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Muslim artists' vision of multifaith Australia

VIDEO

Peter Kirkwood

This is a big year for the [Blake Prize](#) for religious art, as it marks its 60th anniversary.

Described on its website as 'exploring the themes of spirituality, religion and human justice', since its inception the Blake has courted controversy. Over the last several years there's been at least one work in each exhibition that's been denounced in the media as blasphemous or sacrilegious.

This year's collection hasn't raised the hackles of believers. That is not to say it doesn't push the boundaries of belief, or that it's not mapping new territory. What's striking about the 2011 exhibition is its portrayal of contemporary multifaith Australia. This is reflected in the pieces that won awards.

The video above features interviews about the works that won the three awards for visual art. Two of the winners were Muslim artists, both inspired by different aspects of their faith.

The winner of the main Blake Prize was Khaled Sabsabi for a video work entitled *Naqshbandi Greenacre Engagement*. On three monitors set up side by side, it shows members of the Naqshbandi Sufi Brotherhood taking part in a chanting ritual, in a scout hall in the Sydney suburb of Greenacre.

The judges commented that the work gives viewers access to a space that 'is both sacred and mundane, a place of coming together of family and community. The work utilises video as a means to both access and forge connection between peoples, representing and enacting the hospitality shown by a religious community in opening up their practice to draw in a wider audience.'

[Carla Hananiah](#) won the John Coburn Emerging Artist Award for her painting *Refuge*. The judges described it as a 'layering of mystery and illumination over an Australian landscape, asking the viewer to consider themes of religious refuge, homeland and becoming'.

The Blake Prize for Human Justice was awarded to [Abdul Abdullah](#) for a striking photographic work entitled *Them and Us*. It is a dark brooding picture of Abdullah shirtless, with a prominent tattoo on his side of the Southern Cross incorporating the Muslim symbol of a crescent moon and star.

'This work invites us into an unsettling relationship of looking,' the judges said. 'It makes us aware of the tendency to divide people according to their skin or 'look' into categories of friend or foe, a kind of tribal thinking that maintains prejudices.'

To mark the 60th anniversary, the Blake Society launched a history of the prize, a glossy coffee table [book](#) entitled *The Blake Book: Art, Religion and Spirituality in Australia*. It was written by Mercy nun, artist and eminent art historian, Rosemary Crumlin, who has had connections with the prize since it started.

Palestine takes a stab at statehood

POLITICS

Binoy Kampmark

The late Canadian-British business tycoon Lord Beaverbrook once remarked that giving certain countries independence was like giving a razor to a child. Such incapable creatures were ill-suited to independence, effectively disqualified from claims to sovereignty because of their poor resume in development.

In 1947, UN General Assembly resolution 181 was passed. It promised a Jewish and an Arab state out of the Mandate of Palestine. In time, it came to be known as the partition resolution. The United States, Soviet Union and Australia were among the countries voting for its adoption. The Arab world was furious. Israeli independence was unilaterally declared.

With these events in mind, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas hopes to extract a Security Council resolution validating his effort to establish a Palestinian state along the borders of 4 June 1967.

The Israelis, with American support, are fuming, threatening to abandon the Oslo accords that give the Palestinian Authority control of part of Gaza and the West Bank. Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and Danny Danon of the Likud party have adopted extreme stances, claiming the status of east Jerusalem and the West Bank settlements will cease to be up for negotiation should the Palestinians unilaterally pursue recognition. They, it would seem, have not read the history books.

Danon has [urged](#) an annexation of the West Bank and a removal of Palestinians into Jordan, with Egypt taking over Gaza. Given the transformation of the Middle East, the overthrow of various tyrannical regimes and the continuing challenges to others, Israel will be pressed to join the train of history and make similar changes.

That the Palestinians, a recognised people, must mediate their sovereignty through channels that place them in a position of subservience is unacceptable. The question is not whether recognition should be granted, but how.

The US strategy on this has been to reverse the onus of recognition — it is the Palestinian people who must recognise Israel as a 'Jewish state'.

There are those among both Palestinians and the Israeli peace movement who feel the time for recognition is nigh, that it will bring benefits to citizens from both sides. They believe recognition of Palestine will get the parties talking again. Rather than destroy the conversation, it will invigorate it.

As Claudette Habesch, General Secretary of Caritas Jerusalem [explains](#), the vote is a

preliminary, 'a real opportunity to restart the negotiations'.

Statehood has its problems, but also its benefits. The precariousness of Palestinian existence before the encroachment of settlements would be contained. Access to the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court would also be guaranteed, and may well bring restraint to the violence.

Groups within the Israeli peace movement such as the Coalition for Women for Peace have [voiced](#) similar sentiments: 'International recognition of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people is an important and vital step in the process of internationalisation of the Palestinians' struggle for independence, freedom and equality.'

Gershon Baskin, an Israeli writer and broadcaster on All for Peace Radio, is even [optimistic](#) on the move, titling a recent piece in the *Jerusalem Post*: 'Maybe the whole world isn't against us?'

Baskin had been listening to a fatalistic radio conversation between journalist Yaron Dekel and lyricist Yoram Taharlev, who had written a song from the 1970s, 'Ha'olam kulo negdeinu' — 'The Whole world is against us'. Just as the Pharaohs were overcome 'we'll overcome this too'. But to ignore the UN, for all its hypocrisies, would be to ignore 'a political institution which embodies international law and reflects international opinion, whether we like it or not'.

The Palestinians, Baskin surmises, have learnt from Israel. After all, wasn't the birth certificate of Israel's existence obtained from the breeding grounds of the UN? The Palestinians 'are going to the United Nations in order to preserve what might be the very last chance to have a two-states-for-two-peoples solution to this conflict'.

A possibility for steering a middle ground has been voiced by the French. President Nicolas Sarkozy has [broken](#) with Washington on opposing recognition, suggesting instead that the Palestinian status be upgraded to that of a 'non-member observer state'. 'Let us cease our endless debates on the parameters. Let us begin negotiations and adopt a precise timetable,' he said.

Contain the extremists, argues Sarkozy, and avoid the 'immobility' that would encourage conflict.

With all that said, there is a note of warning. Some Palestinian groups have expressed opposition to the plan. The Palestinian Youth Movement, for instance, [feels](#) the UN bid would place at risk 'the rights and aspirations of over two thirds of Palestinian people who live as refugees in countries of refuge and in exile, to return to their original homes'.

Ali Abunimah, policy advisor to the Palestinian Policy Network Al-Shabaka, [questions](#) the democratic credentials of the move, arguing that a 'toothless and illusory' state would be born.

In the end, Abunima's point is a sound one, wherever this bid for statehood goes. 'Ultimately, any successful strategy should focus not on statehood but on rights.'

The mystical art of rudeness

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (G). Director: Werner Herzog. 90 minutes**

At more than 30,000 years old, the paintings in southern France's Chauvet Cave are by far the oldest known examples of cave art. They have been preserved in near pristine condition due to a rock slide that sealed the cave 20,000 years ago, and to severe restrictions that since the cave's rediscovery in 1994 have limited human access except by a select team of scientists and academics.

More recently, German filmmaker Herzog was granted unprecedented access, accompanied by a diminutive production crew. The result of their visit is this extraordinary documentary, which, with the added benefit of 3-D, aims and largely succeeds at evoking the, for most of us, virtually unattainable experience of being physically present at this incredible location.

We are guided during our cinematic tour by a flock of sometimes endearingly eccentric experts: a paleontologist who exuberantly lists the many species whose skeletal remains are in the cave; an archaeologist who wears Palaeolithic era clothing and plays 'The Star Spangled Banner' on a replica bone flute; art historians who elucidate the artistic merit and technique of the cave's artists.

Footage of the cave's interior would, in itself, make a fascinating film. The hundreds of paintings that clamour upon the undulating walls are more than simply interesting relics. They are remarkable artworks, both technically and aesthetically. Subtleties of shape and shading give depth and character to ostensibly simple animal figures, immaculately etched upon the rippling canvas.

But it is no accident that the promotional poster for *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* includes the silhouette of Herzog, the veteran maverick filmmaker himself, cast alongside a detail from one of this prehistoric gallery's more famous pieces, the 'panel of horses'. For better and worse, Herzog is a presence in the film, serving as a sort of narrator-cum-quasi-philosopher.

The best of Herzog's intrusions are profound. He notes the illusion of movement in the art, effected by blurred edges or ghosts of multiple limbs, and enhanced by electric torchlight that churns against the rocky contours, mimicking the firelight of the paintings' original 'audience'. This was, he postulates, a type of 'proto-cinema'; indeed the thread of human artistry that connects the cave's Palaeolithic storytellers to Herzog and his contemporary film crew is alluded to at other times.

On the other hand, the film contains a bizarre postscript during which Herzog daydreams

about what the mutant albino crocodiles, who dwell nearby in a greenhouse heated by runoff from a nuclear power plant, might think if they one day made their way to the cave and gazed upon its paintings. This is the most obscure of Herzog's musings, and an alienating note on which to conclude.

