

## Indigenous People, The United Nations and Human Rights

*Sarah Pritchard (ed.); Zed Books Ltd: The Federation Press 1998; \$29.95*

What's in a name? Not nearly as much as is in the book.

There are very good reasons why an excellent guide to human rights law and practice should be associated with indigenous people's rights: the title of this book is a simple, and simply powerful, statement of the desirability of using the United Nations, and Human Rights Law, as means to advance the rights of indigenous people.

To change the name of the book would detract from that, so perhaps Zed Books and The Federation Press could reissue the book as a companion volume to itself, titled simply: 'A User's Guide to The United Nations and Human Rights', for that is exactly what the book is.

The greater part of the book is an overview and explanation of the operation of the United Nations' system of charters, treaties, complaints and reporting. The rights of indigenous peoples are used from time to time to illustrate the more general explanation, and the final part of the book focuses specifically on indigenous peoples.

This book is a remarkable collection of readable and informative essays by some of Australia's most authoritative human rights practitioners. Despite the specific focus of its title, it should be in the hands of every person with an interest in human rights activity.

**Simon Rice**

*Simon Rice, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights.*

## Feminists Fatale: The Changing Face of Australian Feminism

*by Jan Bowen; Harper Collins, 1998; 229 pp; \$17.95 softcover.*

*Feminists Fatale*, the latest of Jan Bowen's many books, is a collection of interviews with prominent feminists of different ages, ranging from 84 to 25. Bowen explores the questions: what are the generational differences between Australian feminists and what has feminism got to offer today's young women? After 25 years of activism, what does feminism mean today? Is it dead in the water because women refuse to identify themselves with the 'f' word? Are we still hung up on issues about whether one can be feminine *and* feminist?

Is Anne Summers right when she accuses young women of taking for granted all the rights the second-wave fought for, such as control of one's fertility and the right to meaningful education and work? What about Helen Garner's admonition of the young women who complained to the police when Ormond College abjectly failed to deal with their alleged sexual harassment by an older, powerful man? What about 'Generation F' or DIY Feminism? Have we lost the passion and the collectivity of those heady sixties and seventies? Are we all just 'Sisters, doin' it for ourselves'? Have we fallen for the trap of individualism at the cost

of collectivity and consciousness-raising?

Of the interviewees, I found the chapters on Poppy King, Geraldine Doogue and, of course, Helen Garner, most intriguing. Eva Cox, Anne Sherry, Wendy McCarthy, Quentin Bryce and Dur-e Dara are among the other interviewees. Poppy King is somewhat reluctant to identify as a feminist because she sees some streams of feminism as largely individualistic and self-centred at the expense of a truly altruistic, visionary movement. Further, she thinks the feminist movement has lost momentum, not having a collectivist vision for macro reform. Geraldine Doogue advocates that women, while still striving to be ambitious, capable career women, must not lose sight of the importance of 'nurturing'. She sees the role of mother and caregiver as tremendously valuable, such that they shouldn't be under-emphasised at the expense of ambition and career. She pursues a delicate balance between mother, caregiver and part-time, high profile work.

Helen Garner is just as infuriating as she was in *The First Stone*. While she reveals that the furore led to much painful soul-searching and self-doubt, she

doesn't resile from her position that the young women were unduly 'punitive' in going to the police, having lacked the capacity to stomp on the alleged groper's foot with a 'well-placed stiletto'. She doesn't address the irony of her self-confessed inability to confront a masseur who made an unsolicited advance. Yet in her case, there was nothing like the power differential that existed between the young female law students and the Master of Ormond College. She confesses she has not read any feminist theory and isn't interested in doing so (surprise, surprise!!) She sees herself as having been too 'bohemian' and 'bourgeois' in the seventies to be interested in 'practical' political causes such as the Women's Electoral Lobby. Perhaps she was never one to join feminist political campaigns, such as the one pursued on behalf of the Ormond College complainants.

Eva Cox is, as always, controversial but invigorating. Her call to arms to advocate for lasting structural change, not just a high status job and a BMW, is wonderful.

**Helen Brown**

*Helen Brown is a legal academic, a poverty lawyer and a mum.*

## Making Sense of the Family Court

*Leonie Star; Choice, 1998; 132 pp; \$16.00 softcover.*

The *Family Law Act 1975* has been subject to multiple and ongoing reforms since it came into force more than 20 years ago and it is no easy task to steer a clear path through all its provisions. This book, however, is a very thorough guide for anyone who is contemplating divorce in Australia. It leads readers through what they need to know about family law and the legal process and gives them step by step instructions for dealing with not only divorce itself but also the more difficult issues surrounding children, finances and the division of property. In addition, there is plenty of practical information such as where the Family Court is located throughout Australia, the roles of Court personnel and who to ask for assistance. The book is written in plain English which is accessible to lay readers and the author is to be commended for the clarity of her detailed interpretation of what people involved with the Family Court can expect to