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Witnessing East Timor's independence

POLITICS

Meredyth Tamsyn



The day, like most others in East Timor, started very early. But it was not the chickens or motorbikes that woke us that day, it was heart-pounding excitement.

It was 30 August 1999. An event was about to take place that had seemed entirely mythical. It was so unlikely, yet here it was. After 24 years of military occupation, the East Timorese would decide via UN referendum whether to remain a part of Indonesia, or become an independent nation.

My colleague Mandy and I were UN observers visiting Maliana, the large town close to the border with West Timor. In the darkness we sat outside the UN compound eating hot bread rolls bought from a lone man pushing a cart. As we drove to the small mountain chapel where we intended to spend the day, scores of people lined the road walking slowly towards the polling booth.

At the chapel of Odomau-Atas I saw people I had met on previous visits to Maliana. They smiled shyly as they cast their votes and seemed a little perplexed as to what to do with themselves after this momentous, yet somehow mundane event (tick the box, fold the paper, place it in the blue box) was over.

But the euphoria would not last. By mid-afternoon as UN observers and staff celebrated the remarkably peaceful day, locals began to exercise long held plans to evacuate to Falintil (Armed Forces for an Independent East Timor) held mountain areas. Their fear was of a violent Indonesian military and militia backlash for their having had the audacity to come out and vote in the face of a tremendous months-long campaign of intimidation.

By nightfall there were over a hundred refugees seeking shelter in the backyard of the UN house we were staying in. The Australian head of the UN in the district spent hours negotiating with the Indonesian Police Chief for their safe passage to the police compound the following morning.

A week after the ballot, as police looked on, militia would murder 47 people there.

By then we were back in Dili. Our journey had been punctuated by frightening searches at militia roadblocks. The beautiful, friendly people we had known were in a quandary — stay at home, or run to the mountains to hide. Some tried to leave but were stymied by an early release of the results: almost 80 per cent for independence.

The reality of the results would take some time to sink in as an overpowering fear was now gripping the country.

After days of shooting in Dili we were picked up by the Australian ambassador John McCarthy and evacuated. On the road to the airport there were cars lined up, piled high with household objects and mattresses, not moving. The heavily armed militiamen prowled up and down the centre of the road ensuring there would be no escape. The image of the static cars would haunt me for years.

Over 200,000 people would be displaced as a result of the ensuing campaign of terror by the Indonesian military as they executed their 'Operation of Sympathy', a long held plan to

destroy all the vital infrastructure in East Timor and displace as much of the population as possible.

In the face of sudden and overwhelming Australian public outrage, the Howard Government was forced to send in peacekeepers. They were mobilised fast. Several skirmishes took place between Australian and Indonesian soldiers, although for the most part these were kept from the media.

Independence came in a lavish ceremony in 2002 attended by scores of world leaders. In 2005 the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation delivered its final report in which it recommended the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute human rights violations by Indonesian forces during the 24 year occupation, as well as reparations to be made to victims. President Xanana Gusmão was reluctant to release the findings or follow them, preferring to focus on a close relationship with Indonesia.

A photographic exhibition in Dili organised by the UN opens at the presidential palace this week to mark the ten-year anniversary of the ballot, and there will also be a special Tetum language screening of the new film [Balibo](#). The face of Timor has changed in the intervening years. Much of the infrastructure destroyed by departing Indonesian forces in 1999 has not been replaced and some people are poorer than they were under the Indonesian occupation. But there are very few who would want the Indonesians to return.

In the last ten years this small country has seen Indonesian militia incursions across the border, an attempted coup and an almost successful assassination attempt on the President. But this week it is worth remembering back to the day in late 1999 when residents of Dili watched in disbelief as Indonesian soldiers walked down to the wharf and boarded boats to leave East Timor forever.

Exhausted, emaciated and almost delirious with shock at what had been done to their friends, their family, and their country, they laughed, yelled and wept. It was over. For a fleeting moment the East Timorese could savour this extraordinary sight before the task of rebuilding the world's newest nation would begin.

Reasons for optimism in Israel and Palestine

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

One of the world's leading commentators and writers on religion, Karen Armstrong, has just released a new book entitled *The Case for God: What Religion Really Means*. It's Armstrong at her best, and a few weeks ago I reviewed it favourably in [The Weekend Australian](#). As well as making a strong case for mainstream religion, in the book she deplores the divisive and destructive rhetoric of both religious fundamentalists and militant atheists.

Recently Armstrong has moved beyond her role as academic observer of religion to become an advocate for interreligious dialogue. This year she launched her [Charter for Compassion](#). Rather than focusing on alienating differences, Armstrong seeks to emphasise the Golden Rule: 'treat others the way you want to be treated'. She argues this is fundamental to all the major religious traditions, and could act as a unifying principle.

The video featured here is from the Charter's website, and it's a slick presentation of Armstrong's message. As she says in the video, 'I want people to hear the compassionate voice of religion. I want to change the conversation and bring compassion to the forefront of people's attention.'

Though I am also an advocate of interreligious dialogue, in the face of conflict around the globe generated or inflamed by religion, I must admit to often feeling pessimistic about dialogue helping to change things for the better. But thankfully people or events occasionally come along that challenge this pessimism, and last weekend I experienced one such event.

I was part of a small group which met with three members of the [Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel](#) (ICCI), an umbrella organisation that oversees interfaith dialogue in that deeply troubled and divided country. They were in Australia on a two week speaking tour.

The three visitors were Jewish co-chair of the ICCI, Debbie Weissman, Palestinian Muslim co-chair, Issa Jaber, and Palestinian Christian, Rula Shubeita. All three spoke about how they got involved in dialogue, and the motivation and hopes that sustain them.

Jaber was particularly moving in what he said. He was drawn into this work because of a family tragedy during the first Intifada. One of his brothers who worked in an open-air market in Jerusalem was among several people killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber.

Another brother heard about the blast and rushed to the scene. Some members of the Jewish crowd which had gathered, after learning he was a Palestinian Muslim, set upon him in retaliation. He was bashed to within an inch of his life, and spent five months in hospital recovering from severe injuries.

So Jaber is a living symbol of the horrors of the conflict, and of hope for its resolution. One brother was killed by terrorists from his own faith, and another was almost killed by a Jewish mob. Despite this, Jaber has become a leading activist promoting dialogue, reconciliation and peace.

Jaber, and the other two members of the ICCI, though mindful of huge obstacles, are remarkably sanguine about the future. Within their lifetimes, they expect peace to reign after implementation of the two state solution between Israel and Palestine. And they see

interreligious dialogue as one of the tools for creating a climate in which this can happen.

You can hear an interview with Jaber, Weissman and Shubeita conducted by Rachael Kohn on [The Spirit of Things](#) on Radio National this Sunday (30 August 2009) immediately after the 6pm news, and it will be available on the program's website. They are testament to the fact that we can overcome conflict between faiths, and that efforts like Karen Armstrong's Charter for Compassion might actually make a difference.

Indian cinema beyond Bollywood

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

Independent films tend to be a speck in the shadow of the world's lucrative commercial film industries. India has one of the most lucrative of them all; Bollywood, famed for its fanciful, escapist epics, which are fun, but frivolous.

Film festivals help draw important 'small' films into the light. *Yarwng (Roots)* has screened at numerous festivals in India, and at the [Brisbane International Film Festival](#), where it was in competition for the [NETPAC](#) Jury Prize.

The film is anti-Bollywood. Far from glamorous, and certainly not frivolous. Its director, social justice advocate and Catholic priest Father Joseph Pulinthanath, quips that it cost less than the costume budget for a Bollywood film.

'We went into it full swing,' says Pulinthanath. 'I never allowed the money factor to bog me down. If you keep thinking about the money you never get going. There was a certain amount of foolhardiness about this whole project.'

Pulinthanath's passion for justice underpins the film's story, which takes place in Tripura, a state in culturally diverse North-East India. It is an ill-fated love story set against the displacement of villagers by the construction of a dam.

While Pulinthanath notes half-seriously that the love story was included 'so that people won't just walk out' ('at least they wait and see what happens to the girl and the boy,') for Pulinthanath the cultural context is much more important.

'North-east India,' he says, 'is an unknown portion, even to most of India. But it's very culturally rich. You find more than 200 ethnic groups, all of them with their own distinctive languages, culture, traditions, history ... an anthropologist's paradise.'

Pulinthanath has lived in Tripura for 15 years. As he tells it, the indigenous locals are 'people that have learned to live with loss'; victims of a demographic imbalance that stems from the migration of Hindus from Bangladesh following the partition of India.

'It became a 70/30 ratio,' says Pulinthanath. 'The people who crossed over became the 70 per cent. And as happens in a democracy, the government, language, education, and land became in favour of the 70 per cent. The indigenous people got pushed to the margins.'

Pulinthanath's 'love for the common man', and his close personal encounters with the indigenous locals, drove him to respond to the injustice.

'An Indian film done well, that can stand with the best productions in the country, will not only be a document, but will also uplift this community,' he says. 'Give them a sense of achievement. That is one of the reasons we made a feature film, not a documentary.'

'On one level the film is about displacement, but it goes beyond,' he adds. 'It goes to simple human issues of reaching out, of feeling, of human beings. Going beyond all these tags of colour, of religion, of nationhood. It's not a political film. It's a human film.'

That may be so. But Pulinthanath certainly has political aims. The purpose of *Roots* 'is not merely to tell a story, but to make a serious attempt at ameliorating the situation'.