It must be said that Herzog is at times a condescending interviewer. He regards his subjects with anything from mute respect to detached fondness, or less. In one scene he snaps at an archaeologist who is attempting, with limited success, to demonstrate Palaeolithic spear-throwing techniques; in this instance Herzog crosses the line from gentle joshing to outright ridicule.

But he is at other times astute and discerning. Guided by his questioning and observations, the experts are able to evoke, beyond the academic historical and cultural importance of the site, the awe-inspiring, even mystical aura that dwells inside the cave.

One expert reflects on the relationship of the Chauvet paintings to those of Australian Aboriginals, among some of whom rock painting is a living tradition. He refers to a ritualised practice whereby paintings are periodically retouched by successive artists, to counter the wear of weather and time. In this there is an underlying belief that both the original painting and the repairs have a divine source.

It's likely, he infers, that the Chauvet Cave painters had a similar belief, that art was the work not of man but of 'the spirit'. Even gazing upon their images from a distance, through a pair of 3-D glasses in the dark of a cinema in Australia, it is not hard to share this belief.

Simple answers to economic blues

APPLICATION

Andrew Hamilton



The weak August retail sales have disturbed market watchers. Some have detected a widespread inclination to save. The more ideologically inclined have blamed lefties who look down on shopping and consuming. They point out that the refusal to spend will affect the profitability of businesses, which will then lay off workers or close down.

Virtues such as thrift, simplicity and the satisfaction of needs, not desires, were once dismissed as *petit bourgeois*. They belonged to the conservative side of politics.

But it has now become an offence against the established economic order to sew buttons on old shirts instead of buying new ones, to keep cars that are more than three years old, to prune one's wardrobe instead of buying another one and to resist the appeal of the latest gadgetry. Incitement to such behaviour threatens Australia's economic foundations.

Yet throughout history simplicity, thrift and voluntary poverty have been valued highly by many philosophies and religions. Restraint in pursuing the desire for possessions is said to focus our attention on what matters most deeply. It nurtures our desire for higher goods than material possessions. The quality of our inner life and the depth of our relationships to the world and to one another will count more than the amount of money or things that we amass. The lightness of the footprint with which we walk on the earth is a measure of the weight we have as persons.

Simplicity, of course, is a personal value. It will rarely be a mass movement. Greed will always be more popular. But simplicity has had social effects.

St Jerome was kicked out of Rome for encouraging noble heiresses to sell all, give the proceeds to the poor, and to enter a nunnery. Dumping serious wealth on the market skewered the local economy as well as family fortunes. The young women's actions, too, implied a judgment on the values of Roman society.

So too when the early Franciscans came begging to the Bishop's place, their presence called into question the way the Bishop lived. Simplicity invited even the reluctant to ask what really mattered.

The critique of values was deeply personal. It had bite only when the simplicity commended by the friars was seamlessly woven into the notable happiness of their simple way of life. Only a person happy in renunciation and rich in humanity could subvert the values of society.

In religious societies, the tribute that those who assiduously sought wealth paid to simplicity was paid in the coinage of philanthropy. The simplicity of the friar encouraged the nobleman's beneficence to the poor. The result was that the economic order included an ethical balance to greed. The respect offered to simplicity made people ask what mattered in society and in the economy.

In modern Western societies any ethical balances to greed are hard to identify. It is commonly assumed that we can measure the health of a society by the sheer amount of productive and profitable economic activity within it. So the greater the hunger for more widgets, gadgets and brand names, the more profitable will be the companies that make them, the more people will be employed to make them, and the more healthy will be society.

An economy based on consumption is vulnerable. It is always at risk of being drowned in its own triviality. When any external shock comes that makes people ask what matters deeply in their lives, the deep commitment to superficiality demanded by an economy based on consumption will also be shaken. People refrain from spending, and save to protect things that matter more to them.

The consumer economy is also vulnerable to its own contradictions. If the investments of those who are responsible for the economy are put at risk by national deficits, they will protect them by reducing public expenditure. This will cause unemployment, curtail economic activity, and make it more difficult to reduce debts. The results of this process will be seen in the plight of the poor in Greece and England.

So chosen simplicity may be an outmoded virtue in our economic order. But the alternative may well be involuntary poverty.

Media Inquiry won't go far enough

MEDIA

Tim Dwyer

After months of speculation, on 14 September, the Gillard Government finally agreed to [conduct](#) an independent inquiry into the Australian media.

'The Media Inquiry I am announcing today will focus on print media regulation, including online publications, and the operation of the Press Council,' said Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy.

He added: 'The Government believes a separate and distinct examination of the pressures facing newspapers and their newsrooms, including online publications, will enhance our consideration of the policy and regulatory settings Australia needs to ensure that the news media continues to serve the public interest in the digital age.'

We all know the Inquiry can be attributed to the fallout from the UK phone hacking scandal. But the specific terms of reference should be read in light of the backroom horse-trading that took place over the past weeks between the Greens and the Government, as each sought to assert their party's media regulation agendas.

The Government has appointed former Justice of the Federal Court Ray Finkelstein QC to conduct the Inquiry, assisted by University of Canberra journalism Professor Matthew Ricketson. Conroy emphasised that their findings, due on 28 February 2012, would then be made available to the Government's Convergence Review Inquiry, which is scheduled to report by the end of March 2012.

This in itself is an interesting feature, and tends to set up a parent-sibling reporting arrangement between the two inquiries. Some commentators have suggested a parliamentary inquiry would have stood a better chance of achieving long-term reform.

The terms of reference of the Media Inquiry direct it to inquire and report on the effectiveness of media codes of practice, the impact of technological change in the shift to digital news publication, and, critically, ways of 'substantially strengthening the independence and effectiveness of the Australian Press Council, including in relation to online publication'.

(Currently the Council's Principles, Standards and Guidelines apply to newspapers, magazines and their associated online sites. Other online sites may become members at their own instigation.)

The Government, in arriving at its negotiated position with the Greens, has shied away from any explicit examination of media concentration, arguably the main reason behind the widespread calls to examine the structure of the media in Australia in the first place.

Yet many believe the inclusion of a brief reference to ‘enhancing diversity’ will allow sufficient scope for the Inquiry to investigate the wider regulatory implications of Australia’s unusually high concentration of media ownership.

The Australian Press Council welcomed the Inquiry, with its Chairman, Professor Julian Disney, stating, ‘The Press Council commenced last year a sustained program of reform to strengthen its effectiveness. It will advise the inquiry about the progress made so far and the further improvements which are under way ...

‘It will identify other steps which are needed to achieve the level of performance which the Council believes is necessary and the community is entitled to expect. These will require supportive action by governments and other bodies.’

So why this new focus on the role of the Press Council? The Council has had its share of critics. So, too, has the UK’s Press Complaints Commission (PCC): it was initially established to fend off sterner statutory regulation, and a similar ‘press freedom’ model was subsequently applied in Australia.

Last week the editor of the UK’s *Financial Times*, Lionel Barber, giving the annual Fulbright Lecture, called the PCC ‘dead’ in the wake of its failure to act in the phone hacking scandal, and recommended it be replaced with a Media Standards Commission dominated by independent people who were not associated with either media proprietors or editors.

Apart from the funding problems and general ‘insider’ elements of the current model, Barber’s view is that a more convergent model is required as newspapers evolve with mobile and digital products. This is called for, he argued, because traditional formats are now being blended with new social media redistribution, and as blogging and tweeting become a part of mainstream media practice.

‘The newspaper will likely become an amalgam of the best (and sometimes timeless) content, whether news, analysis or commentary ... Editors will have to distinguish between ‘high worth news and analysis’ — content that must live on the web — and material that can be enriched and refined for a more cut-and-keep, lasting form for print ... the web will likely adopt more of a broadcast mentality, compared to its more considered cousin, the newspaper.’

It’s to its credit that Australia’s Press Council has been forward thinking in its approach. But, signalling his view of the future operation of the Council, Disney said improvements would depend on ‘substantial increases in the Council’s financial and staff resources and in the long-term security of those resources. This includes support from non-media sources, including governments.’

Whether or not this reorganisation needs a statutory basis for regulation of the press and online news media will be a key question for the Inquiry.

My father's good death

NON-FICTION

Gillian Bouras

Picture a little girl in long-ago Melbourne. I am seven, and staying in my grandmother's suburban house. On a stormy night. The rain is drumming on the iron roof, lightning flashes intermittently, and a tree branch taps against the veranda lace. I know that next door the elderly Salvationist is dying.

'He's very near the end,' the neighbours had declared that morning. Suddenly this is a terrifying thought. The darkness clings like a shroud; the tapping inexorably measures minutes and seconds. Panic sets in, and horror overwhelms. I wail and bawl, thrashing about in the double bed, burying my head in the huge kapocky pillow, smothering and sobbing by turns.

A crack of light shows under the door. It widens, and then Nana appears, clutching her dressing gown, her wispy pig-tail hanging down her back, her striped pyjama-legs flapping above her slippers. She is all concern. *Whatever is it, dear? A bad dream?*

And I gasp that I am worried about, sorry for, the old man next door.

