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The right to be bad

AUSTRALIA

Ellena Savage

I am never quite sure what I believe about the present. Is it good, or is it bad? Are our human conditions improving, or catastrophically deteriorating? Psychologically, I can only measure my state of being in relation to the present and whatever my memory and education tell me. Scientifically speaking, the data is not conclusive except for, well, climate change. So, the present is simultaneously the best and the worst.

This feeling penetrates how I interpret the many facets of my feminism. There's no way to quantify what my satisfaction levels would be if I were born into another time or another culture, and so it's not entirely up to me to determine how others interpret their own lives. Liberal feminist rhetoric, which is tethered to the capitalist machine, is fairly certain that progress is natural and inevitable, and that equality is bound up in financial liberation, or liberation as determined by the self-made individual.

Sexual liberation, on the other hand, has fallen out of favour. The porn industry kind of exploited that one. Women's liberation from domestic enslavement has taken a hit, too. In the era of the mummy blogger, that just seems judgemental. So here's a proposal for the new woman: to be liberated from niceness.

Not that there's anything wrong with being nice; it is a virtue. But women need to stop asking nicely for equality, and instead just expect it, in every social interaction.

An anecdote: my housemate, wide-eyed and mouth agape, knocked on my bedroom door to ask me if I happen to be named after a character in an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel. The character is Eleanor Savage, and to paraphrase my housemate and John Lennon, I am she and she is me.

I read the Eleanor Savage chapter 'Young Irony' in *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and squealed. Her physical descriptions match mine, she loves, and lives through, literature, she is a bit of a petulant smartypants, and she doesn't tone down her feminism for any man. She is characterised as 'wild', an adjective long attributed to me by half-smiling elders who are probably concerned for my safety. And 'crazy', which is more than problematic.

I identified with Eleanor much more than I expected to, especially in her final scene, where she unleashes on her lover a tirade of pent-up frustration:

Oh, *why* am I a girl? Why am I not a stupid — ? Look at you; you're stupider than I am, not much, but some, and you can lope around and get bored and then lope somewhere else, and you can play around with girls without being involved in meshes of sentiment, and you can do anything and be justified — and here I am

with the brains to do everything, yet tied to the sinking ship of future matrimony.

She asks why she couldn't have been born 100 years into the future, which would be the present, her assumption being that 'progress' would ensue, and that a century of it would give her the freedoms she desires.

It forced me to think about our parallel conditions. She, bound to marry a dinner suit, me, without any obligation to matrimony; she, tethered to her family's moral expectations if she is to not become destitute, me, with the good fortune of liberal parents and a late capitalist workforce to participate in.

My conditions are immeasurably 'better' than Eleanor's. But do they extend to the full spirit of her conviction? Do women have the right to be as bold and bad as men have always? The answer is no. Not really.

'Having it better' — the gendered conditions I was born into as opposed to my ancestors — is not the same as having innate equality recognised and respected. And that includes the equal right to be reckless, to make mistakes, and to maybe even learn from them, as all Great Men in literature have without punishment.

Eleanor is 'feast and folly', she is a 'weird mystery', but most of all, Fitzgerald's character is a little bit cuckoo; there's just no way a character as bright and voracious could escape without having some kind of nervous breakdown. That characterisation is as prevalent in art and the media now as it was 100 years ago. Women may now have the right to talk about their bodies, to earn money, and self-determine politically and financially. What we need now is the right to be bad, to want more, to not be content with what we are given.

Probing the political culture of corruption in NSW

AUSTRALIA

John Warhurst

The Independent Commission against Corruption in New South Wales is continuing to provide stunning insights into the compromised relationship between the major political parties and government in that state. It has moved on from Labor to the Liberal party and from political lobbying to political donations. But the essence of the story remains the same.

NSW Labor's reputation for probity could hardly fall any further given the revelations surrounding Eddie Obeid and Ian MacDonald, not to mention union leaders. Now it is the turn of the Liberal Party and the hearings have claimed the scalp of the Liberal State Premier, Barry O'Farrell over his failure to declare on his pecuniary interests register and to even recollect the gift to him of a \$3000 bottle of 1959 Grange wine.

The gift came from Nick di Girolamo, the chairman of Australian Water Holdings and a Liberal Party fundraiser, and was given shortly after the Liberals' success in ousting Labor at the March 2011 state elections.

Previously Senator Arthur Sinodinos was forced to stand down as Assistant Minister for Finance in the Abbott Government in relation to his role in dealings with the same company. Three Central Coast MPs, including former minister Chris Hartcher, are now sitting on the cross-benches because of the wider donations scandal. And Marie Ficarra, once parliamentary secretary to the new Premier Mike Baird, has also just stood down.

At the heart of the donations scandal is the laundering of donations to the Liberal Party for its 2011 election campaign through the use of dodgy front companies. The MPs in question have set out to breach the 2009 rules specifically outlawing donations from developers. In general they have laundered up to \$700,000 in donations by passing them through front companies, Eightbyfive and the Free Enterprise Foundation.

Not only have these MPs been implicated but so have party officials. Another Liberal Party fundraiser, Paul Nicolau has now resigned as chairman of the official Liberal Party fundraising organisation, the Millenium Fund. Nicolau is NSW executive director of another enthusiastic lobbyist, the Australian Hotels Association.

Even the new post-O'Farrell government is not squeaky clean as Girolamo was appointed to a government board by Baird when he was Treasurer, and reports circulated that his new deputy, Gladys Berejiklian, was close to certain Liberal-affiliated lobbyists. It was almost impossible for MPs not to be associated with lobbyists such as former Liberal MP, Michael Photios, because they were so influential in the party organisation.

Lobbying and fundraising, both legitimate activities, are two sides of the one coin. The former is largely about influencing governments in office, while the latter is more concerned with influencing the outcome of elections. They overlap when, like Labor's Brian Burke in Western Australia, those who are doing the lobbying are also heavily involved in fundraising for the party.

In recent times the direction of public policy has been to try to make both activities more transparent through public declarations of interest and to stop individuals wearing two hats; party office-holding and lobbyist.

Sinodinos had the latter problem, though company directors were not covered by the subsequent ban on lobbyists also serving as party officials. The Prime Minister, himself a product of the NSW Liberals, has taken up the reform cause. Trust in government depends upon such openness.

What is striking about the ICAC hearings is not just the bombshells that cause a premier or a minister to fall from grace but the revelations of the business-as-usual world of politics that sees lobbyists, fundraisers, party officials, MPs and ministers all clustering around the honeypot. Casual self-interest appears to reign unchallenged, and the culture of political life at the top-end is corrupted.

NSW may be worse than other states in this regard but we cannot say this with any confidence.

It is unclear just how respect for political life in NSW can be recovered. The Labor Party opposition Leader, John Robertson, is calling for everything to be on the table in order to re-establish confidence in politics. But he represents a still discredited party. Baird, the new Premier, has raised the possibility of full public funding of elections as a way to drive out corrupt donations. But that is tackling just one part of a much bigger problem.

Move over Lance Armstrong, the Budget is coming

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamiltons

By the time the Federal Budget comes around most readers have switched off. But the process and the ideas that have framed this coming budget deserve cool reflection.

The Government's preparation for the Budget has highlighted the need — confected or otherwise — to address the deficit, and so for the whole community to make sacrifices for the national good. It has defined the good of the nation in purely economic terms. Its underlying assumption is that economic health, and so the common good, is furthered by strengthening competition between individuals in a free market.

The difficulty with this assumption is that heightened competitiveness does not foster interest in the common or national good but creates a narrower focus on the interests of the individual or group. In the process it subverts competition itself. The use of drugs in cycling or in football illustrates the point. Doing what it takes meant taking competition out of the game by sidelining the competitors and excluding them from the possibility of winning.

This paradox can be seen in the making of the Budget. The Government certainly faces a difficulty in financing its contribution to the national good over the longer term. It needs to address the deficit. But this problem does not come directly from the rise in expenditure but from the fall in revenue. That shortfall should have been looked at by consulting how to care for the needs of the community, especially the most disadvantaged, and in that context by asking how appropriately to increase revenue and cut costs. That would be the cooperative way.

Instead it worked competitively. It turned it into a competition between the better off and the disadvantaged and proceeded to rig the competition. It appointed a Committee of Audit which didn't include anyone to represent the social needs of the community. All its members shared the view that economic growth demanded a reduction in the financial commitments of government. The committee predictably focused on cutting expenditure. This established a competition between winners and losers.

That the poorer members of society would lose was made likely by the composition and brief of the committee. It was made certain when the subsidies given the wealthy through negative gearing on property and through superannuation were protected. Savings then had to be made by reducing programs and services available to the less wealthy.

So it is predictable that in the Budget the financial burden will fall on the unemployed, on the ill without private insurance, on education and on those most

disconnected from society. The result will be to protect the wealth of those better off and to isolate those worse off. The cult of competitiveness had led to a rigged competition in which the national interest will not be served.

Governments and the parties they represent, of course, will promise that they stand above competition and so can be trusted to ensure that the common good is protected. But in political life, too, competitiveness reigns. It leads individuals and parties to seek their own good at the expense of the common good.

The New South Wales Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) has shown the length to which politicians and parties will go to fund their parties and to win government. Their readiness to do whatever it takes has led them to conspire with developers and other corporate figures for their mutual advantage.

Highly competitive donors certainly considered that their donation would give them an edge in gaining government licenses and contracts. Here, too, unbridled competitiveness destroyed competition as well as placing individual gain above a principled care for the common good and the environment. Move over Lance Armstrong.

It would be a brave call to argue that the sordidness of public life revealed by ICAC is characteristic only of New South Wales. It seems more likely to reflect the absence at Federal level and in the other states of effective and independent commissions of corruption, and to the lack of legislation to ban politicians and political parties from receiving donations from people who stand to gain from their decisions, and from charging for access.