'It's not possible, or realistic, or human, to ask the people who came across to go back.'

We're just asking that everyone, irrespective of their ethnic background, religion and culture, is allowed to live with basic human dignity. That one does not need to feel second class.'

'I hope the government and the world take notice of these deprived people. This is a group of people for whom there is no one to stand up. No one would ever raise noise for them.'

The film is a local effort. Not only filmed in Tripura, it features non-professional actors, locals for whom the themes of loss and displacement are present realities. It was such a collective endeavour, that Pulinthanath balks at references to *Roots* as 'his film'.

'It's *their* film,' he says. 'I'm not just saying that for the sake of sounding nice. It's a fact. It's their story. It's something that's come out of their anguish. I can't appropriate it. The film is a good thing and I feel happy about it, but also it remains their story.'

Yarwng (*Roots*) can be viewed in segments, online at [YouTube](#) .

When tolerance doesn't cut it

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton

One of the striking features of recent decades in Australia and many Western countries has been the apparent contrast between a regnant ethical framework that highlights tolerance, and an increasingly punitive approach to law and punishment for lawbreaking.

Take, for two examples, the issues of violence in our cities, and the Kyle and Jackie O 'lie detector' incident. The ethics of tolerance suggests people should be able to choose for themselves how much they drink, when they drink, and how they profit from others' drinking. And it suggests that people are entitled to listen to what they want, and to profit from providing others with what they wish to hear.

But it simultaneously demands that people be harshly punished for acting violently when they are drunk, and for putting to air material which some people don't think that others should hear.

In assessing this contrast it may be helpful to look more broadly at the large gap that exists between the large principles or ideals by which we regulate human behaviour and the messy reality in which we violate these principles routinely. Contemporary culture has its ways of dealing with this gap. Christian understandings of it have historically been influential, and pose helpful questions.

In contemporary culture, moral beliefs are commonly held to be a matter of individual choice. Social codes are ideally decided democratically by common agreement. But transgressions of the social code are regarded as unforgivable. When people in showbiz act disrespectfully and young people act violently or lustfully, they must variously be hunted, shamed, sacked and jailed, if necessary indefinitely.

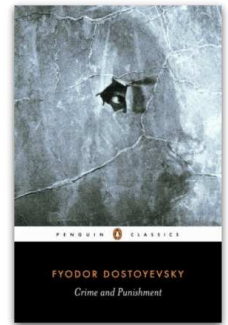
The way in which the media dramatise incidents that appear to breach moral codes is illuminating. The media expresses outrage at particular events, and asks a range of individuals to comment. Victims and their relatives, relatives or members of the same ethnic communities as the transgressors, ordinary people and authorities from child psychologists to prime ministers offer comment. They inevitably choose to be outraged.

So the moral principle is established and confirmed by majority and expert opinion. The media then demand harsher penalties in order to underline this triumph of the common will.

It appears that tolerance of individual choice with respect to moral principles does not lead to a relaxed society. It rather occasions anxiety that egregiously bad behaviour will white ant the foundations of a secure society. This anxiety is then discharged by action that asserts moral principles decisively and inflexibly. The messiness of daily life is effectively transferred to the business of stating moral principles.

The human interactions involved in crime are then treated inflexibly with no respect to circumstances and background. Ultimately this fails to do justice to reality, with the result that both the people punished and society at large suffer.

Christian ways of dealing with the tension between principles and a messy reality generally endorse strong principles, and explore the complexities and the limitations of human behaviour. In Western Christianity, there are two broad approaches.



That adopted by St Augustine and followed by Protestant Reformers, holds that God gives human beings instructions on how to live, and that these are binding. But because of the Fall, human beings can neither recognise God's law nor obey it consistently.

Christ enters this messiness of the human condition and takes on our guilt. When we live in faith, our moral judgment is still impaired, but we are freed to live generously. We live faithfully in the messiness of ordinary life by recalling the grace of God offered in Christ.

When translated into reflection on crime and punishment, this approach would recognise that individuals and society are irremediably sinful, but that people are open to new vision and a change of life. Sanctions for wrongdoing are necessary to provide space for society and individuals to focus on what matters and to reform.

The second approach, associated with Thomas Aquinas, is shared by many Catholics. Here, ideals and moral principles are written into the nature of things. The consequences of the Fall make human life inherently messy. But we can overcome our self-interest and weakness of will, and so recognise by what principles we must live and, with God's grace, follow them.

The messiness of human life is addressed in two ways: by clarifying the application of ethical principles to the complexities of everyday life, and by encouraging people to live, if not perfectly, at least more generously. Life is seen as a journey on which small steps towards better living should be welcomed, without compromising the claim of high principles.

When applied to crime and punishment, this account also encourages us to look compassionately and realistically at the messy reality of human life, to consider mitigating circumstances, and include in punishment for wrong doing a space where people can decide and learn to live better.

Neither Christian approach to the gap between ideals and actual behaviour guarantees a rational approach to crime and punishment. Both have coexisted comfortably with barbarous penal systems.

But they do point to the weakness of moral frameworks that emphasise individual choice and assume that we enjoy an unclouded rationality. These frameworks promise simplicity where there is complexity, and as a result endorse harshness where there ought to be flexibility.

Former politicians make incestuous lobbyists

POLITICS

John Warhurst



The lists of political lobbyists published by the various Australian governments that have lobbyist registers are full of familiar political names.

In NSW, former Premier Bob Carr, former federal Labor senator Graham Richardson and former state Liberal leader Kerry Chikarovski all lobby. In Queensland former Labor deputy premiers Terry Mackenroth and Jim Elder, former federal Liberal minister Santo Santoro and former federal Labor minister Con Sciacca are active lobbyists. In South Australia former Labor minister Nick Bolkus and former Liberal foreign affairs minister Alexander Downer lobby together.

As former political leaders they understand government and politics and can pass on that knowledge to others in the community. If they make the wheels of government run more smoothly then that is a good thing.

But I am unhappy when these former ministers play favorites to the detriment of a fair go for all. I worry even more when former ministers lobby governments that they have served in as senior members. A change of government can clear the air.

I agree with my former political science class mate at Flinders University, Dr Bob Such, once a Liberal minister in the 1990s and now an Independent MP in the South Australian Parliament. Dr Such has a bill on Lobbying and Ministerial Accountability languishing unloved in the South Australian Parliament. He observes that lobbying is too incestuous. The process of making public policy shouldn't be like a school reunion.

Such mixes his metaphors between school and family but his message is clear. He has been quoted as saying that 'it's a bit like the extended family mentality. Those ex-ministers or whatever are welcomed with open arms. It's like they have been through the same private school together, mixed in the same playground, but now we're mates so let's see how we can help each other.'

Though I defer to the right of former politicians to do what they like after leaving Parliament, I value those ex-ministers who re-invent themselves in serving good causes and move on rather than hanging around politics.

It helps to be offered a decent job by either your own or the other side of politics, or by a university or private company. Whatever the motivations of the Rudd Government might be, we should applaud their nonpartisan initiative in employing former Nationals leader Tim Fischer as Ambassador to the Vatican and former Howard environment minister Robert Hill to head the government's new Carbon Trust. Former Liberal Bruce Baird has also just been offered a federal government job.

But there are also many former politicians of all persuasions who have made their own way in public service. Former ministers Robert Tickner (Labor) and Jim Carlton (Liberal) have each been chief executive officer of the Australian Red Cross. Former Liberal Minister Fred Chaney has been co-chair of Reconciliation Australia.

Former Democrats Leader Cheryl Kernot has become an academic in the field of social entrepreneurship at the Centre for Social Impact at the University of New South Wales. Claire Martin and Kate Carnell, former chief ministers in the Northern Territory and the ACT

respectively, lead community peak bodies.

Former Labor Minister Gareth Evans left Australia to be CEO of the International Crisis Group. Another former Labor minister Chris Schacht is president of the Australian Volleyball Association. Former Liberal Minister John Fahey was recruited to head the World Anti-Doping Agency.

The list goes on. Michael Tate, Barry Jones and Ian Sinclair are others now devoted to public service. These jobs may involve some lobbying too; many of these individuals are registered as lobbyists. But I'm always delighted when there is a major element of re-invention and a more direct element of community service.

Former politicians have highly tuned skills and valuable experience. I'd rather see a former minister or leading politician serving the community sector than as a victim of the revolving door syndrome by which former ministers are sucked back in to the whirlpool of politics.

Parable of the long-suffering teacher

EDUCATION

Fatima Measham

It is after lunchtime, fifth period. The Pharisee wants to know why quotation marks are used to denote artistic or literary titles in essays, when they are not, technically, quotes.

Long-suffering sigh from the teacher.

Only the other day, the same student asked why apostrophes are used to mark possessive case in proper nouns (Dave's dog) as well as contractions of two words (it's). It can only be one or the other, he demands. 'Otherwise, people will think: Dave is dog' (last word pronounced as in, 'Wassup, dawg?'). The Pharisee and his friends titter.

The machinations to undermine are barely subtle. The discussion is waylaid. The teacher remembers that the Messiah himself had to put up with people like these — hardliners who can only cope with single uses for things, trying to show the teacher for a fool. She wonders how he managed to keep from throwing scrolls at them.

The tax collector at the back raises his hand. Good timing. As usual, little Zach has thought long and hard. 'It's all about being clear, isn't it?' he says hesitantly. 'Like, so the reader doesn't mix up your words and get it all wrong. I mean, you know, so they know exactly what you mean.'