She is sympathetic, but immediately assured and firm. *But it's nothing, dear, really, to be afraid of. He's quite happy and contented. He knows is going to our Saviour, don't you see? He knows that this is not really an end, but the beginning of something better.*

I eventually fall asleep, comforted but not necessarily convinced.

My only concern with the old man's death, I know now, and surely felt then, was that it forced on me an appalled recognition of an end. For the first time I felt the dreadful dislocation of being only a speck in the universe, felt the grim sadness of brevity, of human limitation.

The day my father died I was on a Greek beach. Such June days are among my favourites, for the crowds of high summer have yet to arrive. The days are balmy, a prelude to the real and scorching heat; the sea seems like a bolt of blue silk, just lightly shirred. On that day a couple of my favourite people were at the beach, too. Friends from England.

It seems strange now, but I don't suppose it was, really. That morning one friend and I had been discussing death. We told each other once again that the weighty prospect does not scare us. Well, not much; after all, we've had a not bad innings, now being within cooe of the three-score-and-ten.

Then we laughed, and agreed that not being scared is fine in theory. The actual practice

might be quite another matter.

The actual business of accomplishing death; ay, there's the rub. We swapped our stories: that of my great-grandfather who went to his room for his afternoon nap and never woke up. He was 98. Another story concerned a Greek peasant who rode his donkey home from his olive groves, dismounted, and simply dropped to the ground: he was at least 90.

The Greeks have the concept of *enas kalos thanatos*: a good death, a death in which one simply ceases without pain, as my ancestor and the Greek peasant had done. Such are our comforts and our armour against the horror stories of young death, of agonising illness, of dreadful accidents, and hideous quirks of fate.

My phone had been switched off, but as I walked away at the end of an almost perfect day, I turned the little time-bomb on again. And it exploded almost immediately: my brother's familiar voice, that equally familiar tyranny of distance, with the voice bearing the burden of time and inexorability as well, for with this news came the realisation that we, in post-maturity, are now orphans.

Our dad was a month short of his 90th birthday. Because of his dementia it was difficult to decide what period of his life he was inhabiting at any one moment; there was a lot of a kind of mental slithering between events and stages, so that he was both our dad, and not. But at least he always recognised us.

Dad's condition had started to deteriorate, but two days before he died, he spent a couple of happy hours with his only son: they were building a model ship together. 'See you at the weekend,' Stephen said. He didn't. On Friday night the carer heard Dad snoring gently. When she looked in on him an hour later, he had stopped breathing. A very gentle crossing of the bar: a good death.

Chance meeting with an inventor

POETRY

James Waller

Swedish runes

For Hans Weil, artist and inventor

Reflections on a chance meeting in Malmo, Sweden, 1997

Speech rinsed itself in the blue halls of Sweden
Cerulean shadows bloomed
From the frozen river
Like algae shadow covered
The cobbles of Gamla Stan,
Covered the lids of closing eyes
Which rested in the winter
Like stones of forgotten light
Bicycles rolled sullenly
In the distance of their silver limbs
Mittens braced hands which disappeared
Into their dark fingered depths
A bridge of frozen sounds
Pulsed in the limping sky
The sun's dim light gazed in an echo of its splendour
Upon the face of a fading wall
All is hidden now behind the pane of seven years of glass
Dissolving slowly in the softened blaze
Of the poem's quiet lens
Through the drift a figure walks upon the silent air
Shadows climb and sing

Within the stones of the old cathedral
Within the darkness floats the crypt
Sweden's tomb of forgotten Kings
The battle plain for blades of night and the shafts of wintry morning
The winds of Lund swirl upon the cobblestones
The sky arches its bow of gentle rain
The frozen lips of myth
Part in the approaching gloom
To whisper in the ear of shadow
Stolen from the figure walking through the drift
The shelter is as cold as ice
And I am lost in the maze of streets
Head bared and fearful in a town of hidden songs
Stumbling in the cloak of darkness
The river stares from its soft fluorescent mirror
A winding road of tinted glass
Obscured in the fuming ether
Breath is an audible scale of blue steam rising
And fingers search in the darkness for a sign of themselves
Found, lost
Black plastic ripples in the wind
Like the waves of the cindered sea
The bed of the distant mares
Wed to the horse of the streaming deep
The hour has not been sung when the blazing mares will rise
For now it is the well of the stallion's drifting lies
Which hold in the palm of Malmo

The secrets of illusion,
The anonymous poet of holographic truth
For whom language is and was and will be
'The anonymous masterpiece',
Created by all and owned by none
The feather of his step
Walks into me
A child of wonder peeling glints
Of bird-like laughter
Ruffling through the books of shelves
And pressing a promise of youth's return
Which sailed through shadows away ...
I have found the street, and burn with a fever of silver keys
The palace of insoluble night
Fades in the warm interior
The corridors prove safe passage
From the mysteries of the well
Alone the lens softly burns
And steps back into the dark
Through the drift the figure steps
Blinded in the mist
Who are you?
Silence
The steps are still
A quiet voice from the inner world
Or from the drifting mist, attempts to explain:
'Firstly Sir, would you please help me across the road? I cannot see.'

Hans Weil, the inventor of the hologram,
which he registered to the patent office in 1934,
takes my arm. We walk across the road,
and then another, along the frozen river,
with the sun gazing down
in a pale gold echo of its splendour,
grazing Malmo's walls with a surfeit of riches lowering
into the grave of fading day.

We walk four or five blocks; Hans Weil probes
the mystery of my arm
and raises the question
of my occupation: 'Artist', I reply. 'Ah ...'

The inventor is light with laughter, giddy as a bird,
as we come to his apartment. Dim, and full of dust
coating the sheaves of books,
the interior breathes the air
of the final ark of philosophy
an island in the mist of memory.

We have tea and Hans shows me an invention
which magnifies letters for his failing eyes,
so that still he may read,
so that still the winds may turn
the bronze art coins of his perception.

Cobweb-like sculptures dream
upon some shelves, poetry is the wing
of his bird-like speech. And his disappointment
as he must descend

to the ground of my feeble understanding.
'Come back to visit, make sure you do.'

A promise broken.

This poem a token

For a king

And his alchemy of sorrow

Resting now in Sweden's

Blue, cerulean halls ...

Former terrorist pres a hard sell for Irish voters

POLITICS

Frank O'Shea

As an example of leopards changing spots or terrorists turning into statesmen, Irish Sinn Féin politician Martin McGuinness is up there with Kenyatta, Mandela and the young Mugabe.

He was once chief-of-staff of the IRA; in that role he was known as a faithful churchgoer with little tolerance for drinking or womanising but with a coldness that was not for turning when discussions involving death or mayhem were decided.

Almost 40 years ago, at the age of 22, he was in direct but deniable peace talks with the British government. A generation and too many deaths later, he was still talking behind closed doors, with Trimble and Paisley, Ahern and Blair, leading to the world's best example of a situation where former mortal enemies can work together, support each other, and even be at ease with each other.

That latter situation led to the nickname The Chuckle Brothers for the double act of Paisley-McGuinness, and is part of the reason why he is now on a hit list by dissident members of an organisation he once commanded.

At the weekend, McGuinness entered the race for the Irish presidency. It is a ceremonial role, quite similar to the Governor-General in Australia, currently filled with exemplary distinction by a woman from Belfast. That she comes from what purists might argue is a different jurisdiction means that no one will object to a candidate born in Derry, Northern Ireland's second city.

Sinn Féin is not popular in Ireland, partly due to their long association, common cause and in many cases common membership with the IRA. More significant however is the fact that their policies are left wing and ultra nationalist — the best comparison in this country would be to imagine some combination of the Greens and Australia First. Sinn Féin, after all, translates as We Ourselves.

One of the reasons why the entry of McGuinness into the presidential race is so significant is that the field is desolately dull. Fianna Fail, the former government, has decided not to enter a candidate, in the well justified belief that the electorate would take their anger out on them in a humiliating way.

In desperation they tried to induce Gay Byrne, a popular radio and television personality, to run, but changed their minds when the media pointed to some of his views that might go well on morning radio but would not bear up to the pressures of countrywide canvassing.

The nominee of Fine Gael, the government party, is from Dublin and carries the suspicion of ordinary people, well justified by recent experience, that a politician from the capital is some kind of pinstripe crook. The Labour Party has an attractive candidate in Michael D. Higgins, a former left wing politician, an academic and a poet who unfortunately tends to talk in the language of modern poetry.

There are other candidates who do not carry either the burden or the imprimatur of a political party. The early favourite was David Norris, an independent senator who represented Trinity College. A world authority on James Joyce and a well known gay activist, he once took the Irish government to the European court — and won — for their treatment of homosexuals.

He withdrew from the race in July when it was revealed that he had made representations to the President of Israel on behalf of a former lover who was to be sentenced for statutory rape. Word is that he is now seeking to re-enter the race.