Whatever of this, few Australians now regard politicians of major parties as credible defendants of the common good. Their competitiveness is seen to place the gain to their party or themselves before the national good. Nor does it inspire hope that their budgets will be fair.

The view that that the economy should serve the whole community, especially its most disadvantaged, and that people who enter public life should be inspired by the desire to serve the community and not to advantage themselves or their parties certainly sounds very old-fashioned. That is not how things are done now.

But when we look at the results of fashionable competitiveness even old-fashioned cooperation looks good.

Hugo Weaving's grief and healing

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Healing* (M). Director: Craig Monahan. Starring: Don Hany, Hugo Weaving. 119 minutes**

As its title suggests, *Healing* probes the process of dealing with loss, coping with regret, and moving on to a more positive future. Director Craig Monahan has said that making the film was part of his own healing process, following the death of both of his parents during the years that the film was in development. Hugo Weaving's character in the film is inspired by a real-life minimum-security prison officer whose daughter had died.

This man helped initiate a partnership between the Healesville Wildlife Sanctuary and Prisons Victoria, to develop a program for rehabilitating injured raptors, that would be overseen by prisoners as part of their own rehabilitation. 'The program encapsulated the positive side,' says Weaving, 'of someone trying to deal with their own grief, and healing himself by setting up a kind of living memorial to his daughter.'

Such a program and process lies at the heart of *Healing*. 'I'd read a number of drafts,' says Weaving, who has shared a working relationship with Monahan ever since he starred in the director's feature debut, the menacing police drama *The Interview*, back in 1998. His character Matt, like his real-life counterpart, is a bereaved father, and his all-but silent grief lends considerable weight to Weaving's gruff portrayal. 'It is not demonstrated in any great depth, but you understand the magnitude of his grief and what he's trying to deal with,' says Weaving.

Matt is inspired to initiate the program not just by his own grief, but also by his observation of the film's hero, Viktor (Hany), an Iranian expat and inmate who bears his own deep emotional scars. Viktor is at the tail end of a prison sentence for murdering a friend. During the course of the film he must confront not only his sense of guilt over that deed, but also try to heal the family relationships that have been damaged by his errant ways. His care for the raptors mirrors and enhances this process of self-healing.

As part of his research, Weaving spent time at some of Victoria's minimum-security prison farms, and hopes that the insights gleaned from these experiences will illuminate for audiences this often-unseen aspect of the justice system. 'It's a prison film and yet you're in a facility that not many people know about,' he says. 'At these facilities there's a great deal of trust and quite strong relationships between prison officers and inmates.'

'It's a pre-release facility, a very different atmosphere to a maximum-security prison. There were no exterior walls or fences — the inmates could run away if they wanted to, though obviously that's not in their interests. It's the borderline

between being incarcerated and being set free. Therefore there needs to be a certain amount of trust and responsibility given to inmates because they need to be rehabilitated back into the community.'

Healing's strongest attribute is its cinematography. Its images of birds in flight or repose stand as poignant metaphors for the ebb and flow of human dignity, the fragility and resilience of the human spirit, and the burgeoning self-respect. If the story is a bit thin at times, and the dialogue stilted, this is balanced by the gravity of the theme and by the performances of Hany and Weaving, as their characters push back with increasing resolve against the weight of grief and regret. In this regard it, like its characters, achieves transcendence.

Whose liberty matters as Dickensian budget looms?

ECONOMICS

Fatima Measham

Thomas Piketty is the epicentre of a seismic wave in economic discourse prompted by the publication last March of *Capital in the 21st Century*. In this book, he and his colleagues show that, among other things, wealth accumulation is not benign. They argue that current conditions have set us on track for a return to 19th century-levels of inequality, where inheritance — not labour, earnings or merit — determines quality of life.

Going over the Commission of Audit proposals, I couldn't help but think that the auditors and the Coalition Government seem keen to expedite this neo-Dickensian era.

Mandatory co-payments for GP visits, increased co-payments for subsidised medicines, students paying more for higher education, lowering HECS repayment thresholds to the minimum wage, with the minimum wage itself cut from 56 per cent of average weekly earnings to 46 per cent, pushing back the pension age as if increasing life expectancy matches capacity for work ... the list goes on and on and on. It is death by a thousand cuts, unless you have the wherewithal to pay.

For all the rhetoric about everyone pitching in to 'repair' the budget, it is clear the burden is to be inequitably borne. The audit, for instance, barely nips at generous superannuation concessions for the wealthy, deferring these for a later 'review'. With the Budget due in less than a week, tax breaks won't soon be rationalised.

Meanwhile the 'budget emergency' being used to justify historic changes to welfare — but not taxation — is unconvincing. Australian social expenditure at 19.5 per cent of GDP is [lower](#) than in OECD countries such as Germany, the UK and Italy. The deficit itself, as a percentage of GDP, is within the [lower range](#) internationally.

None of the chief economists interviewed recently by Fairfax think an urgent return to surplus is warranted, which exposes it as nothing more than a political fetish. Moreover, the structural changes they [propose](#) for addressing the deficit have nothing to do with social expenditure: abolishing negative gearing, taxing trusts like companies, broadening or raising the GST, reducing the capital gains tax discount and tightening superannuation tax breaks for high-income earners.

These ideas aren't as dramatic as Piketty's proposals, which include 15 per cent tax on capital and 80 per cent on very high incomes, nor do they directly confront the inequality that concerns him. Yet both sets of ideas highlight taxation as a key approach to self-perpetuating concentrations of wealth during periods of slow growth and permanent demand for universal services and social benefits.

This is where small-government ideologues tend to expose their moral inconsistencies. Government withdrawal is seen as a virtue only when it comes to the welfare system, not the fiscal structures that favour capital-holders. In this scenario, Piketty might say, we end up rewarding people for nothing more than being heirs, while penalising those without a cent of inheritance.

It's all done in the name of 'incentives' toward 'personal responsibility'. This proposition cannot remain coherent in the face of those who will be hit hard by the proposed suite of cuts and co-payments. Subsidy levels over the past decades have enabled most Australians to make a living, complementing their resilience in times of sickness and joblessness. It works. We only need look across the Pacific to understand what might have been.

In this light, the 'social state' is not something that interferes with individual agency, as ideologues might argue. It provides liberating conditions for it. For people born into disadvantage, not having to think twice about visiting the GP for a persistent cough, not having to abandon dreams of attending university due to expense, not having to be anxious about having a roof over your head because your wage covers rent — these constitute a far more meaningful conception of freedom than most libertarians would concede.

Inequality patently limits the choices for those on the margins; social programs that reinstate such choices can only be read as emancipatory.

The thing is that 'classical liberals' are actually on the right track, as far as expressions of individual dignity goes. It is here that liberalism intersects in quite a peculiar fashion with liberation theology. Both emerge from historical periods of state excess and seek to correct it. Yet they arrive at different conclusions: while liberalism thereafter frames government as an instrument of oppression, to be limited as much as possible, liberation theology (or at least a reading of it) reframes it as an instrument for social justice.

Should the Federal Budget next week and the coming years adopt the recommendations of the Commission of Audit, it will demonstrate that limited government can in fact be oppressive but only selectively so. The question that follows is: whose liberty matters here?

Gerry Adams arrest inflames ghosts of Ireland's past

INTERNATIONAL

Brian Lennon

My uncle, Michael Lennon, fought with Eamon DeValera in Boland's Mill in Dublin during the 1916 Rising. As a young fellow I worshipped Michael for his struggle for Irish freedom. In the intervening years, having sat beside too many empty chairs, I wished that he had stayed at home.

Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein, sees himself as a successor of Michael Lennon. But 98 years after the Rising, Adams was last week arrested for questioning about the 1972 murder of Jean McConville, a widowed mother of ten, living in a run-down block of flats. The IRA accused her of giving information to the British army, kidnapped her in front of her children, shot her in the back of the head and buried her in a beach. They did not tell her family what had happened to her. She was one of the 'disappeared'. Her children were put in care.

Adams vehemently denies any involvement in her murder. He also denies he was ever in the IRA. I know no one who believes this latter claim.

His arrest was linked to taped interviews made by historians working in Boston College. In these Brendan Hughes claims Adams was a senior commander in the IRA in Belfast and was directly implicated in McConville's murder. Hughes had no problem with the killing because he agreed with shooting informers and made no distinction between men and women. But he did have a problem with Adams' denials of IRA membership.

At the time of the murder, and since, a central plank of Republican demands has been for due process, and — often correctly — they criticise failures of the British Government in this respect.

Republicans cry foul play over Adams' arrest for several reasons: the absence of arrests of security force members for atrocities such as Bloody Sunday, the failure to hold inquests for many killed by the British, the refusal of the British Government to release documents. They also allege that the timing of the arrest was politically motivated: three weeks before European and local elections, in both Northern Ireland and the South.

At the root of all this lies the problem of the past: how do we deal with it? The 1998 Agreement was a political compromise. Like all such settlements it failed to be just in many ways. People from all sides who had lost loved ones saw their killers given early release from prison. There were suspicions that Republicans were not being prosecuted. Only a small proportion of the security forces was brought to court.

So what do we do? Prosecute all who broke the law? Most of the time this will not be possible. If it were we would not have room in prison for all those

convicted.

Forgive everyone? This approach often appeals to Christians. But they ignore the anger of God at wrongdoing, and it is often, but not always, an approach advocated by people who have not suffered.

A South African style truth commission, in which people are offered amnesty, but only if they tell the truth? But in South Africa one side won. In the Irish conflict both the British and the IRA accepted that they could not win. So what pressures are there on any group to admit terrible wrongdoing?

There is a further issue: often the worst perpetrators are major players in the peace process. So the huge mural erected by supporters of Adams this week which reads 'Peacemaker, a leader and visionary' is true: without his astute leadership, the risks he took and his persuasive ability, the vast majority of Republicans would never have accepted the compromises of the 1998 Agreement. And the peace we have, with all our divisions, is infinitely better than the violence.

