



Source: Sabrina Tavernise, [‘One by one, killing off of Sunnis’](#), *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 05/07/05

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Writer/s: [Ingrid Wassenaar](#)

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The Past is Another Country

Sweeping the verandah was something that, if they didn't do it, left the main room full of Otranto sand. It wasn't really that the sand looked dirty, or got everywhere, it was just that sweeping seemed the proper response. They'd got on their 12:30 Stansted-Rome Go flight the previous Saturday with blank bright expectations in one hand and walk-on luggage in the other. A lot of theatrical yawning and coffee breath saw them safely onto the plane.

Met with blasting superheated air in Rome, they'd all piled into the frankly derisory Matiz, that Tim had booked and therefore insisted on driving all the way to Puglia. They'd laughed for hours about Tim's matiz-mo. Gritty Northern Philip, and air-brushed Jane. Dusty old Tess, and flyblown Tim. Their yearly week abroad.

Sweeping sand of a morning had something to do with Jane's body, loping out in its severe blue bikini, a sneer slung casually over a shoulder, dressed up as a plush beach towel. Philip padded after every day, trailed her with his electronic goods and blistered, torched ears, out into the blue Italian light.

The sand found its way into their loud lunches, taken amidst much riotous shouting about stuffed olives and how many glasses of red wine were good for you, hilarious imitations of Italian accents. As their teeth absorbed the wine, and their sun-shocked bodies sagged before a nap, Tess would pick off grains of sand-sweat welded to the folds of her stomach. She would glance

later, and there'd be tiny red bites where the sand had been. They were there too when, reading on the beach, she heaved herself up to go swimming. When they drank their cold beer on the verandah at six, grains appeared like dandruff down Philip's sunburnt side parting, especially when he leant in close.

Wet sand made plimsoll lines on Tim's refrigerated tackle box. Tim who seemed to think you could fish for pike off the Southern Italian coast, despite pike being a freshwater fish, thought Tess. Tim, who had brought along that unfeasibly long rod. Tim, who'd gone back in the Matiz with Philip and Jane the agreed day early, to meet all the children from their overpriced holiday camp in the Dorset countryside, leaving Tess to tie things up. Like the sun has the day, Tess, it was ever thus, had the job of cleaning.

Next year had already been planned out, now Puglia had been invaded, colonized, sucked dry, and left behind. Next year's destination of choice was Thailand, which made the grade by virtue of sticky rice and stickier palms. No sweeping there. Doing the last day's cleaning, Tess felt around under the cupboard with her broom, making the cheap glasses rattle. It orchestrated an encore of the late night toasts. The sand skittered out as Philip's wine-bruised mouth fell through her mind, his older, younger mouth that pushed against the busy broom, then took off, smiling, after Jane.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ingrid Wassenaar.