Which brings us to McGuinness. His role in the peace process and as Deputy First Minister in the current prosperity of Northern Ireland ought to be sufficiently powerful to counteract youthful actions that even some in the South regarded as justified in the circumstances of the time.

As in France, the Irish president is elected for a seven-year term. This is significant because the next incumbent will officiate at the centenary celebrations of the 1916 rising; that this person would be a member of Sinn Féin, as the early presidents were, would be highly symbolic.

So much so that people in the Republic might think twice about electing as commander-in-chief of the Irish army a man who was once in a similar position in the Provisional IRA.

Managing our mining windfall

EDITORIAL

Michael Mullins

When treating themselves to luxuries such as travel or a new car, retirees sometimes make light of the fact that they are *spending the kids' inheritance*.

Their feelings are mixed. They are enjoying the fruits of their life's labour, and of their stewardship of the wealth they themselves have inherited. They are also diminishing the pool of wealth available to subsequent generations of their family.

Hopefully they can avoid guilt and unnecessary self-sacrifice by hitting the 'sweet spot' that represents their present and future family's common good, where both current and subsequent generations are provided for in equal measure.

We also need to formulate policies and enact legislation to do this as a nation. Forward thinking for the intergenerational common good is relevant to many areas of public policy that are currently being shaped. Examples include aged care and the curbing of carbon emissions.

Politicians are tempted to make policy on the run that appeals to voter greed rather than the instinct to provide for a better life for future generations. But they don't need to. Kevin Rudd won the 2007 election with policies that included addressing the 'moral challenge' of climate change. His fortunes changed when he turned his back on this.

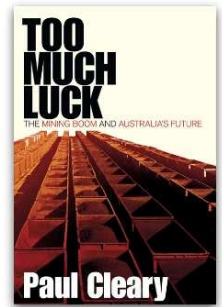
The policy area that cries the loudest for responsible stewardship at this time is mining revenue.

The current resources boom is allowing some Australians to live the good life while much of the rest of the world, and many fellow Australians, endure one of western civilisation's worst economic recessions. Australia has more wealth than it knows what to do with. Author and researcher Paul Cleary calls it 'dumb luck' in his new book [*Too Much Luck: The Mining Boom and Australia's Future*](#).

He says many other countries — and indeed Australia during the 1890s — have previously been caught by the resource trap: a heady period of boom and growth, followed by a painful bust. We can make the boom last through a serious and immediate commitment to a sovereign wealth fund that is protected from likely attempts of politicians to raid it.

Cleary cites Norway and East Timor as examples of countries that are preserving wealth for future generations. Paradoxically Australia tends to believe that it can teach East Timor about nationhood and has nothing to learn from our small neighbour.

He [says](#) that while we have have Timorese students coming here to learn about how to



manage their oil sector, we should be sending people to East Timor to look at their example because it is one of the most outstanding examples in the world of how to safely and wisely manage oil revenue.

‘They effectively set up a fund which is the equivalent of Australia having set up a \$2 trillion fund in the space of six years. They weathered the global financial crisis, they’ve got their money locked away, they’re spending it in a responsible way, unlike we do in Australia.’

Most importantly he identifies what is necessary to establish such a fund, and it’s something other resource-rich countries such as Norway, Chile and East Timor have but Australia lacks — real political leadership.

Rudd resurrection no miracle cure for Labor

POLITICS

John Warhurst

Speculation is in the air again that Julia Gillard's leadership is under immediate threat. It has been fuelled, if the roaring blaze needs any more fuel, by the Malaysian asylum seeker processing controversy, yet another disastrous opinion poll (Nielsen in *The Age* and the *SMH*), a revitalised Kevin Rudd, and perhaps by the satirical ABC TV program [At Home with Julia](#).

Now I didn't predict Kevin Rudd's demise last 24 June but I did say the next morning in the *Canberra Times* (and later in *Eureka Street*) that Rudd [might still have won](#) the next election and that the consequences of the change were unpredictable. That has turned out to be the case in spades.

In recent times I have argued consistently, including in *Eureka Street*, that Labor now should stick with Gillard for better or worse and hope that the next election is not for another two years. Labor will most likely lose that election, but my view has been that no other potential Labor leader will do better. The failure of multiple changes in NSW to improve Labor's situation is one piece of supporting evidence.

Even if Gillard was to be replaced it should only be after being given a decent shot at the job; therefore, no earlier than mid-2012.

Gillard's position now can most likely not be revived. But where there is life there is hope and she seems determined to stay the course. Her spirited performance in parliament last week in support of the carbon tax legislation shows that.

I don't see *At Home with Julia* as causing her more damage, and it may even evoke sympathy. It is certainly disrespectful of the office of PM but, while there has been no previous direct equivalent, other prime ministers, including John Howard, have copped plenty of disrespect too. 'Look-alikes are the craze both here and in the USA.

However never before has an Australian leader's spouse been lampooned like Tim Mathieson. He has to endure a lot to sexism, but will rise above his portrayal as a goofy house husband-type figure.

The Nielsen Poll is especially stark evidence of the weakness of Gillard's position. What was new about the poll was that it sharpened the choice for anyone considering a leadership switch. Rudd really is the only alternative offering much hope of a Labor revival. The others like Stephen Smith, Simon Crean, Bill Shorten and Greg Combet do not have the necessary popular appeal.

Rudd, remarkably given the devastating public criticism of his personal characteristics only

18 months ago, does have more public appeal than Gillard. In fact, the poll suggests that led by him Labor might be favoured (by 52:48 after preferences) to defeat the Coalition if an election were to be held now. That has led to further speculation about a snap election if Rudd became leader once again.

Labor MPs facing annihilation would only be human if tempted by such a promising scenario. So anything could happen, but Labor would be making another mistake if it happened right now.

There are uncertainties galore for Labor in the Rudd-led revival option. They are about much more than eating humble pie by admitting a mistake, although there would have to be a lot of that.

Aren't Labor's problems of Rudd's making anyway and wouldn't that be the legitimate thrust of the Coalition's response? This applies to asylum seekers, the mining tax and the carbon tax. If Rudd takes over and quickly shows he is not the answer, isn't Labor in even bigger strife, if that is possible? Being a martyr can only take Rudd so far.

Can't the same things be said again about Rudd as have been said about Gillard; that is, that he doesn't have a mandate and has been installed undemocratically by cronies outside of an election? Admittedly there would be a new twist, but there has been an election since he was deposed.

Wouldn't this be a breach of faith with the Independents and the Green that support the minority government? They might go along for the ride anyway, but there would need to be some healing.

Rudd as PM would be a refurbished broom but not a new one. If he was to be re-installed then John Howard's Lazarus impersonation and Robert Menzies' return to office in 1949 would have been outdone by perhaps the most remarkable twist ever in Australian politics. Only insiders know whether it is a chance of happening. Only Australian voters know whether it might work.

Sex discrimination by the book

MEDIA

Ellena Savage

[The Stella Prize](#), Australia's proposed new women's only literary prize, comes in response to the growing awareness that although literary arts are largely produced and consumed by women, women are less likely to review or be reviewed in major literary pages, or to win major literary prizes.

The debate about women's representation in high literature began to gain serious ground last year when an organisation of women literary artists in the United States, VIDA, released [statistics](#) revealing women's dire absence from critical acclaim.

Australia's Stella committee have released [equivalent](#) statistics. Women represent 70–80 per cent of book buyers, over 60 per cent of book editors and roughly 50 per cent of publishing authors. Their absence from critical acclaim indicates a serious cultural problem.

Responses to the establishment of the new prize have been generally positive, aside from a few cautious criticisms. The most serious of these is that women don't need a prize of their own; that performance itself, and not identity, merits reward.

It's true that art is not about identity; art is not, and shouldn't have to be, about anything other than art. Yet if assumptions about gender did not affect the way we read, J. K. Rowling would be Joanne Kathleen and the Miles Franklin Award would be the Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin Award.

On the other hand, to suggest that we live in a meritocracy is patently untrue. The culture of success is not driven by merit. If it were, then the recently initiated, white-male-dominated [Power Index](#) would be proof that white men are simply more meritorious than everyone else.

In fact, in Australia, girls perform better at school, and women outnumber men at university. So what happens to women in their professional years? They are inducted into a society that favours the characteristics we are taught belong to boys: ambition, aggression and self aggrandising. Some women successfully participate in boys club cultures, but they do so in spite of their gender.

The *Power Index Secrets of the Powerful* ebook gives advice to the burgeoning powerful. The tongue-in-cheek guidebook reads: 'Never fear making demands for jobs for which you have no experience'; 'the public is there to be manipulated. Fools are waiting to be fleeced'; and 'hold yourself in particular 'high-power poses' for up to two minutes during a meeting to stimulate hormones that will lower your stress and stop you worrying. These poses will also power up your inner dominator.'

Unfortunately the comic tone of this advice does not negate its basis in reality.