However, the mural is only part of the story, as Jean McConville's children know only too well. Whoever killed her was in the IRA.

Handwritten history of two mothers' loving meals

CREATIVE

Gillian Bouras

'The older I become, the more I miss my mother.' So wrote a friend recently. And she is 93. I am not nearly that venerable age, but am old enough to know that the grief and the longing do not go away, but lurk constantly, always ready to inflict the rapier thrust of pain and loss. My mother has been dead 20 years, and still a day never passes without my thinking about her.

Once a daughter loses her mother, there are many forms of 'missing': the flashes of memory, the need for advice that can never come, the futile desire to right wrongs, to name only a few. But above all, once a mother goes, the daughter feels very strongly that there is now no one in the front line of life's battle.

I can't remember when I asked my father to send me Mum's recipe book, and I didn't know why I wanted it, but want it I did. Long before 'lifestyle' became an ambition, most Australian women, Presbyterian or not, had a copy of the standby that was first published in 1904, and remains in print. (I still use my own dilapidated copy here in Greece, and my grandsons eat PWMU Anzacs.) *The Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union Cookery Book*: the first recipe, appropriately enough, is for porridge.

But most women also had their own compilation: my mother's is contained in a Summit/Lion brand book designed for the purpose. It is labelled 'Recipe Book', and has chapter headings and dog-eared index tabs.

The book is here on my desk now, and I realise, with a shock, that it has been part of my life for 60 years. As small children, my siblings and I were pressed into the work of copying recipes from *The Australian Women's Weekly* and other founts of culinary wisdom. There were also contributions from friends and relatives, all conscientiously and formally attributed to the donor: Mrs I. M. Stanton, Mrs Unsworth.

Every entry is, of course, handwritten, and I can match the handwriting to the amanuensis quite easily even now: there is my own unformed script and that of my sister, also long dead. My brother's features prominently: 'Mum got me at it when I had my broken leg,' he told me, with a rueful laugh.

The handwriting conjures up the person: my father, who went through a pie-making phase, is there, and so is my grandfather, who contributed 'Fay's Sago'. My aunt Fay, wife of a farmer, was a doughty rural heroine, and I loved her, but there was a limit, and sago was it.

Lord Acton, that mighty English historian of the 19th century, considered that history provides the 'unique opportunity of recording ... the fullness of knowledge'.

Certainly the recipe book records the changes of time: my mother's precise script, learned as part of her infant-teacher training, evolved over years into a slapdash scrawl that only the initiated could decipher.

There was also the development from dishes like salmon mornay and shrimp cocktail to Quiche Lorraine and the occasional cautiously phrased Asian recipe. Nothing too adventurous, it has to be admitted.

But the recipe book is a historical document for other reasons, for in it my mother has written out the recipes she learned in my Greek mother-in-law's village kitchen. Yiayia was no slave to any fashion, so her dishes were traditional, and made from whatever was to hand.

She was also illiterate, so my mother had to observe and make notes; she conscientiously retained the Greek titles, so there is the *spanokorizo* (spinach and rice), the *fassolia yiachni* (bean and tomato stew) and the *melitzanes tiganites* (fried eggplant). The book is, in a sense, part of the story of two mothers, who had little in common beyond the fact of motherhood and a basic, necessary domesticity.

Another older friend once told me about being seriously ill. Various people tried to tempt her appetite, but 'all I wanted was my mother's brown bread and butter; she always cut the bread paper-thin, Mum'. All those Jewish mothers, makers of the legendary chicken soup, are so right: there is nothing as healing as food cooked by someone you love. And who loves you: your mother.

Audit Commission's Gonski landmines

EDUCATION

Dean Ashenden

The Commission of Audit has planted so many landmines across the political landscape that [two have been scarcely noticed](#) . One is planted directly under Gonski, the other under the federal role in schooling.

Of the many issues tackled by the Commission, school funding is one of the few about which the Government has to do something, soon. The Government has gone along with the remnants of the Gonski scheme, but only until 2016. Prime Minister Tony Abbott has already announced that after that, all bets are off. What the Commission suggests in this area is therefore of immediate interest.

The Commission finds that present school funding arrangements waste time and resources, and frustrate efforts at educational improvement. No surprises there. That is why the Rudd Government appointed Gonski in 2010, and that is what Gonski's report describes in detail.

Two levels of government, federal and state/territory, give money to non-government schools. The Federal Government also subsidises government schools, and runs special programs which come and go, targeting everything from computers to school chaplaincies, in all three schools sectors.

It is not surprising that Australia finds difficulty in getting any traction in educational reform or, as the Commission and others have noted, that spending has gone up much faster than detectable 'performance'.

The Commission doesn't like Gonski's proposed fix and, since some states signed up for Gonski and some didn't, it likes the upshot even less.

Saying that it's a mess was the easy part of the Commission's job. Figuring out what to do next is not so simple, although the Commission seems to have thought that it is. It has proposed two measures.

First, the Federal Government should give its schools allocations to the states. They, in turn, should do the distributing they currently do, but with more money (although not as much more as Labor promised). Rather than head toward a funding formula common to all states/territories and all three sectors, as suggested by Gonski, the Commission wants to head in the opposite direction.

Second, the Federal Government should set national ground rules — a national curriculum, national reporting on outcomes, and national disclosure by the states of how they do their distributing.

This could be workable, had the Commission gone about its task in the right spirit. But it has focused on getting an 'efficient' funding system, which is just one part of the puzzle.

Another, put front and centre by Gonski, is 'need'. The Commission says that it supports needs-based funding and that the states should report on how they do it. But it doesn't recognise need in its own proposals. It wants federal money to be handed to the states and territories in proportion to the number of students enrolled, as if there was no more need in Tasmania than in WA, or in the Northern Territory than the ACT.

Worse, it proposes to flick to each of the states and territories the task of solving or reducing yet another of the problems which preoccupied Gonski. 'Residualisation' has seen the best-resourced, best-positioned schools take students and families from the worst-off, giving Australia a high and rising degree of social segmentation in schooling and fanning conflict between sectors and social groups. Gonski proposed to put all schools on the same footing, thereby evening-up the playing field and dampening down chronic political conflict.

It would be open to each of the states and territories to adopt Gonski-like measures, as NSW has done. But what about the others? Will we get seven local battles over funding shares instead of just one national one?

One way of tackling these and other problems is through national reporting. The Commission is in favour of that, but only for 'outcomes'. Has the Commission bowed to objections by the independent schools to current requirements that they also report 'inputs' (income and expenditure) on the MySchool website?

Moreover, as just about any educationist of any ideological orientation will point out, data on outcomes alone are worse than useless. They are misleading. The real question is how much difference each school (or school system) makes, taking into account the difficulty of its educational job, and the resources to hand. The answer can only be found with data on inputs and social context as well as outcomes.

Nor do outcomes define everything that schools produce, or that parents (and governments) care about. What do current students, parents, and teachers report about the character and quality of life at their school, for example? It is all very well to say that these will be matters for each jurisdiction, but if there is a case for a national curriculum, or indeed national reporting on outcomes, why not on other crucial matters also?

These and other shortcomings could be remedied within a devolved system, but only by a much more considered framework of requirement and reporting than the Commission's narrow field of vision permits.

There is little reason to hope that the Government will see things differently. The Coalition in opposition, urged on by independent sector lobbies, opposed the Gonski solution from day one. It sought to frustrate governments, such as the O'Farrell Government in NSW, that supported Gonski, and encouraged the waverers and hold-outs such as WA and Queensland to resist.

After 18 months of playing the spoiler, the now Education Minister Christopher Pyne and Abbott announced an 11-hour conversion to Gonski, only to try to ditch it again within weeks of taking office. The Commission's proposals are inevitably tainted with the odour of bad faith.

Pyne's brazen effort to get rid of Gonski served only to show that he is not to be trusted and that Gonski enjoys widespread popular support. Abbott must be wondering whether this minister — or any minister — could carry the day with the kind of scheme recommended by the Commission.

Abbott no doubt also realises that Opposition Leader Bill Shorten would be happy to go to the next election as leader of the Gonski party and worry later about how to implement it.

In the meantime, the hottest ticket in town will be for Gonski's [first major statement](#) since the release of his report two years ago, scheduled for 21 May at the University of Melbourne. He has promised to give his views on the extent to which stakeholders have comprehended and implemented what he and his panel proposed.

Our Lady of Perpetual Retail

CREATIVE

Josephine Clarke

The new house

last night in a dream
you sat on my bed
in the new house
hidden in my bedroom
we pretended I was sick
his anger on the other side of the wall
your creased fingers stretched then clenched
your soft pink face wet
on the lino daisies dared not move
and the plywood wardrobe door
its thick lacquer of varnish
the shell of your modern hopes
in the dream we moved off to a petrol station
sat on the brick wall in the sun
under Mobil's red Pegasus
unnoticed and warm

What will they?

We leave this house of their growing to enter the house
of our aging and they, what will they remember
best? Five in the bed on mornings without sport,
busybusystopstop, 'Marco!' 'Polo!' 'Marco!'
'Polo!' on the other side of the fence, the hospital
calling at night, the wooly bush Christmas tree?
Will they miss the light through the vine, the Robinia's
popcorn snow, the sacred bamboo where we watched

singing honeyeaters grow, the cat kept inside?

The year everyone died? A rosemary roast,
my marmalade curdling, yeast breathing out on the sill?
Who knows what they will remember?
From five to six we've grown since the July wedding —
that was the beginning of this house's shedding.