He ducks his head to avoid paper balls, which is a reasonable expectation. As in Jesus' time, tax collectors are much maligned in the classroom. They are very diligent and nobody likes them for it (because they 'ruin the curve'). They sometimes do unorthodox things to find out more, much like the diminutive tax collector in the Bible who indecorously climbs a tree to get a better view.

No wonder, the teacher thought, that Jesus seemed rather fond of them. She hoped that Zach would not get a wedgie in the yard later.

A hand suddenly waves excitedly from front row, centre. 'What about commas, Miss? They look like prepostophes, don't they?'

Oh dear. Need to work more on Pete. Participates well in class discussions, but has not submitted a single piece of writing despite promises to do so. Each time he is absent on a due date, she could almost hear a rooster crowing three times in the distance.

She knows he will come back genuinely remorseful, much like his namesake. It is exasperating, but, she reassures herself, if Jesus could believe that his mercurial apostle would be the rock for his church, maybe she can hold some hope for her Pete as well. Unfortunately, she doesn't have the advantage of being omniscient.

She notices that the writer-in-residence is looking out the window and decides to handball the question. 'What do you think, Pauline? How are commas useful?'

Pauline looks startled, appears to think for a moment, then replies, 'They're used in listing, Miss. To separate the items. Or, like, to break up long sentences.' She gathers strength from familiar territory and adds, 'Also when you want people to pause at a word, because it's important.'



The teacher nods, smiling. It's a relief to have somebody do half your work for you, but this first means getting to know what each student can offer. For some reason, when it comes from one of their own, it is a lot more palatable. She should encourage Pauline to speak up more.

'That's right. Commas, apostrophes, all these punctuation marks are about having control over what you're saying.'

The teacher notices that Tom is frowning. 'But, Miss,' he says, ever sceptical, 'show me something where the punctuation matters. If the order of words is right, won't we still get it?'

Fortunately, she quickly remembers the anecdote about a panda that walks into a bar and fires a gun into the air. She writes on the board, 'Eats, shoots and leaves.' A bit lame, but they laugh. Even Tom.

'Oh,' he nods, 'it's like in maths, if you don't put a decimal point.'

The bell rings. The horde spills out the doorway.

At the end of the day, the teacher knows that punctuation is not going to determine whether these students will be successful. But she is interested in valuing the process that they use to figure out things.

This is why she endures the questions, tolerates the smart alecks, and asks opinions just as much from the wannabes and doubters as the experts. It is how she keeps herself from becoming obsolete. After all, textbook drills do not readily demonstrate relevance; it emerges from enquiry and discussion. And for many young people, it's all about relevance.

It's a classroom struggle that has intensified this century — having to justify to young people why they have to learn what they are being taught. They are already more proficient in technology than many teachers. They are independently accessing and sharing information that their elders would not have known at their age. Some of them are even already earning money from part-time jobs.

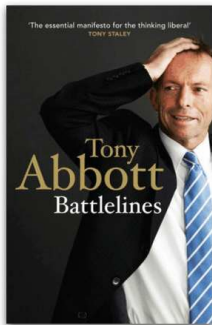
Such experiences tend to become the lens through which young people view their education: if they are able to function as if they have already finished school, then what's the point of school? It's a fair question and one that the developers of the national curriculum would do well to consider. Simply reorganising content may not be enough to hold the questions about relevance at bay.

The teacher packs up, knowing that although she must suffer and die a little each day, there is always hope of resurrection.

The case for Abbott as Opposition leader

POLITICS

Scott Stephens



Politics in Australia bears all the Darwinian traits of having been chastened by a cruel and unforgiving country. It tends toward the visceral and agonistic. Moments of genuine inspiration are fleeting, and it rarely reaches above the level of the soporific and outright banal.

It is hardly surprising, then, that belief — not in the narrowly religious sense, but in the sense of a clear conception of principles, of something beyond one's own ambitions, of the ultimate purpose of one's involvement in politics in the first place — has never been a conspicuous quality among its politicians.

This ambivalence toward belief is not peculiar to Australia, but in Australia it has taken on a distinctly antipodean flavour. Australians have a pathological aversion to sanctimony and cant, yet are suspicious when politicians present as a little too earnest or believing too deeply. They brand them as fanatical or, worse, ideological.

Australia has thus become a kind of politico-moral wasteland, in which the public expects the cynical instrumentalisation of the political process from their elected representatives, who in turn deliver cautious, small-target performances that barely conceal wanton ambition. Mutual cynicism, as Mark Latham bitterly observed, is 'the gold standard of modern politics'.

But the ubiquity of cynicism in Australian politics, while making democracy possible, has simultaneously bastardised the political process. Just consider the erosion of the categories of Left and Right, celebrated by many as an advance on the brutal partisanship of last century. Isn't this merely the consequence of the subtraction of belief from politics?

And so, when the cynicism that pervades Australian politics is combined with our compulsory voting system, elections are reduced to the pendular swinging of public whimsy (the 'It's Time' factor emptied of any consequence). Principled opposition becomes craven opportunism.

Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull are archetypal expressions of this corruption of politics. They are, as it were, political doppelg ngers. Their colossal personae and fortunes in the polls have come to occupy the place once held by a Party's platform. What results is the anomalous existence of political parties without political properties, which is to say, without binding narratives or 'ideologies'.

While the emptying-out of the political domain is currently to the advantage of the incumbent government — particularly one that has raised prevarication, spin and avoidance to an art form — it is disastrous for the Opposition. After just two years, we have witnessed the return of the Liberal Party to the dire situation that confronted them after their defeat at the 1993 election.

In March of that same year, B. A. Santamaria lamented to Malcolm Fraser: 'The country desperately needs a credible alternative to Labor. For years the fact that the Liberal Party has lost its way has been apparent. Today many conservatives believe it stands for nothing.'

But, as the 1996 election demonstrated, night is always darkest before the dawn. Opposition presents the Liberal Party with a rare opportunity to recover its conservative soul

and thereby abandon Labor's vapid brand of politics which has so bewitched the electorate for a time.

No politician has made this case more powerfully than Tony Abbott. His new book, *Battlelines*, ought to be read as a kind of response to Santamaria's challenge. Indeed, one often gets the impression that Abbott is picking a fight not so much with Labor as with the libertarian and individualist tendencies within his own Party.

Abbott's determination to restore charity, belief and courage to their rightful place as the greatest of political virtues distinguishes him as the antitype of both Rudd and Turnbull.

I've elsewhere [described](#) this determination as 'a leader's willingness to wage war against the people's baser instincts, to expand the public's moral imagination rather than simply pander to avarice, to stare electoral oblivion in the face by defying popular opinion, to be willing to sacrifice oneself for the sake of a larger cause'.

Replacing Turnbull with Abbott as Leader of the Opposition is the only way forward for the Liberal Party, and yet it is an act which would itself require a great deal of courage.

I contend that the electorate's low regard for Abbott — demonstrated in successive opinion polls which place his support consistently around 10 per cent — ought to be dismissed as unenlightened electoral bigotry, as a throwback to the anti-Catholic prejudice that bedevilled J. F. Kennedy in 1960s.

The birds I can't quite like

POETRY

Diane Fahey

Red-capped plover

At Barwon Heads

That one red-cap on the shore's silver,
its smallness set against so much vastness,
stayed focal long after its quick flight
defeated my eyes and it vanished
through a pinpoint high above the mouth,
marrying lightness with light.
Nearby, in nest-scrapes under the cliffs,
red-caps raise their young, ready to draw off
dogs or marauding birds by miming
a wounded wing. Although, in my field guide,
the map of Australia is dark with them,
in this place they're threatened. I imagine
dots of space appearing, spreading over
that blackness — here, then there, and there ...

Birds at dawn

I read through the small hours, mantled by white noise
as, beyond the town, waves peak, curl down:
we are both turning pages, the sea and I.
At first light, a stroll in billowy air
to where the deeps push up towards flight. A fulmar,
a kelp gull, scan slopes bursting with egret plumes.
Other birds manifest as collectives:
at the river, a profile of pelicans,
a sculpture park of herons; far above,
a skirl of swifts, parabolas of terns.
Dream light is tintured primrose, dahlia-pink.
My hand lifts to block the gold colophon,
the seed-packed centre of the flower. The sea's breath,
at once exhaled, inhaled, is a mist of sound.

Late summer

Each morning a new cosmography:
between islands, silver or camel-coloured,
weed-dark straits, improvised pools and lakes.
Everywhere, prescience and farewell:
summer's light colliding with the light of autumn.
On the mud-flat, the birds forage calmly —
but for that gull worrying at a fish,
pewter and black-backed, the size of its head:
a trophy, a bugbear. It is pierced, grappled with,
thrashed again and again on sun-filmed sand:
a manic chef at work over a skillet.
Head jerking back, the drama of gulp,
regurgitation — till a challenger screams;
wings erupt; the bounty falls from the sky.

Silver gulls

The birds I can't quite like, that symbolise
cold self-intent, greed, the scalding primal
writ small: drama queens and morsel-pirates
at odds after the picnic — scraps about scraps.
So populous they seem mundane, theirs is
a median beauty. Contrasts show
in tail spots, white boiled-lolly eyes —
and leg stumps, the torn wing that heals indifference.
At their best, afloat in anodyne lulls,
neat as paper boats — or, of course, in air:
wing beats thrumming with the solemn verve
of a baton. What music do they hear?
None but their own, that of the winds
and of the switchback sea: their map of life.