‘The paradox is that a non-meritocratic society needs social mobility to become meritocratic,’ wrote Clifford Longley, veteran columnist for *The Tablet* in the UK. Social mobility can be realised as a kind of affirmative action. But I prefer to view initiatives such as the Stella Prize not as ‘affirmative action’ — the term conjures up too much outmoded worthiness — but as social mobility with a feminist face.

After reading Jonathan Franzen’s novel *Freedom*, I joked that if there could be an Australian equivalent — an epic family saga whose every angle is informed by some huge national theme — it would have to be called *Social Mobility*. A fixation with private schooling? Only in Australia. So much of the Australian psyche is about improving one’s lot, sometimes for good reason, and sometimes not.

We should view positive discrimination then for what it is: a mechanism to move towards an authentic meritocracy.

It uses the tried and tested tools of the patriarchal bourgeoisie: creating new spaces to promote success on merit. Can’t afford bread while the King eats your babies? Overthrow the King! Can’t have your work validated by a sweeping cultural assumption that what you have to say is not very important? Validate it yourself!

In the bourgeois tradition of bettering one’s lot within structures that are functionally restrictive, women are dealing with their structural exclusion by creating new spaces to thrive.

I don’t know if I’ll always stand by women’s-only initiatives — the Stella Prize may well fail to improve perceptions of women’s writing. But until I see women adequately acknowledged in all facets of public life, this kind of social mobility is necessary.

Vigilante Xenophon's name shame

RELIGION

Andrew McGowan

Sexual offenders among clergy and church workers have often used their privileged status to act as though they were above the law, and to ignore general standards of what is just and fair. Senator Nick Xenophon has acted in a way that is, ironically, all too similar.

By using parliamentary privilege to name an alleged perpetrator identified by one-time Roman Catholic priest and schismatic Anglican leader John Hepworth, even against Hepworth's expressed wishes, Xenophon has stepped across a line from the independence of spirit that has won him many admirers on questions of systemic gambling and corruption, into a new territory of irresponsibility.

It may be tempting for those concerned with justice for victims and for the ongoing protection of the vulnerable to sympathise with vigilantism, especially when Church processes and other means for seeking remedy are slow, or produce results difficult to understand. There are still too many indications that authorities in the Roman Catholic Church — but also in other religious communities including Anglicanism — have often been slow to act, and compromised by self-interest.

The recent stories that have emerged in Ireland are the latest in an ongoing tide of revelations which may continue for some time yet, even if important steps are being taken by Church and civil authorities in many places. The need for truth, openness and healing and justice for victims is not yesterday's issue.

Part of what is needed however is a system of dealing with abuse claims that can stand tests more substantial than those proposed in moments of outrage and despair. To act as though the accused are already guilty, and to 'out' or otherwise shame or cast public blame without the safeguards of proper process, makes the real or alleged abusers into scapegoats rather than objects of justice.

A bishop or tribunal that overlooks general principles of fairness when dealing with allegations only leaves their actions open to challenge, and thus weakens the potential of the system to defend others. Zeal for the abused without commensurate fairness for the accused has been claimed in a case currently before the Supreme Court in New South Wales, where actions by an Anglican tribunal in Newcastle are being scrutinised. Its outcome will have implications beyond the particular case, potentially casting shadows across other similar processes and their outcomes.

So accused abusers deserve justice, positively as well as negatively; they should be subject to appropriate sanctions if and when their alleged actions are established, but must also have

their own rights respected in the course of the facts being assessed, and when consequences are determined.

The facts in these cases are usually not accessible to most of us — and in Hepworth's, probably not to anyone except him and those against whom he has made allegations. Respect for those who may have undergone such harrowing experiences demands that particular construals of those facts not become mere tools in the service of other agendas.

The Australian's Christopher Pearson implied this week that the different outcomes of processes regarding Hepworth's claims in the Archdioceses of Melbourne and Adelaide could be attributed to the administration of the Adelaide Archdiocese being the 'most liberal' in the country (a bit like calling *The Australian* the most liberal of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers), and that the difference was related to Hepworth's band of conservative ex-Anglicans somehow representing a threat to Catholic liberals.

This was an unedifying if not unexpected use of Hepworth and his story as a cudgel in ecclesiastical politics. The responses made by the Adelaide Archdiocese to Xenophon's threat have suggested not lack of attention or care regarding Hepworth's story, but rather a very difficult and continuing case, involving claim and counter-claim made at many years' distance.

But at least Hepworth sought Pearson's attention and dubious advocacy. Xenophon's actions on Tuesday cannot be excused on such grounds.

Hepworth is not an ecclesiastical faction, nor a *cause célèbre* to be paraded in Parliament, but a fragile human being whose history has now been scrutinised in ways, and to an extent, that demonstrate scant regard for his own humanity. So too, the man he has accused has been unfairly treated under the guise of privilege.

In the process, the slow progress of churches towards justice for the many who have been abused under the guise of spiritual authority and leadership has been set back. The accused also must also have their dignity acknowledged, not just for their own sake but for the sake of the abused too.

Why Gillard is the PM we deserve

POLITICS

Moira Rayner

I'm not worried about Julia Gillard's abysmal rating in polls. I'm not convinced anyone but journalists and backbiters have any real desire to roll Australia's first woman Prime Minister and replace her with any of those ambitious men among whom she floated to the top of the Labor Party.

All that she has done is sound insincere: ditch the ALP's pre-government commitment to on-shore processing of asylum seekers; maintain the live cattle trade with Indonesia in face of clear evidence of grossly cruel practices; and blather about the sanctity of marriage.

She has shown she is human and, above all, determined to hang on to office despite all the crap thrown at her for being a woman (see the [top eight stereotypes](#)). And you've got to admire that, though I do confess to being disappointed in my hope that the first woman to be Australian Prime Minister would be a statesman. We have just another politician.

Yet we have the leaders we deserve. The parliamentary ALP is so derived and driven by factions that it can decline to implement its formal, written policies on, for example, an emissions trading scheme, or the humane treatment of asylum seekers in accordance with our international obligations — which are explicitly to assess the claims of those who arrive in Australia and claim to be refugees.

Gillard cannot see past the poultry [sic] advice of Immigration Department turkeys (to cite Bob Brown) who feel that Australians couldn't cope with an average of 600 arrivals on shore a month, which we already do (they come by plane).

A party that was truly connected to voters would have them with far greater influence than the careerists who currently flap their wings in smoke-filled offices and say who's in and who's out. It has been in their interests that community activists and organisers and men and women of passion and vision have been sidelined from parliamentary and administrative policy-making.

The ALP's branches are drooping as the roots dry out.

Poor Gillard can't win a trick. She came to power because the factions forced her to step up to the guillotine and stand under her own Damoclean sword. When she faced the electorate she got a hung parliament. I was excoriated for not denouncing her as a creature of the Greens, who with the Independents hold the balance of power and have limited her policy options.

Now, when Gillard has struck out on her own (in my view, mistaken) view of what Australians want her to do about 'the boats', she is reviled for seeking her only option (other

than to implement party policy), a foul bargain with Tony Abbott. That is the only way she could seek to bypass the High Court's casting-down of the Malaysia solution.

I think this is a bargain to be ashamed of, but we share the blame for the loss of quality, originality and steadiness in political decision-making that comes from apathy, compliance and realpolitik.

Labor is no longer the party of workers, just as the Libs no longer stand for the supremacy of conscience or for individual freedoms and civil liberties. There is no two-party system, but coalitions of the moment. The conventions of government have been in steep decline since John Kerr dismissed the Whitlam government in 1975, most pettily demonstrated by Abbott declining to keep his promise to 'pair' government ministers and Craig Thomson in 2011.

Maybe this convention-breaking is a good thing: pretence about rules of civilised behaviour that are regularly subverted in practice is just a lie.

Just as Fijian Prime Minister Bainimarana proved the shallowness of the roots of Fijian parliamentary democracy by his bloodless, peaceful coup, Australia's coalitions (Gillard's ALP/Independents/Greens government vs Abbott's Liberal/National's Opposition) have played out for us the inevitable end of market-driven politics: a coagulation of near-identical policies in the middle of a desert highway.

Former Liberal MP for Kooyong, Petro-Giorgiou, recently decried the poverty of the Liberals' commitment to international legal and humanitarian options. The ousting of Turnbull speaks volumes about their emotional, near-hysterical opposition to any step to combat climate change.

The ALP Left has split on the asylum seeker issue. Hardly a voice has been raised by Labor itself in defence of the often vicious personal attacks on our first woman PM, who has certainly done no worse than the man who preceded her and displayed his own character flaws and poor judgment.

There is no obvious alternative to Gillard, but there is an obvious need for a party which stands for something. Turnbull's leadership opportunity has been stymied by his brilliance at raising hackles among the Liberals, and their preference for a policy-free zone.

We have the leaders we deserve, who would rather follow public opinion, than lead it.