The city

Our Lady of Perpetual Retail lives here
pilgrims arrive to the hiss and gush of bus brakes
and it is always the liturgical season of steel
dockets fly like white moths
we communicate in glances
Our Lady of Perpetual Retail lives here
all the lost apostrophes hang in jewellers' windows
everyone carries their own mirror
this is the liturgical season of steel
even vacancy has a price;
only the food is anointed in oil
The Lady of Perpetual Detail lives here
T-shirts advertise our shape and size —
it's the Royal Show without the horse shit
You have every reason to steal
in spring Boronia brings its breath of silent
spaces not for sale in this temple
here it is the liturgical season of steel
Our Lady of Perpetual Retail lives here

This autumn morning

the blue grey river full of moon,
a swan dipped to graze on a shore I couldn't see.
The scroll of neck, velvet black sinew,

slipped silently between wet and unwet.

Such grace:

the unravelling of an S
and its perfect retraction.

From the red beak,
a single drip of river.
Beneath folded wing, a peek
at white feather.

Such grace
was all it took to undo
what was submerged.
Grief floated,
shining — salt on my tongue.

Pemberton mist

here the evening air does not forget
how much it rained last August

I return middle-aged
walk familiar streets
unrecognised
someone wearing a hat
the karri
among a scribbling of greens
nude in vertical suede
the sun's must
a boy with long blonde hair
lopes away from the bus
his school bag hollow
dusk is the time
for charcoal kangaroos
that lift their heads

before drumming the clearing empty
I cannot shake off this place
its dewed webs
its months of aluminium sky
the trees that ache in the breeze

Ukraine races towards civil war

INTERNATIONAL

Tony Kevin

In mid-April, Tim Judah, highly regarded historian of the post-Yugoslavia wars of secession, toured Ukraine for the *New York Review of Books*. His essay [‘Ukraine: the Phony War?’](#) just came out in the 22 May *NYRB* issue. It is hauntingly prophetic. He predicted things were about to go very badly in Ukraine:

This has been a time when normal life continues while men arm themselves and begin to prepare for combat. It is that strange pre-war moment when the possible future overlaps with the present. Rebels make Molotov cocktails a stone’s throw from roadside shops selling garden gnomes. A halted Ukrainian army convoy is surrounded by locals who mill around chatting to the soldiers ...

As men in beaten-up cars race up country roads past towering grain silos, as groups gather to demand referendums, as people tell me that they don’t believe that war is coming and that Russians and Ukrainians are brothers, I remember the same brave talk, the same euphoria, and the same delusions before the Yugoslavs tipped their country into catastrophe in the 1990s. Ukraine is not like that Yugoslavia, although the atmosphere in the east is a horribly similar combination of resentment and disbelief.

Just two weeks later, Ukraine races towards civil war. In the pro-Russian, Russian-speaking eastern provinces — the famous Donbas heavy industrial region, with its hero cities of the Soviet Union like Donetsk — the irresolute and panicked new government in Kiev has ordered the Ukrainian Army to retake cities from pro-Russian militia demonstrators who had bloodlessly occupied key government buildings to popular acclaim.

After initial reverses, the Ukrainian Army has orders to use lethal force to regain control of those centres. People [look on aghast](#) as Ukrainian soldiers shoot local militiamen, and even unarmed demonstrators:

Local people claim the Ukrainian army shot at unarmed citizens who formed a human chain near a road blockade on the edge of the village of Andreevka, only a few miles from Slavyansk. ‘They are killing peaceful people,’ said Igor, 29, a farmworker from the village ...

‘Where is Russia? Putin stays silent. Russia, Russia, there is no Russia here. Why? We beg Putin to come and save us,’ said [a local woman], visibly distraught.

At this rate, it may not be long before Moscow’s hand is forced, as it was in Georgia, into massive and overwhelming armed intervention.

The *Washington Post* [reported](#) on 4 May that the Kremlin says it is weighing its response to ‘thousands’ of pleas for help from Ukraine. On 3 May, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reportedly told US Secretary of State John Kerry that ‘the

punitive operation in south-eastern Ukraine is putting the country into a fratricidal conflict’.

Moscow news agencies report that Lavrov called on the United States ‘to use all its influence to force the Kiev regime protected by it, which has declared a war on its own people, to immediately halt the military action in the south-eastern regions, remove the troops and release protesters’.

I fear Lavrov is right, But it may already be too late to halt the remorseless escalation into bloodshed and dissolution of the fragile Ukrainian state.

The accelerating civil war is not confined to the pro-Russian far eastern parts of Ukraine. In the south, in the historic Black Sea city of Odessa, near Ukraine’s Western border, there was murderous civil violence over the weekend. In this highly cultured, ethnically complex city (with 62 per cent Ukrainians, 29 per cent Russians, and various Balkan and Jewish communities), a group of peaceful pro-Russian demonstrators barricaded themselves in a city building. Pro-Kiev contra-demonstrators set the building on fire. Dozens were burnt or suffocated.

And so the madness grows. There cannot be much left now of Ukraine’s fragile and uneasily asserted national identity. As happened in Ireland in 1919, as in Spain in 1936, as in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

(*W. B. Yeats, 'The second coming', 1919*)

Yet I had not expected civil society to deteriorate so quickly in Ukraine, in civilised 21st century Europe. In my essay on the Crimean crisis in *Eureka Street* on 4 March, I [wrote](#) that Putin ‘would prefer to try to keep Ukraine united, with whatever government it elects, as long as that government retains good-neighbourly relations and strong economic links with Russia’.

That vision has now been destroyed by the provocative clumsiness of Kiev and its Western cheerleaders. It is hard to see any outcome now other than bloody secession of the east, supported by Russian armed might, and continued bloodshed and unrest in what will be left of Ukraine: a weak and resentful rump state, ripe for the picking by neo-fascist Ukrainian nationalist elements.

It would have been better had the West cooperated in Putin’s original vision to keep Ukraine united, geopolitically neutral, and not anti-Russian.

Some will say the East Ukrainian militiamen provoked the crisis, acting as Moscow's pawns. I don't buy this. I believe people in the eastern provinces felt genuinely outraged and threatened by Prime Minister Yanukovich's violent ouster on 22 February in Kiev, and that they were determined to assert new demands for regional autonomy and human rights from the mistrusted new government in Kiev. Kiev in turn behaved provocatively and clumsily e.g. in attempting to pass laws downgrading the official status of the Russian language.

Now, this government has borne out the eastern people's worst fears, by treating them as traitors and turning national troops on them.

I do not think there can be any going back now from this slide into civil war. The news from Ukraine will get worse before it gets better.

Abbott and Hockey more Prince John than Robin Hood

ECONOMICS

David James

In politics, one should never opt for a balanced and thoughtful description of the truth when wild exaggerations will do. Especially when you want to take from the poor and give to, if not exactly the rich, at least the investor class. Tax concessions to superannuants and those using negative gearing amount to more than the aged pension. Yet there is no mention of that; the silence is deafening.

The Commission of Audit's [86 recommendations](#) to the Federal Government have prompted outbursts of alarm and criticism for those affected: mostly in the health sector and the aged. It is likely most of them will not be adopted, just another episode in the softening-up process the Government is orchestrating. Two messages are being sold: 'We have to do something drastic,' and 'We will all try to share the pain.' Thus Treasurer Joe Hockey can 'refuse to rule out any recommendations' then listen to the huge sighs of relief on Budget night.

At first glance, it seems a justifiable political tactic. The Budget does need some repair, as the wealth benefit from a once-in-a-generation mining boom comes to an end. And it is perhaps unrealistic to expect politicians not to spin, distort and lie. Nevertheless, spin, distortion and lies it is.

The Audit report concentrates mainly on government services and the social safety net. While not exactly engaging in class war (there is a proposed one-off debt payment for high income earners) it nevertheless reveals a lack of concern about the less well-off.

To some extent this is inevitable, because Australia has the most targeted social welfare system in the OECD, directing more of its government spending to the poorest 30 per cent, and less to the richest 30 per cent, than any other nation. So if government spending is to be curtailed, it will inevitably affect the worst off.

Yet a glance at the actual evidence about Australian government spending shows just how much the government is exaggerating for political effect.

The claim that ageing is making pension payments unsustainable is not supported by the evidence. The government spends about \$40 billion on the aged pension (total assistance to the aged is about \$55 billion). Public spending on pensions is 3.5 per cent, the fourth lowest in the OECD (America's is 6.8 per cent).

And, far from having become out of control, government spending has actually fallen over the last two decades. In 1995, and then again in 2000, it was over 9 per cent of GDP. It is now about 8.5 per cent of GDP. This is because government spending has been comparatively parsimonious. What has changed is tax revenue, which has fallen as the mining boom has eased. It is the fall in tax revenue that has put the Budget under pressure.

Even the Audit report's evidence is not especially damning. On page 19, the 'business as usual' scenario only envisages payments rising from 26 per cent of GDP now to 26.5 per cent by 2023–24. This is hardly an out of control situation (the 'reform scenario' has payments falling to 24 per cent over the same period).

The underlying cash balance (revenue minus expenditures) is currently minus 3 per cent. Under the 'business as usual scenario' it is forecast to improve to minus 1.7 per cent by 2023–24. Again, hardly disastrous. (Under the 'reform scenario' it is forecast to be plus 1 per cent by 2023–24.)

The same goes for net debt, which is far from being out of control. Indeed, Australia's government debt is the envy of the developed world. The Commission of Audit estimates that if things stay the same net debt will rise from 12 per cent to 16 per cent of GDP by 2023–24. (In the 'reform scenario' it falls to 4 per cent of GDP.)

It is not really a reason to push the panic button, even on the Commission of Audit's own forecasts. Australia's low government debt and the fact that it did not go into recession during the global financial crisis have given the nation economic room to move.

So why the dire pronouncements from the Abbott Government? Perhaps the relentless negativity that Tony Abbott displayed in government has to find a new avenue for expression. There is also more than a whiff of class war about the posture.

But most of all it reveals a bias to favouring investors over recipients of government spending. There is no suggestion, in either the Audit or from the Abbott Government, that one group of investors, superannuants, will have to 'share the burden'. They get tax concessions worth about \$28 billion.

Nor is there so much as a whisper about negative gearing, which costs the government about \$14 billion a year.