White skies

Those lucent plains, stark yet uplifting,
call me back from shock, ordeal.
I go forth to consult with my familiars ...

A heron perched on an aerial, its form
altering as it preens and the wind lifts
head crest, strokes grey bustle, chestnut cravat;
eye and beak one dark line, it reads the heavens,
takes in the day, bird-watches ... Terns romp
en masse above the river — an inspired
discourse; commonality as dance.

In gold-trimmed grey, a singing honeyeater
alights on the green shipping beacon —
so still, quick-witted — then swims away
over the town, its Atlantis.

Shearwaters at sunset

To be so far out, yet at home, on a journey
where purpose is fuelled by freedom ...
Intimate with spray, the shape-shifting line
writes itself across a curved vastness
darkening beneath magnesium-blue.
A conversation is unfolding between
the elements of a figure — nucleus,
sketch of an eye, vertiginous kite-tail.
Could their flight path be traced in phosphorous
one might contemplate, as it fades,
the mysteries of knots and numbers,
of embroidery, of divination ... Mined with
fathomless light, split sea, camellia sky
are now black glass cracked by stars, breakers.

How Catholic schools are failing the poor

EDUCATION

Ross Fitzgerald

In a secular country like Australia it is ironic that Catholic schools are mainly funded by the state. Even in America, where religion pervades politics, state aid to religious schools is constitutionally forbidden. Yet the fact remains that most Catholic school provision in English-speaking countries is fully publicly funded.



Australian Catholic school funding is a complex work in progress. Although socially liberal and committed to serve a public function, Australian Catholic schools are virtually uniquely private sector schools, drawing from the Commonwealth and states funds without which they would be unsustainable.

The remainder of their resources comes from low-fee imposts, with the exception of a minority of schools owned by Catholic religious orders which have a demographic profile similar to non-Catholic schools and charge their clients substantially more.

This exceptional arrangement, through which an enormous private sector system is predominantly publicly funded, has fuelled the staking of claims for funding other private schools.

Australia now has the biggest private school sector in the world. How did this happen? In the colonial era all schools were equally funded, according to denominational affiliation. At a time before universally available public education became the norm, such schools also reflected the differentiated class interests of society: in effect schools for the rich and others or none for the poor.

Mary McKillop's missionary zeal in founding schools for the poor reflects a time, long passed, in which only the wealthier non-Catholic Churches managed to maintain their schools without state aid. The main exception to this rule was the Catholic Church, which imported thousands of religious women and men to operate a school system relatively accessible to all.

Since the Second World War, a decline in religious vocations, coupled with a dramatic increase in Australia's population, brought pressure on Australian political parties to overturn the ban on state aid to private schools.

Leading the charge was the Catholic Church, which, through the Democratic Labor Party, drove a split in the ALP to influence its supporters to cast their second preferences for the Coalition parties. These had a more conciliatory attitude to the funding of private schools.

The Whitlam Government (1972–1975) broke the stranglehold of the Coalition on this question by agreeing to fund all non-government schools on the basis of need, resolving a sectarian and ideological divide in Australian society and politics lasting over a century.

Since the mid-1980s funding deregulation has imposed a different set of problems on Catholic schools. Their demographic shows that they have become cheap private schools and that lower socio-economic Catholic enrolments in them have plummeted.

Recent research by Michael Furtado shows that under a neoliberal funding policy Catholic schools are unable to match the services provided by government schools to meet poor children's needs.

Catholics do not operate comprehensive schools through which their students are exposed to the entire curriculum that is available in a government school. Their parent organisations are closely controlled by school providers, whose preoccupation is to ensure existing funding policy, even at the cost of locking low-income students out, other than as a matter of exceptional and charitable dispensation.

Such issues have been resolved elsewhere through various modes of integrating Catholic schools within the public sector, as in New Zealand since 1974 and in the UK from 1944. Those who control Catholic education in Australia have vigorously resisted this proposal as a threat to the ethos of Catholic schools.

Yet evidence from other countries does not support such a view: there has been no noticeable dilution of religious ethos where Catholic schools are fully funded by the state and there is no correlation between Catholic school attendance and Catholic faith practice in Australia.

As a result of the Catholic precedent, state aid to private schools has resulted in a class-differentiated school system, with poor children disproportionately enrolled in state schools. In effect, Catholic schools, intended first and foremost for the poor, have become the instrument through which millions of tax dollars are siphoned off public schools and given to the private sector.

The ALP is now committed to funding all schools, public and private, on the basis of the socio-economic status of their enrolled students as broken down by home address. This is an indelible indicator of private wealth or poverty. The funding dollar will flow to schools that enrol learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A golden opportunity faces the Rudd Government and the Church, concerned about the loss of poor students in Catholic schools, to offer an authentic choice to parents to access a broad range of equally accessible schools that are equally paid for by the state.

If the Catholic Church fails to engage Labor's 'education revolution' on this proposal, its commitment to the Gospel of social justice will be in ruins.

Flame blame is a shame

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton



The initial media coverage of the interim report by the Victorian Royal Commission on bushfires was discouraging. It focused on who was to blame. This culture of blame is destructive and, if indulged, will undermine the response to future fires.

Mercifully subsequent reporting on the Commission's thoughtful report has been much more detailed and reflective. It has focused on policies rather than on hunting down the guilty.

To seek to pillory people held responsible for the inadequacies in responding to the bushfires is destructive for two reasons. It distracts attention from the nature of the bushfires, and ensures that the agencies entrusted with the response to future bushfires will be ineffectual.

The reality, at once unpalatable and inescapable, of these bushfires was that they were lethal and uncontrollable. The combination of days of very high temperatures, strong winds and low humidity made them so. The stark warnings issued on the previous day acknowledged the terrible threat they posed.

On Black Saturday, the fires burned at will where the supercharged wind took them. Despite the limited success of firefighters to control some sections of the fire, houses, settlements and lives were lost or saved by changes of wind and the vagaries of fortune.

The reality was that this bushfire had the same relationship to the fires of previous years as did the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima to other bombing raids. Policies and nostrums designed for fires that spread and burned more slowly were as unavailing as the ordinary strategies for civil defence at Hiroshima.

Consequently the deficiencies of controllers and the defects of communication and organisation, while regrettable and costly, were ultimately irrelevant. Even the best of services would have been powerless in this bushfire.

The lesson to be taken from these bushfires is that in circumstances as extreme as those of Black Saturday there is no assured safety for those who live on the edge of bushland. They will be safe only if they are somewhere else when fire comes.

That is a harsh truth from which we would like to escape. That is why the urge to blame people is so dangerous. It enables us to imagine that if we find the right people to protect us, our houses and lives will be safe wherever we live. That is pernicious nonsense.

If that truth is accepted, the painstaking work of the Royal Commission will be invaluable in improving the procedures and responsibilities that help protect lives and property in more conventional bushfires. But we might hope, too, that the Commission will consider the likely effects of future catastrophic fires.

Black Saturday, we may hope, will be a once in a lifetime event. But it would be prudent to assume that global warming will more regularly lead to spikes in temperature and conditions similar to those earlier this year.

The second danger in asking who is to be blamed is that it makes those responsible for dealing with fires defensive. If they know that they will be made scapegoats for fires that

result in a loss of life and property, they will focus on meeting performance indicators, on ticking each box and leaving a paper trail that will show them to be blameless. The initiative and the courage that are needed will be eroded.

When footballers are dominated by the fear of loss and of blame, they play badly and lose anyway. The same is true of other organisations.

This risk is doubled if the reality of Black Saturday is denied. If fire officers are made responsible for defending the lives and property of people who are living in areas that under extreme conditions are indefensible, they will focus their attention on attending to prescriptions and not on acting effectively.

People respond best to dangers when they acknowledge the reality of the dangers they face and trust one another. The urge to blame obscures reality and corrodes trust.

Strategies for a new era of firestorms

ENVIRONMENT

Paul Collins

Last Tuesday Radio National's Fran Kelly [interviewed](#) Russell Rees, head of the Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA), following the Interim Report of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC). She had that morally righteous tone that journalists get when they want someone to confess and admit fault.

Rees had certainly taken a shellacking from Jack Rush QC, counsel assisting the VBRC, about his performance on Black Saturday when he gave evidence to the Commission.

Although he took his medicine from Rush, Rees certainly didn't cop it sweet from Kelly. He gave as good as he got and refused to accept blame.

He pointed out, for instance, that the CFA successfully suppressed an extremely dangerous fire on Black Saturday afternoon in Upper Fern Tree Gully, just below Mount Dandenong. If the fire had got onto the quite heavily populated mountain many would have been killed and tremendous environmental damage done.

He reminded Kelly that no one could have imagined a fire like Black Saturday. As the VBRC itself admitted, 'Reports referred to flames leaping 100 m into the air, generating heat so intense that aluminium road signs melted. The plume of fires created a convection effect that generated winds so strong that trees appeared to have been screwed from the ground.' Fire behavior was described as 'unique'.

While historically this is not entirely true, we have certainly entered a new era of fire in Australia. Never before have we seen such concentrated velocity, fire intensity and spotting occurring so far ahead of the main front. So Rees was right to refuse to accept the kind of generalised blame that is often projected onto public officials (or environmentalists) by some in the community.

