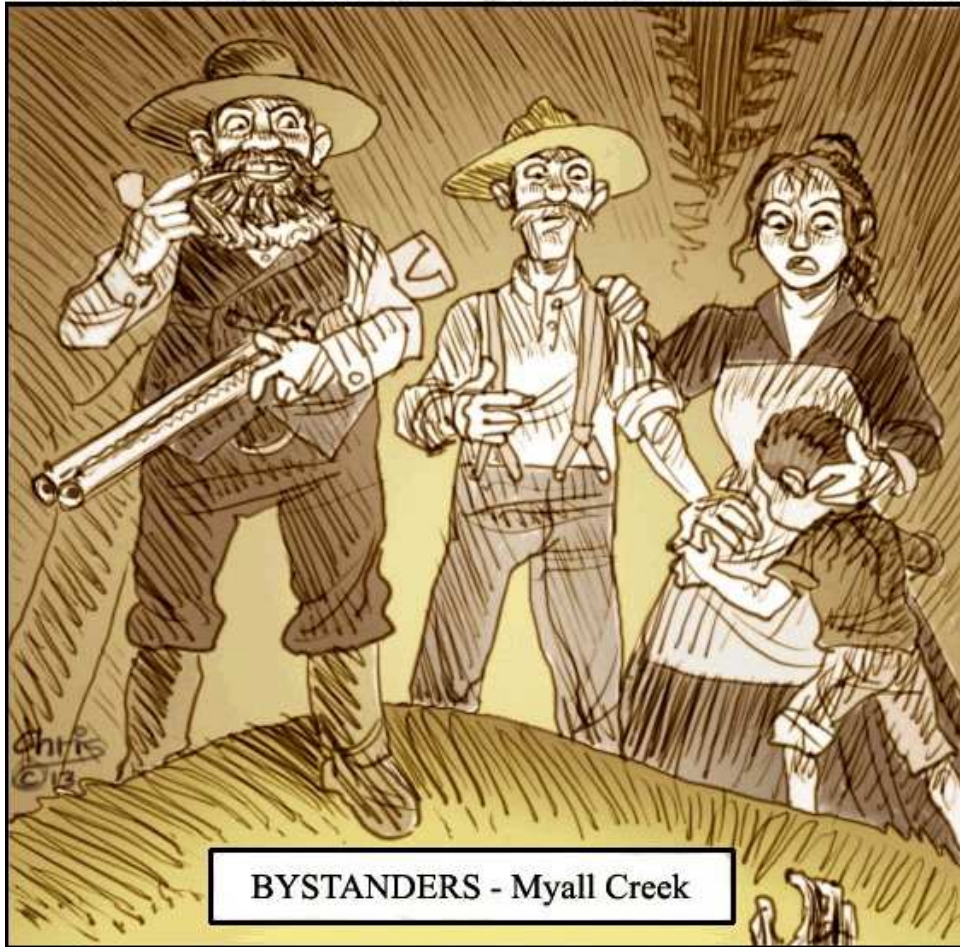


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PO Box 553
Richmond
VIC 3121
Australia

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Tel +61 3 9427 7311
Fax +61 3 9428 4450
Eureka@eurekastreet.com.au

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Abortion drugs wake-up call

COMMUNITY

Kevin McGovern

In obstetrics, a fetus is an unborn child who is recognisably human and in whom all the major structures and organ systems are already present. An embryo is an unborn child from an earlier stage of development. An embryo becomes a fetus about eight weeks after fertilisation.

The 'abortion drug' RU486 kills embryos. RU486 or mifepristone destroys the lining of the womb so that the developing embryo is detached, deprived of nutrients, and dies of starvation. A day or two later, another drug called misoprostol is used to induce contractions and to expel the now-dead embryo.

I find it distressing to contemplate that embryos are being killed in this way. I also find it sad that so many Australian girls and women find themselves in a situation in which abortion seems to them to be their best alternative. I would argue that no one ever truly wants an abortion. But when women face an unplanned pregnancy, they can feel trapped, and that abortion is the only escape.

In September last year, an article was published in the Medical Journal of Australia about the use of RU486 in this country. It [reported](#) on 13,345 chemical abortions using RU486 between 1 September 2009 and 31 August 2011 at 15 Marie Stopes sites around Australia.

Most women reported medium to heavy bleeding, and moderate to severe cramps. The study also detailed 519 cases in which things did not go as planned. There were 382 cases in which the abortion was not complete, and surgical aspiration of the womb was required. In 83 cases the pregnancy continued.

There were 16 cases of haemorrhage, 11 of which required a blood transfusion. There were four cases of known infection, and 21 cases of suspected infection. One woman died as a result of complications. There have also been at least 15 other [RU486-related deaths](#) around the world.

The risk of physical complications after chemical abortion is relatively low, but real. The likelihood of psychological problems — even profound problems like post-traumatic stress disorder — is much greater.

In 2005, Selena Ewing from [Women's Forum Australia](#) examined all the articles about abortion that had then been published in peer-reviewed journals over the previous 15 years. From this review of 168 articles she concluded that there is 'substantial evidence of psychological harm associated with abortion ... Ten to 20 per cent of women suffer from severe psychological complications after abortion'.

There is currently a proposal to include RU486 and misoprostol as subsidised drugs on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. There is also opposition to this, as there should be. The girls and women of Australia who face an unplanned

pregnancy deserve something better from our society than cheap abortion drugs.

If we are concerned about abortion in Australia and the dilemmas which Australian women face, what should we do in the months and years ahead? I can think of at least four things.