Together, these two benefits for investors exceed the aged pension. The superannuation concessions can be defended because they are supposed to allow people to fund their own retirement. But as a Towers Watson report [shows](#) it will not really take much pressure off the pension system. Towers Watson found that when superannuation, the age pension and other retirement savings are all taken into account, only 53 per cent of couples and 22 per cent of singles are on track to reach or exceed their target retirement income:

Negative gearing is even less defensible. It has greatly distorted the housing market. It has created a bias towards investing in land rather than productive activity. And, bizarrely, it encourages investors to make a loss, in order to benefit from government largesse.

It leaves this question. Why is it wrong for the poor to receive government 'entitlements' but entirely acceptable for investors to get 'entitlements'? That is

what is not being said in the debate about the Budget.

What Pope Francis thinks about Abbott's Audit

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

In its own way, the Australian Catholic bishops' Feast of St Joseph the Worker social inclusion [pastoral letter](#) is as remarkable as the [report](#) of the Federal Government's pre-Budget National Commission of Audit that was released on the same day.

It brings to Australian shores Pope Francis' radical economic thinking centred on the dignity of the human person. This is in stark contrast to the Audit Commission's putting efficiency and capital ahead of human need.

The Commission [says](#) it's the 'sustainability of the nation's long-term finances' that should guide government spending. The Bishops, on the other hand, believe it should be 'animated by a concern for dignity of workers and their families'.

It's hard to imagine a more stark contrast in thinking about priorities for this month's Federal Budget.

The Commission does mention the need to 'protect the truly disadvantaged', though there is no thought for those who are *relatively* disadvantaged. In practice it leaves intact superannuation concessions and other tax breaks for high income earners, while targeting payments for those who rely on welfare benefits.

The argument of the Commission is that spending cuts that produce a balanced Budget will make us all better off because we will have a stronger economy and more jobs. On the other hand, the bishops quote Francis' skeptical assessment of such 'trickle-down' economic theories in his apostolic exhortation [Evangelii Gaudium](#):

This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralised workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting.

Those excluded include the young unemployed. The Commission envisages that they would be required to move away from family and friends to areas of high employment, or they will lose access to unemployment benefits.

Forcing young people to leave home for the convenience of 'those wielding economic power' is not only an offence against dignity but a recipe for alienation and the drug addiction and other social ills that follow. Invariably business does not consider moving jobs to areas of high unemployment because economic efficiency is regarded as more important than preventing rootlessness.

It's possible that few of the Commission's recommendations will make it into the Federal Budget, but that it will instead provide an ideological blueprint for

government policy in coming years. Perhaps we are just being softened and we will be grateful to the Government for imposing a \$6 co-payment for visits to the GP rather than the Commission's recommended \$15.

But to the extent that the Government owns and acts upon the recommendations of the audit report, it will be at odds with Pope Francis and all who value social inclusion.

Don't let plane panic paint all men as paedophiles

INTERNATIONAL

Catherine Marshall

On a flight from Dar es Salaam to Johannesburg recently I sat near a young Muslim woman who was swathed in a black chador. As we got ready to disembark, her beautiful, expressive eyes smiled at me through the cloth obscuring her face. We had reached the end of a four-and-a-half-hour journey; I was making the long trip home to Sydney, she was headed for who-knows-where.

We were separated by passengers jostling to exit the aircraft and so weren't able to converse, but I got the sense that she was preparing to meet someone she hadn't seen in a while, that she was excited to be making this journey. I also wondered what it must be like for someone so overtly Islamic to travel on a plane surrounded by people who have learned to equate Muslims with terrorism.

Perhaps I was being overly sensitive on this young woman's behalf, for no-one was behaving aggressively towards her. But one never knows what ideas might be populating the minds of the people in one's midst.

Such as the notion that since men have a greater propensity to commit acts of paedophilia than do women, children travelling unaccompanied on planes should be removed from their sphere as a precaution against mid-air sexual assault. This was the opinion [expressed](#) by columnist Tracey Spicer in the *Sydney Morning Herald's Traveller* section on the weekend.

In the article, provocatively titled 'I don't want my kids sitting next to a man on a plane', Spicer asserts that while 'almost 90 per cent of child sexual abuse is committed by someone in, or known to, the family ... stranger danger is a risk and women are perpetrators in only about 8 per cent of cases'. Moreover, a ten-year-old girl was molested by a man on a flight from Kansas to Detroit more than a decade ago.

Men, Spicer deduces, pose more of a risk to children than do women. It must therefore be correct to assume that women are safer travelling companions for unaccompanied children, and airlines should comply with demands for such protocols to be implemented.

Except that in-flight sexual assault — just like abductions or hijackings — is so unlikely that to suspect all those people who bear some of the markers of past perpetrators (reclusiveness, religious persuasion, gender) is to manufacture a hysteria that is almost as morally reprehensible as the hypothetical offenses themselves.

For feminists who have fought for generations against sexism, the argument that men should be excised from children's orbit lest they commit the same atrocities of which a small percentage of other men are guilty is chilling. It

rubber-stamps the notion that people's character and behavioural choices are determined by their gender, and presupposes that individuals can be judged on the basis of their group's collective history.

This is a dangerous precedent to set. For men crying 'sexism' — a charge which Spicer herself acknowledges — it both reinforces the painful scourge of gender-based treatment and, more worryingly, gives them reason to question women's commitment to creating a genuinely equal society rather than simply reversing the status quo in which male privilege dominates. If one gender can be so easily and universally smeared, so can the other.

It's an important lesson in the mechanics of societies, how civil liberties need to be carefully balanced in the quest for justice and social cohesion, and the limits that women will accept in the pejorative and knee-jerk labelling of their own fathers, husbands, brothers and sons. It exposes the absurdity of a child-rearing style so precious and demanding it now threatens to disrupt the way an entire nation travels.

Instead of whipping ourselves into a frenzy over our children's right to be safe from predators (a right which is inalienable but which can never, ever be guaranteed), stifling their curiosity about the world and the people who populate it, and elevating their rights above those of men who've done nothing more sinister than book a seat on a flight, let's instead thoroughly educate them in the ways of the world, and then send them out into it.

They might even be surprised: if they smile at the chador-wearing Muslim without presuming her to be a terrorist, and listen to the old man's stories without suspecting him of being a paedophile, they'll discover that the good and interesting people in this world far outnumber the evil-doers.

Star Wars fails the colour test

INTERNATIONAL

Fatima Measham

I flipped from delight to despondence faster than you could say 'light saber'. The [main cast](#) for *Star Wars Episode VII* had been revealed overnight, an occasion for geeky glee. But as I scanned the actor profiles, it became apparent that no brown actress was among them.

Nearly 40 years after George Lucas' first instalment — and despite all that has occurred during that time in terms of historic milestones for 'ethnic' women around the world — the mythology he created remains predominantly white.

If it were the case that the integrity of the *Star Wars* narrative rests on white characters, then the page-to-screen process may be excused. But given the wide array of organic life forms and androids that serve as contrast to humans, it bears pondering why the variety among humans must be so miserly.

Are white male characters just more recognisably 'human'? The absence of significant African, Middle Eastern, Asian or South American female characters suggests so.

This isn't an exclusively *Star Wars* problem. Most ensembles in pop culture are glaringly white. *The Hunger Games*, *Game of Thrones*, the Marvel franchises. Brown characters, and in particular brown female characters, are peripheral to the main narrative. They are martyred or rescued, sometimes villainous, occasionally pivotal to a scene, but never the star of their own story.

Whenever I rail against my own invisibility in the media that I consume, someone helpfully points out the one non-white character in a cartoon or blockbuster. I suppose tokenism has a role to play in pushing against barriers but am I meant to be grateful for it? Aside from Storm in the X-Men, most tokens don't even look remotely like me. Last time I checked in the mirror, I was not a black or Latino man.

I shouldn't presume to speak for an entire continent but I must object to the fact that people who look like me so rarely see our reflection in pop culture. It matters, not least because we pay money for it and deserve representation.

What happens when brown women are kept out of the picture, deliberately or not, is that their invisibility is normalised. We are not seen to contribute, much less lead. This is not harmless. It makes our presence in society incidental. Dispensable. Our contributions minimised as exceptions.

The truth is that television and film emit cultural signals that either validate or refute the dynamics within our society. Consider, for instance, the impact of Nichelle Nichols playing Lieutenant Uhura on *Star Trek* in the 1960s. When she and William Shatner kissed on television, interracial marriage had only just been

declared legal by the US Supreme Court.

No less a fan than Dr Martin Luther King Jr [convinced](#) Nichols to stay on the show when she was on the brink of leaving. 'Don't you understand,' he said, 'that for the first time, we are seen as we should be seen — as equals. You don't have a black role; you have an equal role.' According to Nichols, *Star Trek* turned out to be one of the few shows that King and his wife Coretta let their children watch.

This speaks to the importance of including non-white characters in pop culture. Non-white children absolutely deserve to see themselves in it. Being able to insert themselves into a story, having their humanity visualised in full — these are no small things. Twenty years after Nichols appeared on *Star Trek*, Mae Jemison became the first African-American woman to travel in space. She [credits](#) Uhura for moving the stars within reach.

It is not just that characters like Uhura, atrociously rare as they still are, open up the possibilities for young girls everywhere and validate their ambition. Having multidimensional non-white protagonists onscreen not only presents a more realistic version of society, it endorses it. It signals diversity as a societal norm and that it is good, not an aberration to be minimised or controlled.

It also affirms the agency of minorities. Brown women are not invisible, nor are they blank canvases upon which desires and resentments are projected. They are not a species separate to humans, vying with aliens and androids for a meaningful role in the story.

We are not and should no longer be optional.