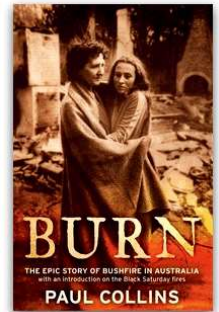
That is not to say that the performance of the authorities was perfect or even adequate. There were many mistakes made and the VBRC points them out. The communication system was completely inadequate, and centralised fire control in Melbourne was simply unable to cope with such a fast-moving situation. Controllers were far behind reality on the ground. More authority has to be given to local fire-fighters in the field.

How to forewarn the public is another problem. The VBRC heard that the maximum number on the McArthur Forest Fire Danger Index is 100. Over 50 is considered 'extreme'. On 7 February it reached 'previously unrecorded levels ranging from 120 to 180'. It is hard to convey to people something that has never been experienced before.

The VBRC makes a number of recommendations, but warning the public about impending danger is a devilishly difficult thing to get right. Somehow you have to find the balance between panic and disinterest.

On the 'stay or go' policy the VBRC wisely warns that recently 'there has been insufficient emphasis on the risks of staying and defending'. Only those who are properly prepared and strong in body and mind should stay behind to defend a residence.

But making a decision about this presupposes that ample warning has been or even can



be given. With fast-moving, unpredictable fires that is not always possible. The last thing you need is a panic evacuation. The VBRC wisely notes that properties need to be assessed well in advance, but that people should not be forced to relocate.

Nevertheless some properties are indefensible and this needs to be acknowledged. Where defense is possible, 'not all houses are defensible in all situations, and contingencies need to be considered in case the plan to stay and defend fails'. All this illustrates the difficulty of generalising. A number of variables need to be taken into consideration in making decisions about staying or going and the VBRC correctly refuses to make binding rules for people.

As a fall-back position the VBRC calls for designated local community fire refuge areas to which people can retreat when all else fails. But even this is not as simple as it sounds. It would and did work in the compact town of Marysville, but it wouldn't work in Kinglake, strung out as it is along a ten kilometre-long escarpment with a single road running along the top. People might well have to go through the fire to get to a refuge.

Interestingly the VBRC makes no comment about preventative burning. This is mantra that is enunciated by a certain element in the community after every fire, but the simple fact is that all the preventative burning in the world would not have stopped the Black Saturday fire or even lessened its intensity.

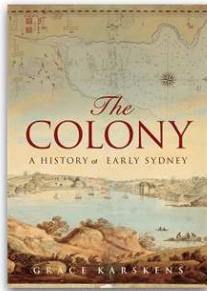
The aim of this interim report is to make recommendations that can be implemented for the 2009—2010 fire season. The commissioners avoid what might be called the 'bigger fire questions'. But in the end these will have to be faced, especially as the impact of global warming hits us.

Holistic history of early Sydney

BOOKS

Tony Smith

Grace Karskens: *The Colony: a History of Early Sydney*. Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest. ISBN 978-1-74175-637-1. [Online](#)



While Australians living in other states rightly insist they have unique identities arising from their own foundational stories, there is no doubt about the national influence of the English colony begun at Sydney in 1788.

There have been many histories of the early days of white settlement, so any new scholarly work must demonstrate that it is making a fresh contribution. In *The Colony* Grace Karskens provides clear evidence that a genuinely holistic approach is long overdue.

Karskens carefully avoids the 'pendulum' view of history. Too many studies of the early colony depict Sydney as either a living hell in which convicts were brutalised by tyrants or a place of natural beauty that provided the opportunity to create a new classless world.

Instead, she constructs a narrative that arises directly from contemporary evidence. The story generates excitement not by embellishment or the application of a single theoretical viewpoint, but by embracing reality even where it seems mundane.

Karskens' writing is comfortably atmospheric. She makes it easy for the reader to feel immersed, almost present, in those early years as the Europeans stretched their occupation of Aboriginal land. By providing a 'deep' history and geography of the land as it appeared to the First Fleeters, Karskens contextualises the settler experience.

By examining the soils of the Cumberland plain, for example, she is able to explain why some areas were considered more desirable than others for farming. By linking development to the main river systems, she is able to explain the difficult task faced by Governor Phillip as he sought to establish an antipodean yeomanry.

Rather than concentrate on official policies and pronouncements, Karskens includes the activities of those who put themselves beyond the reach of government, especially around the Hawkesbury area to the north-west.

This settler narrative does not obliterate the Aboriginal peoples of the Sydney area but includes their reactions and adaptations. While hostilities erupted further inland, there were 'soft' contacts between settlers and Aborigines, including friendly relationships between women.

Despite good intentions, however, the newcomers — the Berewalgal — inevitably disrupted and threatened Indigenous lives as they cleared the forests, appropriated lands, placed pressure on food resources and disrespected cultures. Reprisals became common and deepened the misunderstandings inevitable between peoples of such contrasting and competing interests.

The experience of Sydney reflects the tragedy of colonisation generally. The local people 'made some concessions to European ways, but these were superficial, polite gestures and not internalised. The Europeans wanted more than that; they wanted nothing less than

complete transformation.'

Colonists obliterate the people they supplant by ensuring that history is written in their terms. Sydney's history has traditionally been interpreted through the artefacts of a people who are literate and industrial, that is, through documents and buildings. When the descendants of the Indigenous peoples celebrate their survival, they face the difficulty that their important sites are largely buried under layers of European occupation.

Unlike histories that take the easy option, *The Colony* persists in acknowledging the equal importance of the sparse traditions of the Indigenous peoples of the Sydney area.

For this reason alone Karskens has produced a work that challenges scholars of all callings to help restore the balance that existed in 1788. Whether we like it or not, history is still being made and we all have some power to shape it. A reading of *The Colony* should encourage us all to exercise that power more responsibly.

Discerning truth in *Balibo's* fiction

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

Raimond Gaita, after viewing the film adaptation of his memoir, *Romulus, My Father*, told director Robert Connolly: 'There's not one event in this film that happened as it happened in my life. But there is not one event in this film that is untrue.'

That distinction, between 'fact' and 'truth', may seem amorphous. But consider the ways in which a film can place its viewer in the shoes — or behind the eyes — of its characters.

'One of my favourite films is *The Killing Fields*,' says Connolly. 'The truth of what the Khmer Rouge did in Cambodia is firmly planted in my mind because I walked through the Killing Fields in that fictional film. It documented the tragedy through fiction.'

'Cinema,' he adds, 'can take the audience somewhere and show them a tragedy in a way that creates an empathy in them, which is more powerful than just presenting a series of facts.'

Connolly achieves something similar with his new film, *Balibo*. Set in East Timor, within that fragile window in 1975 between Portuguese decolonisation and invasion by Indonesia, *Balibo* recounts the murders of six Australian journalists and technicians by the Indonesian military.

The film, based on journalist Jill Jolliffe's 'definitive' account, cross-cuts between two timelines: the final days of the five young TV journalists and technicians who were killed at Balibo during the first moments of the invasion; and the fateful, fatal efforts by seasoned journalist Roger East to find out the truth of the plight of the Balibo Five.

They are redemptive character arcs, particularly for East (Anthony La Paglia) and Channel 7 news reporter Greg Shackleton (Damon Gameau). All six set out with a degree of self-interest, but through their travels and their encounters with the East Timorese they are awakened to the injustices suffered within that nation.

'I was interested in exploring the ability of this country to compel people to tell its story,' says Connolly. 'It's hard not to start caring for what happened there. The journey from self-interest to compassion is at the heart of the film. It is just as relevant today. The film throws that challenge down.'

It has been [widely reported](#) that Connolly's script (written with David Williamson) fictionalises events and speculates on the dynamics between characters. Sure — some license is necessary, even in a film that's 'Based on a true story'. That said, the 'centrepiece' scenes, the murders, were carefully reconstructed from historical evidence.

'I was most keen that the murders of the Balibo Five were as documented by the coroner, and the murder of Roger East [later in Dili] was as documented by the witness statements we have, so that those two events stood in the face of history's denial of them.'

Connolly has been [criticised](#) for not paying greater attention to Australian and US political machinations that played an active role in East Timor's continued oppression. In fact he was deliberately selective about the point of view; he 'wanted to tell of the human cost, from the point of view of the East Timorese'.



'The political ambition is secondary to a bigger, humanist ambition to document something in a way that asks questions more broadly of the human experience, and how we commit crimes like this against each other.

'In the massacre at the end, I wanted music that speaks of the human condition, and says to the audience, "You're not being let off the hook. Don't look at this and think this is just something that happened 34 years ago and we weren't there."

One of the film's strengths is its structure. It is bookended by scenes set in 1999, following Indonesia's relinquishment of power, that depict an interview between an Australian soldier and an East Timorese woman with a childhood connection to Roger East.

It's a reminder: the film may focus on the fates of Australian journalists, but the story is East Timor's, and the greater injustices are ultimately theirs.

These scenes also form part of a thematic thread relating to the national self-interest of the Australian government, media and community. 'Australia wouldn't care as much for East Timor if it wasn't for the deaths of those five white Australian men.'

Connolly flags this tension with a scene in which East physically fights a young Jose Ramos Horta (Oscar Isaac) when arguing over this very point. More than just a finger pointed at every white Australian viewer, the scene is also a subtle self-disclosure on Connolly's own behalf.

'A lot of people asked, "How can you make a film about five white guys, in the face of the hundreds of thousands of Timorese that died?" I really grappled with that, and wanted to confront it within the film.'