Exposing UN sex and violence

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Whistleblower* (MA). Director: Larysa Kondracki. Starring: Rachel Weisz, Vanessa Redgrave, Monica Bellucci, David Strathairn, Roxana Condurache. 107 minutes**

In 2002 former Nebraska police officer and UN International Police Force monitor Kathryn Bolkovac claimed victory in an unfair dismissal case against her employer, DynCorp — a private company with a lucrative UN contract to hire and train officers for duty in post-war Bosnia.

Bolkovac's dismissal was due to her making a 'protected disclosure' (i.e. 'blowing the whistle') against alleged corruption and cover-ups among some of her peacekeeper colleagues. They, she reported, had been paying for prostitutes and participating in sex-trafficking.

The Whistleblower is Kathryn's story recast as big-screen thriller. A disclaimer at the beginning clarifies that some characters are fictional or composites of real-life people. It's a film designed to entertain and engage the viewer emotionally, rather than to inform. In this, it succeeds.

Not after it first wobbles, though. Kathryn (well played by English actress Weisz) is shown to be a conscientious cop who, following a marriage breakdown, has lost custody of her teenage daughter. Her ex-husband and his new partner are now moving interstate, daughter in tow.

Pained by the prospect of this separation, Kathryn has already tried and failed to get a transfer closer to their new home. The generous six-month contract on offer for the Bosnia job suggests another means of affording the move, albeit only following a more pronounced period of separation.

The film's perfunctory treatment of these familial and career frustrations makes Kathryn's decision to go to wartorn Bosnia seem too flippant to believe.

The Whistleblower soon steadies though. Once in Bosnia Kathryn's motivation shifts from financial compensation to compassion, and the plot gains momentum. Appalled by the lack of interest and bureaucratic inertia of her employer Democra Corps (a fictional stand-in for DynCorp) in the face of racial and domestic violence against women, she casts herself as crusader for their cause.

This proves to be merely the embryo of the greater — and more dangerous — fight for justice she is about to face. Gradually Kathryn begins to encounter evidence of colleagues'

involvement with human trafficking. This is the exercise of male power over vulnerable women, writ large. Herself a woman in the midst of a boys club, and a potential threat to the sinister status quo, Kathryn, too, is vulnerable.

The faith she feels for various colleagues and associates, such as human rights lawyer Madeleine Rees (Redgrave) and Internal Affairs operative Peter Ward (Straithairn) belies the fact that, in an environment where almost everyone is hiding something, trust should be given sparingly. Indeed it also offsets the instinctive mistrust she feels for other male colleagues.

Weisz's tense and measured performance, which is the film's greatest strength, evokes the aura of justified paranoia which must beset any prospective whistleblower.

There are other wobbles. A shonky romantic subplot involving Kathryn and a fellow monitor is marked by some of the limpest scripted flirting you'll ever see. And European mega star Monica Bellucci is wooden and utterly wasted in her role as a jaded Democra Corps executive.

But there is dramatic power here, too. The emotional fulcrum is provided by teenager Raya (Condurache), a victim of the trafficking and sex slavery that become the object of Kathryn's quest for justice. We first meet her in an ominous prologue sequence; later we witness some of the worst atrocities she endures. She provides the human face of the 'issue' of human trafficking.

Most importantly, when Rya's path intersects with Kathryn's, their interactions reinforce the older woman's determination to achieve justice, while highlighting the limits of her ability to do so. In *The Whistleblower*, good and evil are unequal opponents, and even victory is attended by tragedy.

Carbon tax saves Gillard (for now)

POLITICS

Tony Kevin

My most recent *Eureka Street* articles on climate change policy ([Celebrating the carbon tax](#) and [Gillard's climate coup](#)) set out reasons for my optimism that, following the formation after the 2010 election of a minority Labor government under Julia Gillard which owed its continued existence to the support in Parliament of the Greens and Independents, Australia would at last be able to make progress towards legislating a carbon pricing system.

The arguments of those two articles have been borne out by events, though only after the real danger of Tony Abbott's 'stop the carbon tax' campaign, which seemed to be gathering public momentum, was surmounted.

In recent months, under Greg Combet's quiet but deft policy leadership, aided by Ross Garnaut's and Christine Milne's authoritative public education on the real issues, Australia has at last, after 17 years of debate, reached 'the end of the beginning': 18 bills have been drafted expressing the present Labor-Greens-Independents policy consensus that a carbon pricing system be put in place, to commence in July 2012.

These bills will now have a month of debate in each House of Parliament. Barring the unforeseen, they will become law in October. The Greens and Independents will support these bills.

The bills will set in place a carbon tax on about 300 firms (Australia's top emitters) for three years at an initial price of \$23 per tonne of CO₂ emissions. There will be fiscal compensations for lower-income taxpayers affected by public pricing knock-ons from this tax.

The tax will start the process of moving Australia from a high carbon burning, inefficient economy to a more efficient, lower carbon burning economy. It will be replaced by a carbon trading system in three years. (Negotiations have begun for Australia to possibly join the existing European Union carbon trading system).

Wisely, Gillard and Combet are addressing the large raft of climate change policy issues step by step, with the core issue of carbon pricing being tackled first. There will be later separate legislation on compensation for the beleaguered domestic steel industry, and on renewable energy targets and government incentives, where the Greens have more ambitious ideas than Labor.

I sense the Australian electorate is now resigned to the inevitability of this policy reform. The scientific evidence of manmade climate change continues to strengthen. The Tony Abbott campaign of fear and negativism peaked a few months ago. It lost momentum with the failure of the Convoy of No Confidence and a public turning away from the extremism and hysteria

of radio shock jocks.

Abbott then turned down his carbon tax rhetoric. He will find it hard now to wind it back up again.

Also, the public attention caravan has moved on. Labor has secured important allies in industry and the trade unions. The carbon tax issue has been displaced in public debate by a media and public focus on three issues above all: the Craig Thomson affair, the offshore processing of asylum seekers, and fears about effects on Australia of the shaky global economy.

As journalist and editor Rob Burgess has [noted](#) , though Gillard's leadership has started to come under pressure, no one in Labor will want to try to overthrow her until its carbon pricing laws package securely in place. No new leader would want to go to a 2013 election with no progress made on climate change policy since 2007!

This means, effectively, no challenge to Gillard before the first half of 2012. If opinion polls keep trending down, Gillard may by then be vulnerable.

On the other hand, with the carbon bills finally passed and other things happening in the economy and politics, her standing relative to Abbott's might have begun to recover by then. In sense Abbott's indiscriminately negative high-pressure style of politics is a wasting asset that may alienate more voters as time goes by.

There will be important issues for Labor to resolve with the Greens over renewable energy policy, and with Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott over inland agricultural water supplies and fears of catchment pollution from coal mining and coal seam gas extraction. But the carbon price legislation will not be hostage to these issues.

Labor now has just two nightmares: that the Craig Thomson affair may spiral out of control, or that a global economic crisis may erupt on the scale of the 2008 GFC. (Maybe a third: that Andrew Wilkie might paint himself into an inextricable corner over his proposed gambling laws.)

Refreshingly, the carbon tax is no longer the crisis of the day.

Inhaling God

MARGARET DOOLEY AWARD

Jessica Voelker

(red) String theory

There is a cat's cradle aura surrounding you. In the midst of divine fingers there are threads. Tiny fate filled marionette strings, not controlling but connecting us to our maker, each other and this often magical material world.



Your very body looks like a road map full of red string crossings. Your veins are so densely packed that your lips and hips would be clearly articulated if you took everything from your body but your circulatory system. If you were to unravel all your redness you would have enough veins to stretch around the earth twice. Nearly 100,000km of red strings knotting you together.

Not only are you a tangled ball of yarn, but themes of thread, ribbon, string, cord and line weave their way through folk lore, Greek myth, religious texts, and quantum physics — leaving a bread crumb trail of what ties us together.

Bloodline

Your veins aren't the only red string up your sleeve; there is also your blood line. The words blood, Adam, human, and earth share the same root word for red in Hebrew, *dam*.

In Genesis the first human family committed the first murder when Cain killed Abel: the beginning of countless acts of bloodshed which have become a human legacy and an indelible bloodline. We are also inextricably linked to the earth as our very name, human, suggests. We work the land, live off of the land, and return to the land in death. From dust we came, according to Ecclesiastes, and to dust we shall return. We are magnificent and brutal sand sculptures.

But interestingly there is another word for red in Hebrew, *shani*. Shani is most often used to describe a type of crimson string. This thread is used in purification rituals and in the textiles of the Tabernacle and later of the Temple. It has holy and royal significance.

In the Bible, in the book of Joshua chapter 2 verses 18—21, a woman named Rahab who lived within the city of Jericho assisted the Israelites in capturing the city. To indicate that she and her family were to be spared she hung a scarlet thread from her window.

Also in the bible is the story of Tamar and her twin sons Zerah and Perez. Zerah's arm extended through the womb during birth and a nurse tied a red string around his wrist to indicate he was the oldest, but his arm withdrew and it was Perez who breached first, later

leading the bloodline of King David and Jesus.

These references infuse the symbol of red string with strong links to bloodline, and the promise of inheritance in Perez's case, while forgiveness and protection are conjured from Rahab's story.