Dangerous, sensual young love and sex

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***Young & Beautiful* (R). Director: Francois Ozon. Starring: Marine Vachth, Geraldine Pailhas, Fredric Pierrot, Fantin Ravat, Johan Leysen. 95 minutes**

'When you are seventeen you aren't really serious.' Arthur Rimbaud's poem 'Romance' is the thematic centrepiece of Ozon's thoughtful and unsettling consideration of adolescent, female sexuality. It is recited and dissected by members of a high school literature class, who remark on its nostalgia for dangerous, sensual young love and sex. 'June night! Seventeen! ... The sap is champagne and goes straight to your head ... You are wandering; you feel a kiss on your lips/ Which quivers there like something small and alive ...'

Something not unlike this has occurred to the film's troubled protagonist, Isabelle (Vachth), during a recent family holiday at a luxurious beachside villa, the events of which are explored during the first of the film's four distinct acts. It is the summer of her 17th birthday, and she manufactures the circumstances of her first sexual encounter, with a young German tourist on the stony shore. It is a visibly unpleasant experience, but marked by self-awareness; during the encounter, Isabelle has a vision of herself, standing nearby, watching, inquisitive.

The film takes an abrupt, disquieting turn. Isabelle is back at home, back at school and, although only months may have passed at most, self-employed as a prostitute. This portion of the film, subtitled 'Autumn', contains myriad encounters between Isabelle and her clients. In the worst and most humiliating of these, she is belittled and explicitly objectified by a man who achieves self-gratification without touching her. But she achieves something like tenderness with a much older man, Georges (Leysen), during their repeated encounters.

This portion of the film is shocking, not least because we are offered little context and no reason explanation. Money is not a motive; Isabelle comes from a wealthy family, and her mother Sylvie (Pailhas) and stepfather Patrick (Pierrot) ensure she wants for nothing. Later in the film, after an alarming turn of events reveals the truth about Isabelle's activities, a psychologist suggests the behaviour may stem from unhealed trauma related to her absent father (all of her clients are older men); Isabelle dismisses this, though she does not deny it.

Objectification is the key to unlocking Ozon's ambiguities. The title reduces Isabelle to physical characteristics, as do her clients. But more than this, the experience of objectification is shown to be universal in Isabelle's world. In the very first frame we are offered a point-of-view perspective of Isabelle sunbathing topless on a secluded beach; the watcher is revealed to be her brother, Victor (Ravat) (whose own sexual awakening, as an observer of his sister's sexuality, provides a further, troubling layer to Ozon's thoughtful but perplexing film).

By making men pay her, Isabelle exerts control over the manner and circumstances of her objectification. These are drastic and tragic measures that condemn the everyday exploitation of women by men, from pop culture to pornography. The third and fourth acts of *Young & Beautiful*, 'Winter' and 'Spring', unfold the fallout and aftermath of the discovery of Isabelle's secret by her parents. The drama is superbly acted, particularly by Vacth, who quietly embodies all the passion, insecurity and fading idealism of late adolescent self-discovery.

Lessons from Christian camp's gay discrimination

RELIGION

Andrew McGowan

Freedom of religion and freedom from discrimination on grounds such as sexual identity are both widely-accepted principles in Australian law and society. Sometimes however it seems that freedom from discrimination cannot be taken for granted in, or even just near, a church. Just days ago a case in point with a history stretching back some years may have reached its conclusion.

In April the Victorian Court of Appeal upheld earlier rulings of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, to the effect that a Phillip Island camp run by Christian Youth Camps Ltd, affiliated with the Christian Brethren, had discriminated illegally against same-sex attracted persons by refusing a booking from Cobaw Community Health Service for a weekend event for young gay and lesbian people.

Judges in both proceedings acknowledged readily that the refusal to grant the booking was discriminatory. The courts also found — by a majority, in the appeal — that exemptions provided in the Equal Opportunity Act to allow for religious freedom did not apply to the case. Some of the reasons are interesting and important for Christians and members of other faith communities, regardless of their attitudes to same-sex relationships.

The judgements suggest that corporations with religious roots cannot expect to apply to themselves the same sorts of exemptions that are intended to defend the beliefs and consciences of individuals.

Justice Marcia Neave, in her separate judgement supporting the rejection of the CYC appeal, went so far as to suggest that the provisions of the Equal Opportunity Act regarding religious freedom for persons (s.77) could not be applied to corporations at all, which leaves room for some interesting reflection on how religious bodies that seek incorporation, as some churches have done and are doing, manage their understandings of exemption.

Where 'religion' and its exercise by individuals is unquestionably at issue, there have still been different understandings about how it could or should be allowed as a basis for discrimination.

At the VCAT hearings, witnesses for CYC maintained that the refusal of the booking was necessary for them to conform with their doctrine of 'plenary inspiration', and hence what the Bible was understood by them to teach about homosexuality. They maintained, and more so in the course of the appeal, that the refusal of the booking was necessary for them to comply with their genuine religious belief and principles about homosexuality.

The judgements did not dismiss the possibility that such beliefs could be held in

conscience, but it was not hard for the judges to point to inconsistencies.

The Christian Brethren maintain a belief — more prominent in the appeal than in the original case — that sex is only appropriate within marriage. There was little indication in evidence tendered that their belief system about marriage and sex was understood to be applied to humanity in general, let alone that it should determine how conference bookings are made.

The President of the Court of Appeal suggested the doctrine that really deserved protection was simply the belief of church members that determined their own marital lives, not a blanket understanding about sex in general that had to be applied to a wider public.

It was also clear from evidence that attempts to extend the moral domain of the church regarding sex were not applied consistently. Other secular groups who sought to book the Phillip Island Adventure Resort were not grilled as to whether pre- or extra-marital sex might take place during their stays; it was the character of the event as geared to same-sex attracted youth that spurred the discriminatory actions.

Brethren, like other Christians, affirm ideas of welcome, inclusion and hospitality, and did so in these proceedings, when pressed in the witness box. It was not clear to some of the judges any more than to other observers whether or how these doctrines were brought to bear when the Cobaw group was turned aside.

This is not really an isolated case. The churches have become accustomed to making pronouncements about welcome and acceptance, of which gay and lesbian people and their supporters are understandably wary. The tendency for Christian affirmations of acceptance to be accompanied by practical discrimination against gay and lesbian people, even in settings far outside church life in the strict sense, keeps rearing its head.

There have been prominent cases in the UK (Preddy) and the USA (Masterpiece Cakeshop) where Christians undertaking purely commercial activities for private gain and profit have wanted to refuse anything from bed-and-breakfast accommodation to cake-decorating services to same-sex couples, without giving equivalent attention to the behaviour or identity of heterosexual clients.

Some Christian traditions are reconsidering their historic marginalisation of same-sex attracted people. Others will continue to maintain a more traditional stance, at least as to the appropriate expression of sexual desire, but these too must face serious questions about their continuing support of what can only be described as homophobia — discriminating in terms of employment or of access to goods and services.

It is in any event sobering that the churches often seem to need the courts to give them lessons, if not about sex, then about hospitality and fairness.

Australia's boat people psychopathy

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin

Last night I watched the excellent ABC [Four Corners](#) program recalling the orgy of violent rioting against Manus Island detention centre inmates on 16–17 February, climaxing in the deliberate beating and kicking to death of a young Iranian man, Reza Barati, apparently by a gang of PNG nationals working at the camp as security or maintenance staff. To this point, no charges have been laid.

Though few of the facts presented were new — most were canvassed in more or less detail by Australian media reporting in the weeks following the events — the impact of watching live accounts by present or former G4S expatriate staff members (mostly anonymous, one declared) was profoundly unsettling. I am not going to attempt to summarise the program — I urge readers to watch it online — but here are some follow-on thoughts.

In the final weeks of the G4S management contract for the detention centre, inmates mounted three weeks of sustained peaceful demonstrations which finally goaded PNG camp staff and police into invading the camp, firing guns and wielding machetes and nail-embedded clubs, and beating any inmates they could lay their hands on.

Barati was killed through his head being beaten and stomped into a metal grating on a stairway landing. As several G4S staff commented in the program, it is a wonder and a mercy that this was the only death.

The program only hints at the high degree of Australian official complicity and culpability in this terrifying story. I want to develop those threads further.

Those Australian politicians and officials who chose to set up and administer the Manus detention centre on PNG sovereign territory, subject to PNG law and police 'discipline', had deliberately and in full knowledge put three groups of people — young distressed male detained boat people, locally employed PNG nationals, and a small contingent of expatriate Australian G4S supervisory staff living on a boat moored at a nearby pier — into a situation where such a disastrous confrontation was only a matter of time.

It was predictable that detainees would demonstrate their rising frustration and anger with no progress in processing their refugee claims, and that their desperation would provoke violent retaliation on the part of resentful surrounding PNG nationals. This was a controlled experiment in the provocation of violence and terror.

It could also be correctly anticipated that expatriate G4S staff could not protect detainees from violence by angered PNG nationals when things boiled over. G4S staff had neither the force nor the legal backing to do so. When armed PNG

nationals surged through the fence into the camp, G4S expatriate staff were helpless.

All this was predictable. Such was the underlying logic of the Manus project. Ministers and officials structured a sustained deterrence scenario intended to be so awful as to choke off the flow of boat people wanting to come to Australia; to send the message that these young men had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. The people in the camp, thus cowed, would be less troublesome in future. And the publicity of the riots and deaths would send useful deterrent messages to others in the international boat people pipeline.

The impeccable logic of the above paragraph reflects the logic of psychopathy. Psychopaths are highly intelligent, good planners, manipulative, with expert knowledge of human nature, yet totally lacking in empathy with the pain of their victims. Whatever their motivation, the planning of the Australian ministers and officials who set up and operated Manus ticks all these boxes.

Four Corners highlighted two culpable decision moments in the two days of the riots.

The first was when the Immigration Department in Australia directed, contrary to the advice of Immigration staff in Manus, that detainees should now be advised through their community representatives that if refugee claims were to be accepted, the only resettlement prospect was to be PNG. Given the rising temper of the detainee demonstrators, it was predictable that this news would push them beyond the limit of prudent peaceful demonstration into insulting and provoking PNG nationals. Yet Immigration in Australia gave that direction.

