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I'm deadset against living books

Honathan Porter | November 26, 2007

IT'S time we all went to the library and borrowed someone - not a book, a person, and rid ourselves of our beastly prejudices.

How it works is this: the living library project is the politically correct equivalent of speed dating. It brings people face to face with their prejudices. The idea, which has won a National Multicultural Marketing Award, is that if you are exposed to someone you feel prejudiced about, say a pedophile or a terrorist, then after chatting with one for a few minutes - Poof! - your prejudice disappears. That's right, you will be as full of loving kindness as a NSW judge about to let a child molester off with a good behaviour bond.

These folk clearly haven't been working very hard on their prejudices.

The project, spearheaded by the Lismore library in northern NSW, brings together "people who are different, one on one, in the same way that readers borrow a book, engage with them and try to understand them", says the Community Relations Commission. "People who have experienced prejudice, negative stereotyping or discrimination put themselves up for borrowing at the regular living library days."

The library has available for loan a Bundajlung artist, a Muslim convert, straight-edge youth (who apparently believes in a sex, drug and alcohol-free lifestyle) and male and female transplant recipients. It's based on the assumption that meeting these people will lessen my prejudices against them. But the more people I meet, the more I find all my prejudices confirmed.

To paraphrase Winston Churchill, you may take the most extreme Muslim, the most devout believer in climate change and the most passionate refugee advocate, put them at a table together and what do you get? The sum of all my prejudices.

One of my favourite prejudices is against loony theocracies, including Saudi Arabia, where a woman was recently sentenced to 200 lashes after she was raped. Her crime was to be sitting in a car with her boyfriend when she was kidnapped by seven men (he also was raped by the men).

The problem for the judge was that she wasn't married to her bloke, so she had to be flogged.

The library people loan scheme should be exported to the Sunni triangle. Let's send a few dozen Patrick White-reading, Chomsky-quoting, self-appointed hand-wringers to a basement in Falluja and see how they go at dispelling their kidnappers' prejudices against skinny, Anglo-Saxon Balmain basket-weaving Pilgerisers.

Speaking of basket-weavers, Britain's contemporary artists are too scared to go after the prophet Mohammed, (may peace be upon his holy name). Grayson Perry, whom *The Times* in London describes as a cross-dressing potter and Turner Prize winner, said he avoided commenting on radical Islam. "I've censored myself," Perry said.

It's a shame he didn't start censoring himself a while ago; his work includes a depiction of a teddy bear being born from a penis as the Virgin Mary.

"The reason I haven't gone all out attacking Islamism in my art is because I feel real fear that someone will slit my throat." Never mind that millions died face down in the mud so Mr-Cross-Dressing-Potter could throw whatever he likes on the wheel.

So why is it always the Bollinger Bolsheviks who support terrorists? And why do the Leunig lefties clamour for the release of fiends from Guantanamo? And why are the morally bankrupt so quiveringly eager to surrender to the most prejudiced in the land?

Don't they know that come the caliphate, these chardonnay socialist, inner-city elite, urban sophisticate - wait, I'm on a roll - Spencer Street Soviets smugly sipping their soybean skinny lattes from the skulls of honest loggers - will be the first ones put up against the wall and shot (if they're lucky).

Then of course we will be able to trace the political evolution of our nation thusly: noble savages; outpost of a monarchy; squattocracy; brief shining moment as a liberal democracy; outpost of monarchy again (remember all Johnny's trips to the palace?); then straight to loony theocracy.

The living library may be our only salvation to cure our prejudices. But what happens if leave your living book under the bed or on the television set and forget to return your living loan?

Can you engage with them in the bath, throw them on the bed if you disagree with them, or make notes or write rude words in their margins? And if they make you really angry, can you organise a living book bonfire?

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