Secular Liberal Democracy (which only takes off in the nineteenth century) was functionally overshadowed by real transcendentals, probably right up until the 1970s. After the 1970s our knowledge class effectively abandoned high transcendentals in a positivist realist manner (where only what you can see and touch is real) and in a postmodern constructivist manner (where all meaning is just an imaginative and performative expression of power). Hence, the moralism of our present Great Awokening cannot be anything other than an imaginative construction aiding the material self-interest of our prevailing symbolic elites. This, I think, is why old Progressives (such as Drew Hutton) still uphold Free Speech, Enlightenment Universalism, the Goodness of the Common Person, and the Majority Will as genuine First Principles, but our young Progressives do not.

In sum, I recommend this book highly. It is an illuminating empirical study on what actually makes our present Great Awokening fly, and why it is actually the opposite of what it claims to be. However, this study has its limits. It cannot see the old transcendentals of Free Speech and Liberal Democracy which the Enlightenment vision of the Common Good relies on. So it gives the unintended impression that elitist self-interest-serving governance of one form or another will always be what is really going on, regardless of whether Free Speech and Liberal Democracy are upheld or not. This is problematic if one wishes to use al-Gharbi's work to show that the curtailment of Free Speech and the over-riding of the Majority Will by our present DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) morality activists is an inherently bad development.

Paul Tyson is a freelance academic from Brisbane. He has written numerous books on theology, ethics, sociology and science.

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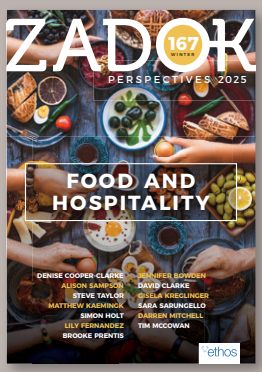

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