The second occurred when the PNG nationals' camp invasion was getting underway. G4S expatriate staff asked Australian management whether they should attempt to control the PNG nationals' behaviour themselves, or withdraw to the safety of their staff ship and hand over 'control' of the situation to PNG police (who, it seems, were themselves keenly participating in the violence against detainees). The directive came back to withdraw.

Later, to their credit, after the surge of violence had peaked, expatriate staff returned to tend the wounded in an emergency field hospital set up at pierside — we see all this in the *Four Corners* program, and it is excruciating.

The sincerity and pain of the declared former G4S staff member was palpable. His words were corroborated by other G4S and interpreter accounts (as dramatised by actors — the witnesses wished to preserve anonymity for employment reasons).

I am left with a sense of shame that this atrocious violence against innocent, defenceless people was foreseen and permitted by my country's senior political and administrative leadership. Such decisionmaking needs to be called to account for what it is. Responsibility for Barati's death lies at the feet of Tony Abbott, Scott

Morrison, and the senior officials who took crucial decisions within the policy framework set by those two ministers.

Dickens' song for the poor

CREATIVE

Gillian Bouras

I first read Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* decades ago, after finding it in a dusty cupboard in my grandparents' holiday house. There I was, aged about eight, reading of snow and holly and things northern in the middle of the Australian summer with all its heat and dust. But I was transported, in more ways than one, and still am every time, despite my many re-readings of this slim but freighted volume.

A great many people consider Dickens to have been a genius, and I am one of them. Critics say his novels are too baggy, and his female characters, apart from the comic ones, wet and weedy. But Dickens was a product of his time, as we all are, and he was very conscious of meeting the demands of society and of his readership. A product of his time, yes, but his writing, at its best, is for all time in that it expresses the universal.

A Christmas Carol was originally planned as a political pamphlet entitled *An Appeal to the People of England, on behalf of the Poor Man's Child*, but Dickens, staunch champion of the poor and of children, realised that fiction would have more impact on social attitudes. In six weeks of feverish work, he rewrote the tract as a novella. First published on 19 December 1843, it was an instant success, and has never been out of print.

While Dickens reportedly hoped that his vision of Christmas might encourage the restoration of social harmony, his narrative line can also be seen as a convenient plot device, for *A Christmas Carol* is a deeply Christian story, not just about Christmas, but about life itself, about actions and their consequences, the need for wrongs to be made right, and the desire for hope and potentiality of renewal.

The plot of the novella owes much to Dickens' fascination with the supernatural in general, and with ghosts in particular, in at least the possibility of the tear in the veil between this world and others. The fearsome yet pitiable ghost of Marley, the miserly Scrooge's late business partner and only friend, serves as a grim warning of the dead soul the wintry Scrooge may well become: 'I wear the chain I forged in life.'

The Ghosts of Christmases Past, Present and Yet to Come move Scrooge inexorably through the stages of life in a series of epiphanies, and force him to experience nostalgia, celebration, and dread, while his own cramped and costive outlook on life periodically comes back to haunt him.

The low points of the narrative, and possibly the most instructive, come first when the Ghost of Christmas Present grows steadily older, and eventually shows Scrooge the appalling sight of two children: wretched, abject, frightful, hideous,

miserable. The boy is Ignorance, the girl is Want, and they are the offspring of humankind. The boy has Doom written upon his forehead. 'Unless it be erased,' says the Spirit.

This moment is closely followed by a vision of the future: Scrooge is taken to a churchyard, one that is 'overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation's death, not life; choked up with too much burying'. It is now that Scrooge swears that he is not the man he has been, and that he will henceforth let Past, Present and Future live within him, and thus be open to the lessons that the spirits of all three teach.

And then, the last Phantom's hood and dress 'shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost'. Scrooge's own, of course. And so he realises he is still alive, and with another fighting chance to change. Wintry Scrooge now courts the spirit of spring and renewal. *A Christmas Carol* can now be called *A Song for All Seasons*. And we all have another chance, in whatever shape or form.

New Year at the Killing Fields

CREATIVE

Tony Page

Cambodian New Year at the Killing Fields

The children go holiday wild,
Swarms of them drenching us
With holy water. Skin soaked
We fall off our bikes, flattened
By their rabble-roused blessing.
At the entrance, pepsi competes
With coke, disco propaganda
Dances out of control. Teenage
Guards wave us through, selling
Tickets would spoil their party.
Inside it's a garden, well-kept
Trails between the mounds
Fooling us they were designed
To please the eye. Until we
Read how many killed in each.
Look, that tree, so graceful —
Against which babies' heads
Were bashed — saving bullets
For more mature enemies.
I check for red-handed stains
But they have long since
Dissolved into complicity.
How to poison this branch
If it grows inside us all?
No blessing can ever purge

A pathway out of this scourge

My brother cannot sleep

Barely thirteen months separate us,
Brothers gangling teenage limbs
In the bedroom of our shared past.
You, the Olympic athlete, forever
Running ahead of yourself
But never first over the line.
The fitness I envied in you,
Forty years later seems skeletal
Beside my pudgy self-acceptance.
It's only on the phone you tell me
How you wake sweating from
Panic, how you wake
In that million dollar house
Your anger manages to maintain,
Empty rooms on every floor.

Augustine confesses to Pelagius

Down the ages, what guilt I'll generate —
Whole centuries of self-loathing.
I'll rub your noses in it:
All of us, absolutely rotten.
You're a fool, Pelagius. Preaching man
Can be saved by leading a 'good life'.
Our genitals upset that apple cart. Admit it —
We're all powerless down there.
Grace is a gift, never deserved.
Look at me: if it weren't for the
All-predestining Father's love,
I'd still be burning in lust.

Thirty years as bishop chokes me
With Realpolitik. Pain presses
From all sides while the good God
Purifies with each thrust of the knife.
Make no mistake: I am a loving man
But the whip must be cracked each day
If the faithful are to keep on their toes.
It will all make sense in Paradise.
Your head's in the clouds, Pelagius,
The 'good life' — nothing but a mirage.
Sit in my cathedral for just one week
And your utopia would go up in smoke.

Dawn the proof

Half the sky is Himalaya.
I rise before the sun
On guard duty for the world:
To make sure it keeps in place,
That the earth's backbone
Supports us for another day.
Dorje Hakpa, Purbi Chyachu,
Their names nodal points
Brushing against the stratosphere
While we were still froth in pools.
Far-flung peaks are the first
To be tested by light.
Lower on the horizon
They are stroked by the sun's rays
Before my sentry point here.
Dawn the magnifier,
The proof of global curve.

Geography's vastness
Weighs anchor and sails
Across the world's mind.
The peaks line up as a magic screen
Along which lasers are projected,
Radiance bouncing off itself
Experimenting with colour.
Effulgence so subtle
Perhaps it is downloaded
From philosophy.
Everest tries to hide
As I hunger for the secrets
Of our planet's highest point.
But mist engulfs the apparition,
Long before the first hour is up.

Remembering Barry O'Keefe

AUSTRALIA

Brian Lawrence

I first met Barry O'Keefe in the early 1970s in the course of the Sydney Law School annual moot competition. Members of the Bar and the Bench volunteered to act as judges, as two teams of two argued for and against some esoteric proposition of law, in a make believe appellate forum. Barry was assigned as our judge.

Although the arrangements allowed for about 20 minutes for each presentation more than two hours had passed and Barry was still not finished with the second submission. Eventually the security person arrived to put out the lights.

Barry invited us to pack up notes and books and the four of us, with the few spectators who had persevered, retired across Philip Street and squeezed into his chambers. After midnight he finished by dictating a detailed judgment. His generosity, enthusiasm, and the keen interest he took in using the occasion to help us learn the law made a deep impression on me.

Barry was among the best known barristers of his time and no doubt there will be many tributes to his prowess as advocate, judge and corruption commissioner.

He was a man of simple and deep faith. That was the context in which I came to know him better during my 16 years at St Mary's Cathedral, usually rostered for the 6.45 am Mass, which suited a bureaucrat's daily routine. He was there most days. He did the reading on Fridays.

The integration of the spiritual life and professional career is a challenge for most people. How do you find stillness and God's presence when there are constant demands on your time and energy? Barry told me that his attendance at daily Mass was important so he could find the time to know and love God.

One of Barry's judgments, which stands as a major contribution to the ethical issues at the end of life, was the case of *Northridge v Central Sydney Area Health Service*. In two paragraphs he set out succinctly principles that accord with the law and sound ethical practice.

23 The law in Australia is well settled that it is lawful for, and the duty of, a hospital which or doctor who has undertaken the care of a patient who is unconscious, to carry out such treatment as is necessary and appropriate to safeguard the life, health and welfare of that patient, even though such patient is in no position to give or refuse consent to the course taken.

24 There is undoubted jurisdiction in the Supreme Court of New South Wales to act to protect the right of an unconscious person to receive ordinary reasonable and appropriate (as opposed to extra-ordinary, excessively burdensome, intrusive or futile) medical treatment, sustenance and support. In this day and age ordinary

reasonable and appropriate treatment, for a person of the age and condition of Mr Thompson, would extend to the administration of antibiotics and appropriate feeding. The court also has jurisdiction to prevent the withdrawal of such treatment, support and sustenance where the withdrawal may put in jeopardy the life, good health or welfare of such unconscious individual. What constitutes appropriate medical treatment in a given case is a medical matter in the first instance. However, where there is doubt or serious dispute in this regard the court has the power to act to protect the life and welfare of the unconscious person.

For the past 18 months Barry has chaired the Truth Justice and Healing Commission for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia. His wise counsel will be missed.