Red strings may also signify sacrifice. During Yom Kippur, there is historically a 'scapegoat' ritual, in which two goats are presented. One is tied around the horns with red string and set free while the other has red string tied around the neck, to indicate it should be slaughtered, as it now bears the sins of Israel.

In Exodus, the blood of a sacrificial lamb was put over doorways as protection during the tenth plague. In Romanian folklore red string tied to the threshold of the home is used to symbolise that event.

The connection to red string and blood is clear, while Jesus is represented as the scapegoat for humanity. In John's Gospel, chapter 1 verse 29, John declares of Jesus, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'

These two types of red in Hebrew evoke two contrary symbols: the red of blood, earth and Adam, which indicates the marriage of man to his lineage of bloodshed, bound to the earth in life and returning to dust in death; and the royal red thread as a symbol of promise, protection and a new bloodline and sacrifice in Christ.

Thus the bond of our name, human, to the red of earth and blood was broken, and in Ecclesiastes it was written, 'The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.'

The threads that connect us:

'All the principles of heaven and earth are living inside you ... Everything in heaven and earth breathes. Breath is the thread that ties creation together.' —Morihei Ueshiba

As much as it feels as though we are an isolated island in a sea of many, we are intimately connected to one another in a fascinating physiological web. Your very breath is a receptacle for human history. In a very real way, you breathe the breaths of the first people to walk this planet. Every inhalation has a volume of 0.5 litres with 10^{22} molecules of air. There are about 10^{44} molecules in earth's atmosphere.

As a result, says John R. Cameron, Emeritus Professor of Medical Physics at the University of Wisconsin — Madison, 'Each breath contains a molecule of air that was in a single breath of Archimedes, Aristotle, or any other famous person who lived many years ago. Jesus Christ took approximately 150 million breaths in his lifetime; thus, one could expect that each of our breaths could contain about 150 million molecules breathed by Christ.'

Now when the Bible says God is within you, you can breathe a sigh of relief and know it's

true ... Just don't hold your breath too long!

Even at a cellular level we are connected. Each cell has its own electric field, which can be further-reaching than that of the electric field near a high-voltage power line ... and new voltage-sensitive nanoparticles have indicated that the electric fields inside cells could be as strong as or stronger than a bolt of lightning. Perhaps this explains the electric shock we get when we touch someone we are falling in love with. And it certainly gives the term staying grounded all the more electrical significance!

But puns aside, this electrical energy cannot be kept isolated; we rub up against each other's electric fields constantly. We are connected by this invisible energy within us. We cannot contain our brilliance.

And if that weren't enough, science has taken a science fiction-esque approach to the quantum world. Currently holding the standing title for a theory that unifies the chaos of quantum mechanics with the relative predictability of general relativity is *string theory*.

A concept developed in 1984 by physicists Schwarz and Michael Green, string theory essentially connects all objects in the universe to little bitty vibrating 'strings' of energy. A superstring is a hundred million billion times smaller than the nucleus of an atom.

Freeman J. Dyson, a former professor of physics at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, illustrates just how small these strings are. 'Imagine, if you can, four things that have very different sizes. First, the entire visible universe. Second, the planet Earth. Third, the nucleus of an atom. Fourth, a superstring. The step in size from each of these things to the next is roughly the same.'

Each of those bodies is approximately 10²⁰ times smaller than the one before.

If scientists wanted to explore the world of superstrings, engineers would need to create a particle accelerator measuring 1000 light years around. It seems very clear we are made of divine thread; our stories weave into one another's.

Stringing it all together

Someone is waiting for you with an invisible red string around their ankle. You have a red string around your ankle too, and it will bring you to your soul mate. In this ancient Chinese parable, it is 'The Old Man in the Moonlight' who ties predestined people together.

In ancient Greece, strings thread their way through the myth of Ariadne. Ariadne, princess of Crete, fell in love with an Athenian hero, Theseus, who was sent to a labyrinth to be killed. Ariadne helped Theseus escape by giving him string to find his way back out of the Labyrinth.

For Anglo-Saxons a string around your finger helped you remember.

In these three examples red strings declare the unseen elements of the world, represent divine intension in our daily lives, become the symbol of how we find our way to the source, enabling us to remember our purpose, and connecting us to one another.

Through physics, religion, the human body, and mythology, red thread has been the backstory weaving us into a tapestry rich in cultural, physiological, and divine connection. Follow the thread to see you have meaning in this creation: a new bloodline has been offered you, and we each are so miraculous we hold bolts of lightning in our cells.

Tie a string around your finger so as not to forget you are wrapped in the blanket of the creator as is every other creature on heaven and earth.

(red) String theory

I woke up ravenous

One red rib

Dangling

On a tree limb

In China this means

You have a red string around your ankle

You are waiting for your soulmate.

Cats Cradle two Fridas

Pulling apart fibrous Siamese segments of grapefruit

Which is you and which is me

That we are a spider web of wanting and redness —

Explains it all

A theory

A marketing scheme

We like to forget

Of God with red fingers

As you fall asleep

Adam's rib is a red string

A blood line

It may stretch or tangle, but never break
Red remembers
Louder than an ice cube
Only blue blood could know how wide a red vine runs
Infra-red of the desert —
Past
Far-red of tomatoes —
Present
Unknowable reds of tomorrow —
You are a three-cord-rope
Called promise
In Hebrew
Adam, blood, & earth
Have the same red root
And all were meant to fade the fastest

Favourite body parts

POETRY

Jordie Albiston

Golden

Thank you eyes, for opening onto a new day,
every day, for fifty years. For blinking
before the camera, for allowing a little spray
of ocean in, or a storm, when that sinking
feeling came, or when my babies were born.
Please accept my apologies that certain
images — hurting animals, whichever war —
found their way into the picture, again.
Thank you feet, for putting one after another
along shorelines, new countries and long
country paths. I like how you bothered
to sometimes pause, sorry for all the con-
crete, landmines and shoes. To hands, many
thanks, for touching many things, and not
flinching. I don't know how you managed
when the object was sharp, or angry, or hot
but you did. I hope you enjoyed a season
of sun and sand between fingers, the feel of
another's occasional flesh, I hope the reasons
for clenching a fist against injustice, or love
were real. My gratitude to spine for holding
me up, your sufferings did not go unnoticed.

If I asked too much, if the task of unfolding
day after day caused you to buckle and twist
I regret. Thank you legs, for lurching your
burden from moment to moment, for taking
that extra step. Forgive me for the backward
directions, forgive all the sudden braking.
Sometimes the map is wrongly rendered.
Sometimes the lines are laid upside down.
The world turns strangely, her head on her
knees, her brain in a vacuum of please don't
and please. We look to the hugeness and
feel microscopic: yes hello! happy birthday!
goodbye! Our ship becomes sea, no land
for miles, but I digress. Yet let me just say:
I am indebted to mind, you kept me going
when everything else was broken or tired or
stalled. I admire your hunger for knowing.
Thank you especially for closing your doors
that time. For the music, the music, through
which I survived the sunken, most capsized
of years, I thank you ears, and call on you
to pardon the propaganda, small-talk, lies.
And finally, for constancy, for braveness in
the darkest of places, I address my brightest
thing: you beat forever, deep down within
me, striking the wrong along with the right.
What is me, what is you, no man shall part:

never quit, sweet drum, my dear, sweet heart.

In a spin over Malaysia solution reboot

POLITICS

Kerry Murphy

Yesterday the Government announced it will change the Migration Act to enable the Malaysia solution to go ahead. The aim is to remove the legal obstacle that allowed the High Court to [declare](#) that Malaysia was not a valid destination to which 'offshore entry persons' could be sent by Australia.

The Malaysia solution and the Government's latest action perpetuate the spin about the mythical 'queue' that has become *de rigueur* over the past decade. Ostensibly it is about making 'unlawful' arrivals 'wait their turn'. But such rhetoric obscures the fact that Australia has international obligations to ensure people are not placed at risk of being returned to persecution.

Over the years we have seen changes in the rhetoric used by governments to justify harsh treatment of asylum seekers. This is about spin and not about respect for human rights and dignity. Versions of reality are created to fit with message. For example, linking the onshore and offshore refugee programs enables politicians to claim there is a 'queue' which is 'jumped' by people arriving by boat.

At the time of [Tampa](#) back in 2001, and for some time thereafter, the spin was all about 'border security'. Taking asylum seekers to Nauru or Manus Island for assessment ensured our borders were secure. But another unstated motivation was to isolate the people from those who could assist them, especially lawyers. The law in this area is complex and most people would find it extremely difficult to articulate their case without professional help.

At the same time as the Tampa legislation in 2001, the 'privative clause' was introduced into the Migration Act as an attempt to stop applicants from challenging cases in the courts.

The privative clause was read back by the High Court in 2004, which held that 'jurisdictional error' did not protect a decision from review. Examples of jurisdictional error include where a decision maker asks themselves the wrong question, or fails to consider a claim. Since then, there have been no major changes to limit judicial review of the cases.