(Incidentally, after viewing the film the real Ramos Horta endorsed this fictional scene. 'He said, "I did have fights with East, although they didn't happen like that ... I could have had that fight with a dozen journalists."')

Balibo has achieved accolades from critics and audiences alike. At the Brisbane International Film Festival, it was recognised by both the Interfaith Jury and the FIPRESCI (International Federation of Film Critics) Jury, and received the Audience Prize.

This speaks to its power both as an excellent and engaging political thriller, and also as a strong and timely advocacy film that, at the very least, has got people thinking, feeling and talking about the past and present struggles of the East Timorese.

'The triumph for me is talking to people who experience such a profound sense of either grief or guilt or tragedy over what happened,' says Connolly. 'A straightforward documentary exploration might not have achieved that.'

How *Balibo* distorts history

POLITICS

Paul Cleary



When I first heard that a film was being made about the murder of Australian journalists in East Timor in late 1975, I immediately thought of the film about the Cuban missile crisis, *Thirteen Days*. Directed by Australian Roger Donaldson, the film recreates actual meetings held during the crisis and produces a thriller.

The [new film](#) about the deaths of five journalists in Balibo in October 1975, followed by a sixth in December, could also have drawn on the mountain of material now available that reveals the diplomatic dirty tricks — and Australian and American complicity — in the invasion of East Timor and subsequent death toll of 183,000.

Instead, the first feature length film dealing with Indonesia's invasion of East Timor, and the deaths of these journalists, has missed an opportunity to inform the audience and thrill them at the same time.

As much as two thirds of the 111 minutes portrayed in [Robert Connolly's film, *Balibo*](#), is fictionalised. Astute friends who have seen the film believed that the all of the events portrayed were real. After all, the promotional blurb says 'Based on a true story'. Even the experienced film reviewer Paul Byrnes fell for it, claiming the film was 'long on factual fidelity, short on movie hyperbole'.

For the record, here's a list of the following events in the film that are fiction:

The journalist Roger East was never cajoled out of his public service job by the young Fretilin foreign spokesman Jose Ramos Horta to work in East Timor, and nor did Ramos-Horta hand him an AUSTEO (Australian Eyes Only) dossier on the Balibo Five

East and Ramos-Horta never trekked on foot to Balibo, and nor were they attacked by a US helicopter along the way.

The Indonesians didn't attack up the hill in front of the Balibo fort, but from around the back of the village.

The senior commander of the Balibo operation, Colonel Dading Kalbuadi, didn't put a pistol to the head of the journalist Brian Peters and shoot him dead. He was 10 km away at the time.

East wasn't captured trying to send his last report from Dili's Marconi radio office.

And it's unlikely that General Benny Murdani, the Indonesian army intelligence chief, was observing the executions of East and Timorese people on the Dili wharf on 8 December, dressed in a white safari suit, though he did parachute into Dili some time that day.

For part of this list I'm indebted to the journalist Hamish McDonald, whose book *Death in Balibo*, co-authored with ANU academic Desmond Ball, has a swag of detailed material that would have made *Balibo* a much better film had it been included.

However where the film really deviates from reality is that it only portrays the Indonesians as the villains. True, they did the actual killing, but others were complicit as well.

Balibo goes to extraordinary lengths to shock viewers with Indonesian brutality in East Timor in late 1975. The consulting historian Clinton Fernandes researched the type of pistol put to the head of journalist Brian Peters, and the type of civilian dress worn at the time by the Indonesian officers.

At the same time the film omits the Australians and Americans who sanctioned the unlawful invasion by Indonesia. This is a serious omission that undermines *Balibo* as a historical work.

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, who tacitly endorsed the invasion in meetings with President Soeharto, gets a mention but is not portrayed. Richard Woolcott, the Jakarta ambassador who was rooting for an Indonesian takeover, is not mentioned. Nor are the Australian foreign affairs officials who routinely received intercepts on civilian massacres in East Timor.

The US government was deeply complicit in the unlawful invasion. President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sanctioned the full-scale invasion in a meeting in Jakarta with Indonesia's President Soeharto in December 1975. Then the US supplied aircraft and arms to eliminate the resistance in the Timorese mountains.

While the film mentions the meeting, Connolly and his leading man Anthony LaPaglia have not extended their justice demands to Kissinger, a Nobel laureate who is still alive. Presumably this wouldn't bode well for potential US distribution. Exposing Whitlam would not go down well with the prime market for the film in Australia, the Labor-voting inner suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne.

It is impossible to imagine that an invasion of any country would not result in civilian deaths, in cold blood or otherwise, yet the westerners who sanctioned it are let off the hook.

Connolly and his co-writer David Williamson have mysteriously ignored the incriminating declassified cables, the most infamous being Richard Woolcott's August 1975 missive which argued that Australia would get a bigger share of Timor Sea oil if Indonesia controlled the territory.

In the same cable he took the audacious step of suggesting that a minister could answer a question in Parliament or at a press conference explaining the need for the unlawful use of force in Timor from Indonesia's viewpoint. While planting the seed, he covered his backside by recommending that the strategy not be used.

Woolcott went on to become head of Australia's foreign affairs department, was awarded the nation's highest civilian honour and more recently has been given a new lease of life as a special envoy on Asian affairs for the Rudd Government.

Woolcott's second-in-command in the Jakarta embassy, Allan Taylor, who was briefed extensively on Indonesia's invasion plans in late 1975, went on to have a stellar diplomatic career culminating in his appointment as head of Australia's spy agency, ASIS.

Connolly, LaPaglia and the film's website have called for the Indonesian military to be tried for war crimes. Indeed they should, but they have not extended their justice demands to the westerners who are also complicit.

By contrast, Timorese leaders like Xanana Gusmao say it is almost impossible to determine where the pursuit of justice ends. Does it simply end with those who actually did the killing?

Connolly notes in a recent article that one result of the film is that Woolcott has outed

himself by making ludicrous comments about the deaths being the fault of the media companies. Well, at least Woolcott outed himself, because the film certainly didn't.

There are many more villains in East Timor's tragic history than the Indonesians alone.

Coffee and loneliness

FICTION

Mary Manning

It's ages since I've noticed birdsong. I've been too absorbed in misery to tune into their joy, but this morning, very early, with the window open because the night was hot, a bird is singing in the birch tree. It sings the same song over and over, teaching its young to sing. The baby repeats two of the notes followed by a little trill as if to say please only two at a time.



Usually when the morning sun comes in the bedroom window and the trees make patterns on the wardrobe doors I wrap my arms around my head and pull a pillow over to make a three-tier tower: head, arms and pillow. I am inviolable in my keep-out tower. Not that there's anyone left to violate my space, which is why I burrow against light and birdsong in the first place.

But now, well and truly awake, I am on my balcony in a pink cotton dressing gown and thongs singing along with mother bird and drinking orange juice. Amazing! I haven't felt this lift of the spirits for about five years.

I've left it too late to walk to work so I'll catch the tram but tonight I'll walk home. It will be sunset so I might hear more birds.

I am noticing sounds more today. It's as if someone's cleaned my ears out with a cotton bud and pinned them back against my head for maximum reception.

Like now on the tram to work. Usually I am only conscious of the background clack of wheels and chat of passengers. But today the passengers seem soothed by faint repetitive music coming perhaps from a radio turned low. It is some sort of chant — a Jewish cantor comes to mind, or something from the Koran.

I realise eventually that the sound comes from the man sitting across the aisle from me. He wears a dark coloured taxi driver's uniform and on his head a scarf arranged like a theatrical curtain, the fabric hanging on each side of his face leaving only the central part uncovered. He is turning the pages of a book, quietly singing each page. I can see the lines of music. His singing is moving and tranquil.

I'd like to tell the man that his singing reminds me of the Gregorian chant I learned to sing at school but he keeps his head down. Today I can still sing the Latin words of the *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei* when I listen to a Mass by Brahms or Mozart.

With the words of the *Credo* in my head I walk into the coffee shop where I work and am straight into the buzz of conversations about people's plans for their day — pick up the dry cleaning, have a cholesterol test, find shoes to wear to the gallery opening. It's exhausting listening to them.

Two mothers come in with small children and job lists. The younger child wears one pink shoe and rattles a colourful confection of plastic shapes on a plastic chain. Her mother props her in a high chair at about counter level and in line with me performing behind my Gaggia. Pull, push on the levers, scoop the coffee, flatten it, steam fragrant liquid into white cups. My lever-pulling right arm has huge muscles from my coffee ballet.

The child loves the choreography, laughs, points, tells me secrets in playmate language, loves me. I have made a friend. I feel a little spurt of the baby bird energy of the early morning.

The women get up waving lists and car keys. The baby throws her plastic collection in my direction. A gift. The mother picks it up and looks past me as if I am an extension of the Gaggia. The child shouts and points to tell her that the plastic chain is meant for me but the mother says quiet now this is no time to throw a tanty.

I want to say that this child is my friend, but it's not the sort of thing you say to customers, or to the mother of any child you've just met.

On my walk home I search the second-hand shop for a garment made of warm brown wool and shaped like the robes worn by saints of long ago. I will wrap myself in it when I go out looking for people whose singing or conversation will take my mind off solitude. But the coats and jackets on the racks are all too bright or too skimpy. None is vaguely like a saint's robe.

Near the counter is a rack of sunglasses. I choose a pair with tortoiseshell frames. For the time being, until I find my warm brown robe I can hide behind the dark lenses and pretend I am not lonely.