On 1 February 2002, the morning after my father Wally had died, at the end of the 6.45 Mass, Barry spontaneously stood up. He said that he would like on behalf of those present to offer condolences. He then invited everyone to join with him as he recited by heart the [Memorare](#). The faithful might like to pray the prayer now for the repose of the soul of the Hon Barry O'Keefe QC.

Workplace safety issues in South Korean ferry disaster

INTERNATIONAL

Andrew Hamilton

Today is [World Day for Safety and Health at Work](#) . Large though its theme is, this year it stands under the shadow of the massive loss of life on Malaysia Airlines Flight 70 and on the [Sewol ferry](#) . They are massive monuments to the importance we give to safety and try to build in the workplace.

It is shown, too, in the anger and distress of the relatives of people who died in the disasters, when they believe, fairly or unfairly, that health and safety have not been duly respected.

It would be unfeeling and presumptuous to speculate on the causes of the ferry disaster. It is a time for grief and sympathy. But it may be helpful to enumerate the questions that have been asked, not to resolve them, but to see the panorama of factors on which health and safety depend.

Some of these questions concern the business that ran the ferry: the ethical qualities of its owners, the safety of its adaptation for the route between Incheon and Jeju, the procedures observed in stowing vehicles and other cargo in the hold, the priorities given to prompt departure and arrival over other concerns, and the training and clear allocation of responsibility to those crewing the ferry. These questions inevitably also touch the adequacy and implementation of regulation, inspection and compliance measures provided by the government.

Other questions concern the conduct of the ship during the crisis: the responsibility of the captain in dangerous waters, his responsibility to passengers in the event of danger, the allocation of responsibilities to the junior officers, the readiness of the crew for times of emergency, the responsibility of coastguards and other ships, and the clarity of communication on and from the ferry.

As with the MH370, many people have questioned the engagement with the families of passengers during the emergency, and whether they received adequate support and honest and up to date information.

These questions will surely be treated exhaustively in a full enquiry. But even when they are asked they disclose a pattern. In travel by plane or by ship, as in many other enterprises, there are two different sets of interests: the operational interests of those who provide the service, and the interests of those who benefit from the service. Companies ideally take both with complete seriousness, of course, but they stand in some tension.

The interests of the companies that provide travel and their officers are more immediate. They want flexibility: to be able to purchase ships quickly, adapt them for service economically and without delay, to earn a reputation for predictability in the times of arrival and departure, to cut costs of administration and compliance

as far as possible, and to offer a relatively cheap but profitable service. All these interests are best served by reducing regulations as far as possible and by minimising the costs in terms of time and money of compliance.

The interests of passengers coincide at one level with those of the companies. Passengers want a cheap, reliable and competitive service. But they also have larger interests, shared of course with the companies. They want their health and safety to be guaranteed. This guarantee is for the longer term and looks not to what is statistically normal but to the exceptional case.

If it is to be given, it requires bodies that recognise new risks and devise better safeguards, and regulations that visualise the extraordinary threat as well as normal working conditions. Compliance with regulations will demand thorough training, close familiarity with procedures to be followed in the case of accident, coordination between different people and groups involved in ensuring safety, and caution even in the face of operational needs. These things are costly and tell against efficiency and flexibility.

There will always be tension between the flexibility that business demands and the regulation that the larger and long term interests of society demand.

Business will always call for less and more targeted regulation to adjust to new technologies and opportunities; the community will always want instant and sweeping regulation in the face of new disasters. The huge loss of life involved in crashes and capsizings illustrate what is at stake in having proper systems of regulation, research, investigation and compliance directed precisely at the extraordinary sets of events that cause injury. That is true of smaller workplaces as well as of ships and planes.

That is why we Australians should be vigilant when governments promise to be business friendly and to reduce supervision, regulation and the burden of compliance. Adaptation and simplification are commendable. But when supervisory boards and evaluation agencies are closed, particularly in matters concerned with the environment, the safety and health of our children in the face of the equivalent of the 50 year floods is likely to suffer. And the children who died on the *Sewol* give a face to those whom we might allow to be at risk.

Australia's days of the dead

AUSTRALIA

Michael McVeigh

A solemn service welcomes the dawn. Families brave the weather to pay their respects. Some pray, some call forth memories. In doing so, they bring to the present the experiences of our country's past so that they can carry them into the future. ANZAC Day is a powerful and worthy ritual. But the tales of our soldiers make up only one of the ongoing chapters in the story of our country. There are many others.

On 25 January, let us remember the Indigenous people who once nurtured the land. Let us remember those who were killed when the settlers came to our shores — by violence, displacement or disease. Let us remember those whose lives were destroyed by policies that alienated and dehumanised them. Let us remember the Indigenous people who still die in our prisons, and those who die of substance abuse or poor health.

On 25 February, let us remember those who gave their lives in settling this unforgiving land. Let us remember those like Burke and Wills who found themselves unprepared and unfit to survive in harsh environments. Let us remember those who died because they were too remote to find medical care. Let us also remember the more recent victims of bushfires, floods and storms, each continuing in the tradition of those first settlers in trying to build a safe haven in our unpredictable world.

On 25 March, let us remember the people who lost their lives migrating to this country: the ships that wrecked themselves off our treacherous shores; the convicts and migrants who died of illness on the journey. Let us remember also those who have died trying to come to this country today as refugees, and those who die around the world with their hearts set on finding a safe home like the one that we enjoy.

On 25 April, let us continue to remember our fallen soldiers, who sacrificed their lives in war. Let us remember those who served in Australia, or fought to protect the country in the Pacific. Let us remember the wives and children they left behind. Let us remember those soldiers who have served and died more recently in places such as Afghanistan, and the other peoples around the world who continue to be caught up in conflict.

On 25 May, let us remember the women who have gone before us. Let us remember those who died in childbirth. Let us remember those who were forced into workhouses because they had children out of wedlock, and those who died in these places. Let us remember the women today who die at the hands of men, both those killed by men known to them, and those targeted by strangers.

On 25 June, let us remember all of those who have died in the workplace. Let

us remember the convicts forced into labour. Let us remember those who rebelled and died at the Eureka Stockade fighting for better conditions. Let us remember the people who die today from accidents or illness due to being overworked.

On 25 July, let us remember those who die in other parts of the world due to poverty and war. Let us remember Australians and others who have given their lives helping people in these countries.

On 25 August, let us remember the victims of our recklessness. Let us remember those who have died in road accidents, from their own carelessness or the carelessness of those around them. Let us remember those who have died due to medical malpractice, and from other institutional negligence. Let us remember those who fall victim to environmental catastrophe, as well as the animals that die at the hands of humanity.

On 25 September, let us remember those who have died from disease. Let us also remember those who placed their own health and safety in jeopardy to treat others.

On 25 October, let us remember the forgotten dead: the people left to die alone without people to care for them, and those who have nowhere to call home, but live and die on our streets.

On 25 November, let us remember the children who have died. Let us remember those who died in the womb, or were never given the opportunity to live. Let us remember the children who died in illness through no one's fault. Let us remember those whose lives have been destroyed by abuse and neglect. Let us particularly remember those whom our institutions have failed to protect.

On 25 December, let us remember those who are yet to be born, our hope for the future. Let us remember the one person who died but rose again, and who brought hope of a new life to millions throughout history. Let us remember all those who give hope to others.

Let us tell all of these stories, every year, so that we will never forget.

South Sudan warning for Australia's hate speech champions

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

In South Sudan, hundreds of innocent civilians were slaughtered earlier this month in a massacre based on ethnicity. Thousands are believed to have lost their lives since the December outbreak of a political dispute between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy president, Riek Machar. The recent victims had failed to find sanctuary where they were hiding, in hospitals and places of worship in the oil hub of Bentiu.

The UN's top humanitarian official in the country [told](#) the BBC that the scenes in Bentiu were 'perhaps [the] most shocking set of circumstances' he had ever faced. The 'piles of [bodies of] people who had been slaughtered' all appeared to be civilians.

Many of the rebels say they took up arms because of the murder of their relatives in the capital Juba at the beginning of this conflict. But significantly it appears it was hate speech broadcast on the local FM radio station that spurred them into action.

The UN [deplored](#) the broadcasts that insisted 'certain ethnic groups should not stay in Bentiu and even call[ed] on men from one community to commit vengeful sexual violence against women from another community'.

Its spokesperson called them 'especially regrettable and unfortunate, given what happened in Rwanda 20 years ago, when radio stations were used to broadcast the hate messages' that fanned the flames of tension, ultimately sparking mass ethnic killings in that country.

Radio is a particularly powerful means of mobilising a population for good or ill during various emergencies, including natural disasters and civil conflict. At such times, television tends to foster passivity, and the consumption of what is sometimes referred to as 'disaster porn'. But radio broadcasts are much more likely to fuel the imagination, transform hearts and minds, and encourage people to act.

In Australia, radio has been especially useful during bushfire and cyclone emergencies, but a curse when shock jocks have manipulated public opinion against the common good. This includes subverting action on climate change, but also fostering ethnic hatred. For Australians, news of the the role of radio hate speech in the South Sudan ethnic violence might in some way echo Alan Jones' famed message of [encouragement](#) to white Australians to take part in a 'show of force' against non-white Australians at Cronulla in 2005.

In South Sudan, the UN is doing its best to ensure the broadcast of hate

messages is disallowed, with its spokesperson [declaring](#) 'we have called on relevant national state and local authorities to take all measures possible to prevent the airing of such messages'.

But in Australia, Attorney General George Brandis appears to be doing the opposite. He's in the process of establishing legal protection for those wishing to broadcast hate speech. Brandis recently [asserted](#) that 'people do have a right to be bigots', in his push to repeal section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, in the interest of allowing unfettered free speech.

Australia has its fair share of ethnic and religious animosity, but it remains largely under the surface. The recent South Sudan example shows the violence that can be caused by individuals with legal sanction to broadcast messages that wish ill on particular groups in the community. The UN says this is a freedom South Sudanese do not need. Do Australians really want it?