

Comment

Let me be perfectly fluent about fluids



MAX FATCHEN

IT may seem inflammatory to talk about fluids. It reminds us that fluids are liquids and there are certain ones we consume which aren't good for us.

For some the very word fluid reminds them of water and this reminds them of water rates and desalination dilemmas.

But there must be a measured approach to fluids. We wash with them but I am concerned this frail body of ours must be irrigated constantly, that we are mostly consisting of fluid, that our organs need it to operate.

Why am I so fluent about fluids? Some of my best friends have been nursing sisters and when it comes to fluids, they are real gushers.

Lecturing me, they turn on the tap of their rhetoric.

Their opening gambit is: am I keeping up my fluids?

And as we paddle down this confessional waterway I am instructed on certain facts.

One is that we are all walking waterbags, a kind of miniature Millbrook. So it must be.

The trouble with age is that what is intake must also make its exits after one's inside has taken its share.

One of my friends of advancing years still loves travel and when he first went overseas he would know the sites of famous buildings and cathedrals.

Now he has his own directory of toilets. Paris, Rome, London, you name it and he knows where.

There is considerable inconvenience if you aren't geographically aware of conveniences.

I was once refused entry to a Parliament House toilet in a friendly neighbouring country. I was being escorted by a personable young New Zealander who gave the person a piece of her mind and a rather big piece as it's unwise to arouse a New Zealander.

Now liquid intake has been used as a cunning ploy by children.

Haven't we as parents said to children, "Have your drink of water before you go to bed and not too much or you know what will happen."

The cunning child has a sip, hands back the glass and snuggles down.

Lying in wait as it were. Let us roll back the years.

A strange thing has happened as far as I can remember in children's upbringing.

The bedclothes promoted a similar atmosphere to the Sahara Desert and in the dead of night there came the inevitable "I'm thirsty".

It was no good saying go to sleep. Liquid was required, the young body cried out for fluid, vocalising the need. The required glass was filled. And taken into the bedroom.

The light was switched on, the child sitting bolt upright in bed. The parched one took the glass in both hands, beady eyes alight with triumph and there came sip after slow sip.

Let us not call it a fluid fiasco - and I wouldn't dare. But when I see one of my nursing friends arriving I rush to the fridge or sink and gulp guiltily.

With here arrival comes the inevitable question: Am I taking my fluids? I tell you even my eyes grow moist that she should distrust me so.

And so to fluids let me raise a glass ast from an old drip.

We can save their souls



WHENEVER we drown in a verbal tsunami about the "tidal wave" of boat people, the phobic voices of those who demand border protection float to the surface.

They blow the same dog whistles about queue jumpers, cultural contamination, future terrorists and taxpayer costs, all of which have been debunked as myths.

The inquest into the Christmas Island boat tragedy and the proposed "refugee swap" with Malaysia have prompted the usual moral panic about "not in our backyard".

Ironically, these same voices demand that refugees on the other side of the world be accommodated by their neighbouring countries.

A case in point is my country of birth, Lebanon, where my compatriots are too often asked this loaded question: "Why can't your country grant citizenship to your Palestinian refugees?"

Despite all our infrastructure, our First World country panics at the spectre of a boatload of asylum seekers. But we expect post-war and post-occupation Lebanon to naturalise its refugees.

The Palestinian refugees fled their homeland in 1948 when the state of Israel was established. Apart from Lebanon, the refugees ended up in Jordan (two million) and Syria (477,000).

I have visited the refugee camps in Lebanon which make Australia's appalling detention centres look luxurious.

When considering the full narrative that rendered the Palestinians homeless, a different set of questions needs to be asked. Why are these refugees treated like commodities that can be cut-pasted from one Arab land to another?

This line of propaganda is fundamentally racist, assuming that all Arabs are the same: Palestinians should feel at home and simply dissolve into the familiar sand dunes.

Imagine permanently relocating victims of the Brisbane flooding to Christchurch then frowning at any ungrateful complaints of homesickness, as it is still an English-speaking country.

Rather than assuming that the solution to this inter-generational refugee problem is Lebanese citizenship, why not ask them about their aspirations and solutions? Because the answer to this pertinent question is too confronting - they want to return to their ancestral home and land in Palestine.



IN MY VIEW
JOSEPH WAKIM

For too long, the receiving states have been guilted into greater responsibility. Instead, the sending state should be asked if it is mature enough to accept responsibility for its actions. What compensation will it pay for Al Naqba - the catastrophic displacement and dispossession of Palestinians?

The UN General Assembly Resolution 194, passed in December 1948, declares that "all refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practical date".

After 60 years, this international law is still ignored with impunity.

The coronal inquest into the Christmas Island boat tragedy addresses six operational questions pertaining to surveillance and detection. It has confirmed that about half of the asylum seekers had fled the civil turmoil in Iraq.

Australia was part of the Coalition of the Willing that illegally invaded Iraq in 2003 without UN Security Council approval - overthrew their government, destroyed their civic infrastructure and

THE FACTS

- ▣ An asylum seeker is claiming refugee status, but a refugee has already been recognised under the 1951 Convention relating to the status of a refugee.
- ▣ Asylum seekers are not illegal immigrants. Under Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has a right to seek asylum.
- ▣ There is no orderly queue for asylum seekers to join. Many flee from countries where there is no UN Refugee Agency office or Australian Embassy.
- ▣ Of the 1254 claims assessed on Christmas Island from July 2009 to January 2010, only 110 people were found not to be genuine refugees.
- ▣ Australia only receives about 0.5 per cent of the 1.18 million new global asylum applications.
- ▣ Australia is ranked 47th as a world refugee host country.

Instead, we can ask questions that address the causes rather than the consequences of boat arrivals. Unlike public discourse which can be reduced to a string of formal expressions, private dialogue requires listening wholeheartedly, without prejudice, but with empathy. A dialogue would reveal why they are

“What can drive a family to sell everything they own and risk everyone they love to take this treacherous voyage?”

inadvertently unleashed the unholy sectarian war between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

We played a part in uprooting and creating these asylum seekers and have a moral responsibility to compensate for the fallout as they wash up on our shores in the ultimate act of desperation.

Apart from the valid operational questions that Coroner McCusker is investigating, there are bigger moral questions that go to the heart of the matter.

The same old questions dictate the public discourse: When, how and where did the boats arrive? How many boats and how many passengers? How much will they cost? Where shall we process them?

This is akin to planning a relocation of the refugee camps within Lebanon without exploring if Palestinians can return home.

fleeing in the first place. What can drive a family to sell everything they own and risk everyone they love to take this treacherous voyage?

Why are almost all these boat people vindicated and granted refugee status? What actions can we take as a nation to redress the unbearable circumstances that lead them to the sea in the first place?

If we are blinded by the boats and the tents, we fail to see the faces and hear the stories of the families inside.

If we question the question, we free ourselves to explore the causes rather than consequences. If we keep having discourse about boats, we fail to have dialogue with the people.

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