On my walk home a flock of starlings streams into a huge palm tree chattering loudly about their day before settling down for the night. I can see the tree vibrating even through my new glasses.

Right to lifers miss the point

THE MEDDLING PRIEST

Frank Brennan



Church and other mission oriented groups should work hard to maintain and strengthen their commitment to health care that is universal (not confined only to those who can afford it), and comprehensive (not confined to specialties thought to have distinctive appeal to mission oriented groups).

Only by being a mainstream contributor to health care across the board can churches make their optimal contribution to the quality and ethics of health care.

Without a grounded, informed Church voice on ethical issues in the public square it will be even more difficult for parliaments and courts to make the right decisions about ethical health care in the future. Health facilities, if run only by the State and the for-profit sector, would lack a critical dimension in some of the more difficult ethical debates on health care. Let's consider one recent case relating to parliaments, and another relating to courts.

Last year, the Victorian Parliament, while legislating for [abortion on demand](#), went one step further, enacting its compulsory referral clause. This novel law requires any medical practitioner with a conscientious objection to abortion to refer the patient to another medical practitioner known not to have the same objection.

The provision is unnecessary and unworkable. That is why no proponent of the law, including the government, has been able to provide a compatibility statement pointing out how the law's interference with the right to freedom of conscience is justified under the Victorian Charter of Rights and responsibilities. The law has never been supported by the Australian Medical Association whose code of ethics imposes no such obligation to refer.

At the time of the parliamentary debate, some portrayed the objections to the law as emanating just from a group of religious zealots. The objectors could see that such a law would needlessly violate the consciences of some medical practitioners.

The Parliament's Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) raised questions about the new law at the time but the Parliament took no notice, the government declined to provide a statement of compatibility, and some ideologues said no such scrutiny or statement of compatibility was required.

In the light of sustained, reasoned critique of the law and the law making process, the Victorian Human Rights Commission has now expressed the view 'that SARC's interpretation of the Charter is preferable and that the bill should have been accompanied by a statement of compatibility'. It's just that no credible legal commentator is able to provide such a statement. The law is now a dead letter.

Since the Victorian debacle, the Australian Medical Council has been consulting on a national code of ethics for all Australian doctors. During their consultation, they reported that 'there was a request for clear guidance in relation to conscientious objection'. Last week they published their [new code](#) and provided such guidance, in contradistinction to the Victorian law. The Code states:

Good medical practice involves:

Being aware of your right to not provide or directly participate in treatments to which you conscientiously object, informing your patients and, if relevant, colleagues, of your objection, and not using your objection to impede access to treatments that are legal.

Not allowing your moral or religious views to deny patients access to medical care, recognising that you are free to decline to personally provide or participate in that care.

Some might prefer that the word 'directly' be omitted. But it is quite arguable that legally enforced direct referral for a procedure that does not usually require a referral and which otherwise would not be performed except after appropriate counselling would constitute 'direct participation'. A conscientious objector would be entitled not to formally refer in these circumstances.

The Victorian Medical Practitioners' Board has power to discipline or even strike off practitioners for non-compliance with Victorian law. Before such action was taken by the Board, it, being a public authority for the purposes of the Charter, would need to ensure that it did not act in a way that is incompatible with the human right of freedom of conscience. The new Code should be a sure guide for the Board.

Let's now turn from the parliaments to the courts. Last week Chief Justice Martin gave a sensible, uncontroversial decision in the Western Australian Supreme Court.

Christian Rossiter is a profoundly disabled quadriplegic who is presently receiving nutrition and hydration through a PEG. He has had enough of life and wants his carers at Bridgewater Care to discontinue feeding him. 'Right to life' and 'right to die' advocates have been having a field day. You would think they had not read the judgment.

'It is important I think to emphasise at the outset what this case is not about,' the Chief Justice said. 'It is not about euthanasia. Nor is it about physicians providing lethal treatments to patients who wish to die. Nor is it about the right to life or even the right to death.'

The judge said that if Rossiter, having received competent medical advice, decided to request Bridgewater to cease administering nutrition and hydration, then in the absence of any revocation of that direction by Rossiter, Bridgewater should cease to provide nutrition and hydration. There would be no risk of criminal liability. The only risk would arise if the caregiver were to continue feeding without consent and direction because that could be an assault or a trespass on the person of Mr Rossiter.

This was nothing like the case of a person in a persistent vegetative state without the competence to decide and unable to communicate with the caregiver. As the judge made plain: 'Mr Rossiter is not a child, nor is he terminally ill, nor dying. He is not in a vegetative state, nor does he lack the capacity to communicate his wishes. There is therefore no question of other persons making decisions on his behalf.'

The reactions of the 'right to life' and the 'right to die' advocates are equally misleading and unhelpful. It is not only illegal, it is also immoral for a person to trespass without consent on the body of a competent person who specifically refuses consent to the trespass. It is not only against the law. It is wrong. It is morally objectionable.

Churches with a strong teaching tradition should assist their members to form and inform their consciences that they should not trespass on the bodies of the mentally competent without consent.

In future, the tasks of our parliaments and our courts will be more difficult if the reasoned voice of experience is not heard from church groups who know what they are

talking about when it comes to health care. Unless we are at the bedside in constant dialogue with the clinicians, we too risk becoming ideologues.

Insomniphobia

POETRY

Edward Reilly

Fourish

Let the wind prattle against windows.
Panes rattle, cornices whistle moonsongs:
We turn in our shrouds to be warmer,
Somewhat closer to each other, at four.
A cat coughs, lurches by the windows,
Implores admission, confesses his loss
To pillows and an unblinking television:
It is now approaching a quarter past four.
The throat has turned dry with speech
Or was it too much red wine last night?
I cough discreetly, head into pillowland,
Avoid dreams and fretted anxieties.
At the end of our courtyard a car starts
Growling like some fierce predator,
Our collective souls quiver, cough softly
Lest he draw up outside our window.
The bedside clock has edged forward,
Almost five, she whispers, close your eyes,
And the wind soughs, do sleep, do sleep.
Moon gives way to dawn and magpies:
Then there's the first of the day's joggers,
Next door's plumbing starts growling,
A door opens, slams, and another squeaks,
Someone's home late, or away early.

The Nymph Has Taken Leave

The Nymph has taken leave of us, hopeful suitors,
Willing herself towards her dreadful lover.
And so, the world has once again shifted axes,
Groaning a little as it does, like a pensioner
On the day before his accounts come due.

It's turned cold now, and wet, unlike last week
When it was warm enough to sit outside after dinner
To watch the stars emerge from behind their covers,
Match themselves against twinkling fairy lights:
And now, those clouds are no longer gray-edged
But epitomise grayness itself. A small voice intuits
This is the year's necessary revolution
By which the appletree will bloom in Spring,
Or, next season's tomatoes will be plumper,
And so on — I assent, and set about
Planning my part as if I were a gardener
In a comedy of clay, mud and bagged manure —
All for my own benefit — so the voice insists,
This being hereabouts the Kalends of March
Her insistence rings true enough, though I'd rather
Be locked in the arms of her daughter, or a niece,
Who would keep me nicely warm in the months ahead.
I know what's coming: long weeks as the year fades
Into decrepit mornings and fog-bound noontides,
When afternoons give a brief moment of light,
Then, the long commute home in gathering gloom.
Everyone will turn sour. Perhaps, and I pray for it,
Snow will graze the nearby hillocks, the bay freeze over,
Some blinding glint of diamond cut through.
But that is to hope against everything I know:
As my world darkens, another's is reborn into light.

Refugees and other aliens

HUMAN RIGHTS

Catherine Marshall

On a January night 11 years ago I sat in the back of a wheezing Mamba — an armoured defence vehicle — alongside members of the local police commando in the South African province of Mpumalanga. I had joined these men to report on a top-secret mission to intercept a refugee-laden train travelling from the Mozambican capital Maputo to its neighbouring counterpart, Pretoria.

Although South Africa was still radiant in the afterglow of its miraculous transition to democracy, the throngs of Mozambicans fleeing poverty and the aftermath of a protracted civil war were not accorded the politically benign and compassionate label 'refugee'. Instead, they were classified by the government and disgruntled citizens alike as illegal immigrants — or, to use the legal term applied to them, aliens.

So it was with some wry appreciation of the ironic and the allegorical that I watched a similar scene unfold on a cinema screen last week. Bureaucrats and law enforcement officers rumbled along in dust-churning Caspers, headed for a refugee camp where they would serve eviction notices on the camp's inhabitants. Aliens in the literal sense, these unwanted residents had arrived in their spaceship above Africa's thumping heart, Johannesburg.

'If they were from another country we might understand, but they're not even from this planet,' remarked a bystander as the convoy of Caspers streamed into the filthy, overrun alien camp, District 9.

The observation was deliberately ironic, given the xenophobia-fuelled violence that has succeeded the racial hatred of apartheid-era South Africa.

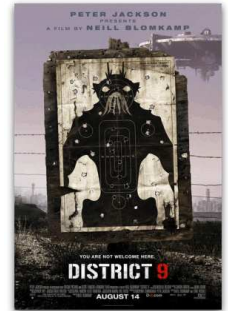
It reminds those of us who grew up under apartheid of long-forgotten human rights injustices, such as mid-winter evictions of squatters or the forced removal of Cape Coloureds from District 6 in Cape Town — abuses which have somehow managed to reconfigure themselves and find expression in new and unexpected ways in this apparently rainbow-hued country.

