

The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands

Jeremy Salt. University of California Press

Reviewed by Doug Turnbull

Not long after the attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, I read an article by Arandathi Roy (the author of "The God of Small Things"). Aware of President Bush's determination to seek revenge on the perpetrators of the attack, and what that might mean for the world, she suggested that before America sought its revenge it should ask the question: "Why do they (the perpetrators) hate us so much?" She went on to suggest that the foreign policy of America and its disastrous interventions in the affairs of Middle Eastern countries had led to the action of September 11.

Jeremy Salt, a Professor of History at the University of Ankara, has written a book which expands on Arandathi Roy's posed question. (The book is not held in the Bendigo Library and I had to trigger an inter-library loan from Mornington to access a copy.)

The same mentality which told European nations that they had a perfect right to go to all parts of the world and colonise "uncivilized" peoples, (who "needed" the benefit of western culture and Christian faith), also came into play in the Middle East when oil was discovered in those lands.

Salt chronicles the long and bloody history of Western intervention in Arab lands. With an amazing grasp of historical detail, he examines the major events that have shaped the region. French and British colonial mindsets brought suffering to lands including Algeria, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. Salt's narrative highlights the interventionist foreign policy of the U.S. in more recent times.

He uses U.S. and British archives extensively in his research, and paints a damning picture of a sustained campaign by Western powers to dominate the Middle East. Those sources reveal what politicians were determining behind closed doors, and provides the true reasons why.

The present upheaval in the Middle East becomes clearer for me in reading Salt's book. It has changed my understanding of what is happening there and who are truly culpable for the tension, destruction and massive loss of human life.



Bendigo Uniting Churches Social Justice Group

*This is the fourth Insert for 2024;
it is circulated within all Bendigo Congregations.
We thank them for their support, and welcome
opportunities to share their social justice concerns.*

Christmas is coming!

We celebrate the incarnation, the story of how God took flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus. We recall that this broken world is where God continues to be present with God's people as they labour in the service of God's Kingdom.

We labour for love, we labour for peace, we labour for justice.
We know that the conflict, the greed, the violence and cruelty that inflicts our planet is deeply offensive to God. It is also deeply offensive to us.

We call ourselves disciples, and so we are.
We follow Jesus, the Prince of Peace,
who brought God's radical call to love.
Therefore we will work for justice,
we will confront the powers,
we will raise our voices,
we will speak the truth.

When the song of the angels is stilled
when the star in the sky is gone
when the kings and princes are home
when the shepherds are back with their flocks
the work of Christmas begins;

to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry
to release the prisoner
to rebuild the nations
to bring peace among the people
to make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman



Food and Justice

Come Christmas and we are likely to sit down to a splendid array of delicious food, in company with our friends and family. Food is at the centre of our celebrations, and our lives, as individuals, families and communities.

*The following is an excerpt from the keynote address by **Jonathan Cornford** to the **UC Food & Social Justice Convention** held in October. Jonathan presented a biblical, theological and justice analysis of food in our world today. **He speaks of how our modern food system developed:***

... In the century or so after the Black Death, roughly 1350-1450, feudal serfdom came to an end and there was a period when independent peasant farmers were comparatively prosperous. But as we move into the sixteenth century this all begins to change.

This is the dawn of European capitalism, and in countries like England we can begin to see emergence of a newly commercialized agriculture founded on the enclosure of land and the hardening of private property rights. By the eighteenth century the small proprietor is almost extinct in England and we can see a very sharp polarization between wealthy 'farmers' who controlled the land, and the agricultural wage labourers who actually did the work.

But it is the nineteenth century when things really change dramatically. This is the century of industrialization and rapid urbanization, happening at the same time as explosive settler colonialism, especially in the English speaking world. Industrialisation was made possible by intensive capital investment in machinery that was operated by low wage urbanized labour. But such large concentrations of low wage labour are only socially sustainable if you can feed them on very cheap food.

In England, this set up a struggle between land owners and industrialists, which the industrialists ultimately won ... when Britain removed tariffs on imported food and created globalized incentives and competition in agriculture. ...

... the continued expansion of industrial cities and the emergence of the modern megalopolis ... was ultimately made possible by the vast amounts of cheap food flooding in from the stolen lands of North America, Australasia and southern Africa, the largest land grab in human history.

But such cheap food came at an unbearable human cost to those whose land was stolen, and, as is now increasingly clear, to the soil and ecosystems of those places, nowhere more so than in Australia.

We now live in an urbanized world – since 2008 more than half of humanity lives in cities ... Urbanisation continues to be premised upon globalized cheap food ... (and) ecologically destructive forms of agriculture, exploitative labour and exploitative pricing, and controlled by vast multinationals.

The competitive race to the bottom in this food system continually incentivises someone, somewhere, to exploit people and the planet in whatever ways they can get away with.

At the heart of all of these problems is the fact that food is too cheap. We do not pay the price that is necessary in order to take care of food producers and ecosystems, while feeding the world. And yet, the global poor, and especially the urban poor, are now dependent upon cheap food and incredibly sensitive to any price rise in the core grains of wheat, rice and corn, even here in Australia. How we solve this Gordian Knot is at the heart of the challenge facing humanity this century.

Jonathan & Kim Cornford began Manna Gum 2009.

<https://www.mannagum.org.au/>

Manna Gum is an independent Christian non-profit organisation that seeks to promote a vision of life that is truly good news: for us, for our neighbours and for the world. It publishes articles, podcasts and other resources that provide a biblical perspective on economy, ecology and other important stuff.

Manna Gum has been the culmination of the previous ten years of Jonathan and Kim's life working and campaigning on development issues in Laos and Cambodia, working with the homeless and drug dependent in Melbourne, leading Bible studies, exploring Christian expressions of responsible living in the inner city, and participating in ecological restoration work. Kim and Jonathan now live in Bendigo, Victoria, with their two girls, Amy and Mhairi. They are members of the Seeds Community, a small missional community in Long Gully.

Haiku

God, your will be done,
wars be ended, guns silenced;
may we dwell in love.

The gospels tell us
that wealth and power hold us
back from God's kingdom.

The days of Noah:
Christians pretending all's well
while the planet burns.



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