One of the attractive parts for government of offshore processing of asylum seekers arriving by boat since 2008 was the belief that such cases were not reviewable in the Courts. But the High Court stated in November 2010 that the recommendations of independent merits reviewers were in fact reviewable in the High Court, and more traditional common law grounds of administrative review applied.

Since the [boat tragedy](#) off Christmas Island in December 2010, the rhetoric of Government and Opposition has changed from 'border security' to wanting to 'protect' people from the

risks of travelling by boat, or break the 'business model' of people smugglers.

But another objective of assessing cases in Nauru or elsewhere is to reduce the chances of judicial review. If the people are offshore, it will be much harder for lawyers to represent them, and decisions will be less transparent.

Even the most professional bureaucrat can make mistakes, and the Government should not be afraid to have such mistakes corrected by the courts.

The executive, parliamentary and judicial arms of the Commonwealth sit together sometimes awkwardly. Each is supposed to provide some balance in our democracy. However in the area of migration, commonly the parliamentary and executive arms have tried to limit the judicial arm. When this happens, there is little incentive for decision makers to be more scrupulous in their decisions, and the risk of refoulement of refugees to a real chance of persecution, increases.

Let us not forget that this is about protecting people from persecution in their home country, not shoring up votes.

Even the arrival of 600 people a month (which the Government has claimed is likely) is manageable provided the policy of mandatory detention is reformed. Around 20,000 student visas are granted every month, so how will 600 refugees be the cause of social unrest?

The detention system is not working because it is a flawed system designed for small numbers of arrivals. Mandatory detention creates more problems than it solves. Offshore processing is an attempt to limit the judicial oversight of these decisions. Ideally the Government should act in a way that ensures the protection of human rights and treats people with dignity.

Australia's refugee bastardry is biblical

EDITORIAL

Andrew Hamilton

Christian refugees have always identified readily with the Gospel stories of Jesus' trial and killing. In the sufferings of a good man persecuted for no good reason, and subject to unjust laws they can see their own experience reflected.

In the unravelling and current attempts to re-ravel the Malaysian solution, they will be even more strongly impressed and discomfited by the parallels. The stories of Jesus' trial in the four Gospels highlight the triumph of expediency over legality and morality. The Roman governor Pilate recognises that Jesus is not guilty of any crime but still has him first scourged and then crucified. In John's account he ignores the plea of his wife, the voice of conscience.

In the background to the story of Jesus' death is the voice of the crowd. The crowd is easily manipulated and an ever present threat both to Pilate's tenure and to the remaining independence of the local Jewish administration. It is expedient for both levels of government to get rid of Jesus.

Asylum seekers recognise in these details the part that corrupt legal systems played in the persecution from which they fled. They also readily see in Pilate's behaviour similarities to their treatment in Australia.

They know that Australian law commits the government to protect refugees and to detain them only in order to establish their identity. But precisely because they are innocent and are likely to be granted protection as refugees, they are punished by prolonged detention in order to deter others.

They also read enough of the Australian media coverage to know how strongly popular opinion can run against refugees and how it is manipulated by prejudiced journalism.

In the Malaysia solution and the scramble to restore it, asylum seekers familiar with the Christian Gospels will be struck by the detailed similarities.

In John's Gospel, Pilate is caught between the claims that justice makes on him to release Jesus and the voice of the crowd; between being fair and being firm. He hits on the expedience of a swap. He promises the crowd that he will free one prisoner as a favour, and offers them the choice between the innocent Jesus and Barabbas, a terrorist. The crowd, of course, chooses the terrorist. The swap unravels and Pilate is left looking neither fair nor firm.

In Luke's description of Jesus' trial, too, Pilate finds Jesus not guilty of the charges brought against him but then has to face the judgment of the crowd. He tries to escape from his travails by seeking the cooperation of his fellow regional governor, Herod. They were natural rivals

for imperial favour. Knowing that Herod wanted to see Jesus, Pilate sends Jesus to him. He and his court had the opportunity to sport with Jesus and rough him up. Then he sent him back to Pilate.

Luke adds the note that Pilate and Herod became friends on that day. It would be hard for Christian refugees not to be reminded Tony Abbott and Julia Gillard as they reach out to each other in order to pass laws that will stitch asylum seekers up properly and placate the crowd.

Asylum seekers with a sense of history might reflect that Pilate, Herod and the people of the time are now remembered principally for their participation in an act of bastardry. They might then wonder speculatively how Australia today and its two current political leaders will be remembered.

Liberated Libya's fatal flaws

POLITICS

Anthony Ham

The disparate strands of Libya's revolution have been held together by a single unifying thread: an almost visceral desire to oust Colonel Gaddafi from power. Extremely effective as a rallying cry for rebellion, this anti-Gaddafi sentiment is deeply flawed as the unifying narrative for a new nation.

The epic challenges facing Libya's rulers in unifying the country were laid bare in the aftermath of the fall of Tripoli; according to the *New York Times*, the airport was controlled by rebel fighters from Zintan, the central bank, port and prime minister's office were occupied by Misrata rebels, while the iconic central (once Green, now Martyrs) Square was the domain of Berber fighters from Yefren.

Barely a week after the capital's fall to rebel forces, Tripoli had become the unsettling symbol of a liberated but deeply divided nation, a microcosm of the perils facing a country where each region, each rebel brigade, bristling with weapons and a sense of entitlement, stands ready to stake its claim for a piece of the new Libya.

In the same way, the presence in rebel ranks of senior former Gaddafi loyalists threatens to become an uncomfortable source of division. Throughout the revolution, these high-level defections fuelled the perception of a regime crumbling from within, giving hope and momentum to those who dared to dream that the Colonel's days were numbered. As a result, one-time Gaddafi loyalists filled — and continue to fill — many senior positions within the rebels' government-in-waiting.

Mustafa Abdul Jalil, Gaddafi's Justice Minister from 2007 until his escape in 2011, is the head of the National Transition Council (NTC), while Abdul Fatah Younis, Colonel Gaddafi's former number two, served as the commander of the rebel army until his death in late July.

But with Colonel Gaddafi no longer at the helm, questions are being asked whether the new Libya should be ruled over by those so strongly implicated in the old. When Younis was killed not in a battle with Gaddafi loyalists but by soldiers from his own side, it unleashed a wave of suspicion that bodes ill for future reconciliation; tribal elders from Younis' tribe, one of the largest in eastern Libya, threatened to withdraw from rebel ranks. They were appeased only when the entire NTC cabinet was dissolved, effectively leaving the rebel half of the country without a government.

Further missteps followed. After the fall of Tripoli, the NTC named Albarrani Shkal, a former Libyan Army general, as the capital's security chief. Within days, the NTC was forced into an embarrassing backdown after protesters in Misrata complained that Shkal had been

complicit in the former regime's brutal siege of their city. Their replacement appointment, Abdel Hakim Belhaj, a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, is viewed with deep suspicion by the West.

A fellow Islamist rebel commander, Ismail al-Salabi, confirmed the presence of damaging divisions among rebels: 'The role of the executive committee is no longer required because they are remnants of the old regime. They should all resign, starting from the head of the pyramid all the way down.'

As Libya's rebel commanders squabble over the spoils of victory, deeper questions remain about what impact the rebel victory will have for ordinary Libyans and other civilians, particularly migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa.

A central element of Gaddafi's foreign policy had been to lavish riches on African states. Peddling power and influence, Colonel Gaddafi became a champion of African unity, in the process encouraging migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to enter Libya. Over time, African migrant workers became essential pillars in the economy, working in low-wage jobs which few Libyans wanted.

The colonel's openness towards Africa was, however, out of step with Libyan public opinion. Resentment over high levels of unemployment and the unnecessary difficulties of life in an oil-rich country fed occasional outbreaks of unrest with racist undertones; resentment grew in intensity with each passing year.

As a retired air force captain told me in Tripoli in November, 'We know the price of oil, US\$100 a barrel? But where is all this money? It goes to Africa to support those countries because they supported Gaddafi during the sanctions.'

Thus it was that reports of Gaddafi's policy — sometimes true, more often exaggerated — of recruiting African migrant workers as mercenaries touched a raw nerve in Libyan society. And thus it is that those sub-Saharan Africans who survived the conflict now find themselves in a profoundly vulnerable state. Apart from being a pressing humanitarian issue, their fate has become a critical test for rebel promises to build a free and humane Libya.

And yet the success or otherwise of Libya's revolution may be determined far from the halls of power. Libya's future may instead depend on each Libyan's ability to leave behind the suspicions of the past, of a society where each Libyan learned to not so much love their neighbour as to keep a very close eye on them. Fuelled by distrust — both of the state and of fellow Libyans — the retreat into the safety of tribe, religion and even race became an essential survival mechanism for most Libyans.

If the new rulers can build a Libya that earns the respect of ordinary Libyans at the expense of these potential faultlines, the revolution may well succeed. If they can't, the new Libya may be no safer than the old.