While *District 9* is ostensibly an entertaining and technically sophisticated sci-fi movie, it also prompts the viewer to reflect on the ongoing maltreatment not only of the estimated 270,000 registered asylum seekers longing to assimilate into South Africa, but also the 42 million people worldwide who are currently displaced.

If we are incapable of treating our earthly fellows humanely, the director seems to be asking, how can we ever hope to function as morally robust beings in a universe whose boundaries we cannot begin to comprehend?

It's a debate that resonates in Australia as much as anywhere else: viewing Africa's intractable refugee crisis from the relative luxury of this country's neatly ordered shores, we have in many ways become over-confident and self-righteous.

Certainly, we have sidestepped a similar maelstrom through legislation that has been, variously, draconian and humane, and have narrowly upheld a collective public conscience that denounces those groups and individuals which are overtly opposed to multiculturalism.



But privately, prejudice can often be found bubbling away with dangerous intensity. Many Australian families sleep more soundly knowing that the night patrol is feverishly scanning the ocean's horizon, rounding up asylum seekers and locking them safely away on Christmas Island.

The newly-appointed Jesuit Refugee Service country director for South Africa, Australian Jesuit David Holdcroft, says he is better able to 'tolerate the intolerance' in under-resourced, refugee-deluged South Africa than in Australia, which in 2008 accepted 13,500 refugees — just 0.1 per cent of the 11 million refugees worldwide who were searching for a new home that year.

The 'luxury' of a coastline, says Holdcroft, protects Australia from an unchecked influx of migrants; there is no such buffer for South Africa, a country easily accessed via a chequerboard of interlinked countries and endless, unmanned borders.

The thousands of migrants who make their way to South Africa each year are motivated by anything from violent persecution and economic instability to simple opportunism. These mixed-migration flows and South Africa's 'no camps' policy blur the distinction between legally-recognised refugees and 'illegal immigrants'. 'A person's background is never totally clear', says Holdcroft. '[But] people are people.'

I came to the same conclusion that January night in Mpumalanga as I documented the top-secret mission which ultimately netted 84 illegal immigrants. They were taken off the train and locked up in police cells overnight, before being repatriated the following morning.

'Sometimes they're taken to Lebombo in the evening, and then try to enter South Africa again the next day', a Border Policing captain told me. I ached for these downcast people who physically buckled beneath the burden of disappointment.

In the years since, the flow of Mozambicans into South Africa has decreased. On the other hand, political developments in Zimbabwe have triggered a human deluge across the border at Beit Bridge.

Like the aliens in *District 9*, who have been conveniently excluded from the human rights declaration, refugees in South Africa — and across the world — face a bleak future. By extrapolating this raw exploration of undisguised fear and bigotry, we are better able to access the humanity of the stranger — especially the stranger who is so different from us that we are certain we will never succeed in finding common ground.

Pope's 'new anthropology' shoots for the moon

APPLICATION

David Holdcroft-Aug-2009



A fair bit of ink has been spilt regarding Pope Benedict's new encyclical [*Caritas in Veritate*](#) ('charity in truth'). A dense document, it seems to satisfy no-one: the politically conservative see neo-conservatism held up to the spotlight, while the left see a sustained critique of [human rights](#) and some [strands of teaching](#) on social justice.

I am sure the last thing on Pope Benedict's mind over the last month was the 40th anniversary of humanity's first steps on the moon. Yet some of the reflections on that event go some way to helping us understand the major themes of the encyclical and to explaining why many of its critics have missed the point.

After their historic mission, the Apollo astronauts embarked on a multi-nation world tour. In the 2007 documentary [In the Shadow of the Moon](#), Michael Collins talks, as you would expect, about the warmth of the reception he and his colleagues received wherever they went.

But what he found most remarkable was that, whereas he had expected the United States, NASA or the astronauts themselves to be congratulated, he instead heard comments like these: 'We did it! Look at what we accomplished.' He was astonished and profoundly moved by this shared sense of pride and accomplishment.

This sentiment encapsulates one of the major themes of *Caritas in Veritate*. Benedict has taken the rapid growth of globalisation and reread it with the eyes of an inclusive faith. In doing so he both names the pitfalls of globalisation and, more important, identifies its potential. Through it he hears God's call speaking loudly in our present world. He seems to be saying: 'We can do it. We can make a truly just world!'

This may seem reminiscent of the 'Yes we can' speeches of the Obama campaign: inspiring, yes, but hardly revolutionary. What makes *Caritas in Veritate* so interesting is how Benedict gets there, particularly how he talks about, and indeed redefines, the 'we' or, more correctly, the 'I'.

Over the course of the 20th century, Catholic Social Teaching developed a comprehensive outlook on human development. In particular, John XXIII's [Pacem in Terris](#) and Paul VI's [Populorum Progressio](#), which Benedict uses as his departure point, together analysed the increasing gaps between rich and poor nations and advanced a humanist vision of development, with the United Nations playing a critical role.

But the vision was built on an understanding of human beings and their relationship with God that was fundamentally individual in its orientation. While economic and social development was seen as necessary, there was little motivation for the rich nations to help bring it about. Solidarity with the peoples of the world was an option for the virtuous. Charity was something to be done after the hard work of wealth creation is accomplished.

As a choice, the option for the poor, as it came to be known, seemed to some to be a soft 'lefty' project adopted by a few idealistic souls. The emphasis was on the word 'option'. At the same time many feared the 'should' statements that sometimes characterised the more collectivist approach to social justice: they lacked freedom.

In this context the growth of individual human rights at times sat awkwardly with much of the Church's work and thinking. To put it crudely and simplistically, salvation for the Christian remained primarily a solitary affair worked out between one's self and God.

The Church's desire to attribute ultimate responsibility for the wrongs in the world to the choice of the individual unwittingly encouraged this.

In *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict offers a 'new', more coherent anthropology. Humanity is no longer merely an aggregation of individuals linked by economic, social or political systems. It is a collective entity:

'... the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures. It is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God ... The same holds true for peoples as well.'

This understanding lies at the heart of Benedict's vision of true human development. The human being is a being-in-relation-with-others. The state of the world, the fact that more than half of the world remains in hunger, diminishes who I am, makes me less than who God intended me to be.

To work for relational justice becomes a moral imperative, although one that I am free to choose or reject. But to reject it leaves me, not to mention our world, impoverished.

This is a radical message indeed. It accepts the reality of globalisation and defines its opportunity. Future generations may well look back and see it as the giant leap for the beginning of the 21st century.

Yes we can achieve justice for Indigenous Australians

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

The Edmund Rice Institute for Social Justice, Fremantle, has [called](#) for a large ex-gratia payment to the family of Mr Ward. The 46-year-old Aboriginal elder and cultural leader died on 27 January 2008 while being transported from Laverton to Kalgoorlie, in the back of a privatised prison van. His first name cannot be revealed for cultural reasons.



The [report](#) of Coroner Alistair Hope was published on 12 June this year. It concluded that Ward died of heatstroke, and that the WA Department of Corrective Services, the prison transport company GSL (now G4S) and the two drivers were jointly to blame. The coroner said Ward's treatment was inhumane, and a breach of international laws to which Australia is a signatory.

In a statement issued after the Coroner's report, Edmund Rice Institute director David Freeman said the report confirmed fears that this is 'one of the worst human rights tragedies in Australian living memory'.

Aside from the ex-gratia payment, the Institute also urged a complete rethink of the community's engagement with Aboriginal persons. David Freeman outlined ten points of concern in a statement issued after the coroner's findings. These include a factor that is rarely alluded to, which is that Aboriginal Australians frequently suffer in silence, and therefore much of the suffering goes unnoticed.

'Our society's de facto expectation [is] that if we don't hear a peep from Aboriginal people — even when we make it impossible for them to communicate with us — there is no cause for concern.'

He suggested that Aboriginal prisoners deserve a greater duty of care, given the well-known 17-year longevity gap. Mr Ward was only 46 years old, but was regarded as an 'elder' — 46 is effectively 63 years old in non-Aboriginal terms.

David Freeman contacted *Eureka Street* recently to tell us that there has been little action since the handing down of the Coroner's report on 12 June. Most recently, the WA Department of Corrective Services [has talked of](#) terminating the contract of the security firm, when the Department itself was found to share the blame.

Another way forward is evident in a recent speech [delivered by](#) Governor-General Quentin Bryce at the Second National Indigenous Courts Conference in Rockhampton. It would seem to address David Freeman's call for a rethink of community engagement with Aboriginal persons. There are various Indigenous Courts in different states, including the Aboriginal Community Court in WA and the Murri Court in Queensland.

The Governor-General spoke of her visit to the Murri Court in Rockhampton, not long after it was established in 2003:

'I sensed the extraordinary power of a court calibrated to Indigenous belonging; the Elders' endeavours in keeping people out of jail, creating bridges of trust, building and supporting communities ...

'I had a deep and abiding respect for the Law; its capacity to enshrine and protect human dignity, to uphold our highest ideals of equality and justice. Yet here in the Murri court I found something different. Beyond the sacredness of Law, a rich and compassionate wisdom shining through the faces of the Elders.'

It is certainly too late for Mr Ward. But in her own quiet way, the Governor-General is uttering what has become the ubiquitous 'yes we can' cry of this moment in history, and it could mean Indigenous Australians enjoy an access to justice that compares with the rest of the population.