We should help everyone to develop their metaphysical imagination. Our imagination helps us see realities that are not immediately obvious. Metaphysics is reflection on the nature of things. Our metaphysical imagination therefore helps us to see that embryos, even though they look quite different from us, are truly human beings.

Bernadette [faced](#) an unplanned pregnancy when she was 16. Her son Damien is now 20. If you met Damien, you would be pleased that Bernadette allowed Damien to be born. And if you contemplated the connection between Damien today and Damien as he was in the womb, you would be exercising your metaphysical imagination.

Secondly, we must provide honest sex education. No method of contraception except sterilisation is completely reliable, so in heterosexual sex there is always a chance of pregnancy. If someone and their proposed sexual partner are not able to make a life-giving decision about a possible pregnancy, they are not ready for sex.

Their life-giving decision might be that they will be able to keep and raise their child or, if that is not possible, to continue the pregnancy to term, and offer their child up for adoption. With the open adoption we practise nowadays, they will be able to maintain contact with their child, and visit him or her several times a year.

Thirdly, we must support girls and women who face unplanned pregnancy and are considering abortion. John Paul II said in these cases 'the only honest stance is ... radical solidarity with the woman'. Around Australia there are many [groups](#) and individuals who offer practical support to women who face unplanned pregnancies or need support to bring up the children they have chosen to keep.

Fourthly, we must offer support and the hope of healing to women and men who have been hurt by abortion. After abortion, many women suffer for many years with grief, guilt and remorse. Often, they suffer in silence, their abortions remaining a shameful secret. We must find ways to help these women. [Rachel's Vineyard](#) retreats in capital cities round Australia provide one such option.

The proposal to provide cheap abortion drugs is a wake-up call to those of us who are concerned about abortion in Australia, and about the dilemmas which Australian women face.

Abbott's animal charms

BOOK CHAT

Barry Gittins and Jen Vuk

***Political Animal*, David Marr, Black Inc. Publishing, April 2013**

Barry:

David Marr's *Quarterly Essay* 'Political Animal' (September 2012) set felines squarely among the critical pigeons.

Mined for its curiosity factor by *Crikey*, panned as partisan by *Quadrant* (Marr is a 'ruthless, steely-eyed ideologue of the Left') and dismissed as overblown by the Sydney Institute, most discussion revolved around the 'she said, he said' defamation proceedings (delayed until February 2014) concerning physical intimidation Abbott allegedly used in his salad days of university, counter-reactionary opposition to social change, and rugby.

This Black Inc. edition, with inflamed legal context and increased depth, is Marr's essay on steroids.

He scours the dank recesses of Australian political life with new insights into Student Tony and comments on disputed turf, in a surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of a deeply fissured figure bifurcated into Values Abbott (largely pre-leadership) and Politics Abbott (the new women-friendly soundbiter).

It sizzles with post-essay responses, Abbott's arbitrary use of language and rejection of criticisms, lending new light to Abbott's ongoing approaches to media and issues (such as his continued labelling of boatloads of asylum seekers as 'illegals').

Marr's is a necessarily partial view of Abbott's psyche. Balanced? Mostly. Critical? Assuredly. Presenting former journo Abbott as junkyard dog and supreme negator is one thing. Citing former PM Paul Keating's statement — 'Tony Abbott's policy is: "If you don't give me the job, I'll wreck the place"' — however, is overkill.

How do you find the overt warnings, Jen? I find Marr more effective when he wields his stiletto, as with his take on Abbott's jeremiads: 'His pitch to the fearful is the nameless dread of change in a fragile world ... [in] a profoundly conservative brand of politics that deals in panic and threat.'

Casting a Victorious PM Abbott as a puppet of Pell and Howard, or a fiddler with women's rights, seems risible; Abbott is bound by social restraints. Still, Marr ominously cites Abbott's mantra: be guided by principles but don't spook the cattle: 'sufficiently impress the public [but] don't worry the public [into thinking] you would be a risk if you found yourself in a position of power'. (How *does* Marr's Abbott come off to women, Jen?)

Perception counts; choice looms. 'On most ... social issues that define modern Australia Gillard's party and Abbott's party see eye to eye,' Marr opines, accurately. His Abbott is a disciplined pugilist, refraining from wild counterpunches, lest he soil his scorecard and lose the bout.

I still find Abbott's notion that written truths are weightier (more valid?) than spoken truths disturbing (Marr notes Abbott's ABC appearances dwindled remarkably since that gaffe).

Reinforcing my distaste at Abbott's policies and practices, Marr grounds his fears of Abbott Resurgent in a visible lack of grace. Bullying and badgering. Dissing the late anti-asbestos campaigner Bernie Banton, prone on his deathbed. Treating women contemptibly. I'm transfixed by Marr's Hulk Abbott, raging silently at a telejournalist's queries with unacted violence and dead air.

Political Animal demands acceptance or rejection of Wall-Bashing Tony's existence, or Strident Homophobe Tony's fears. Are you convinced, Jen?

Jen:

Well, Barry, I can't say I was expecting Marr's extended character study to change my mind about the Man-Who-Would-Be-Prime-Minister (in short: I'm no fan), but I was a little more open to a change of heart.

Abbott — or 'Abbo' to his mates — arrives on the page highly ambitious yet dangerously blinkered. A 17-year-old with a 'rough-house brand of Catholic evangelism', driven not by piety, but by 'glory and discipline'.

What is perhaps most surprising about these early years was that the Liberal party wasn't initially on Abbott's radar. Yet his decision to, in the end, become a card-carrying member was, Marr argues, completely in character. 'His values have never stood in his way,' he notes drolly.

It's unfortunate that the same can be said for the women in his life. *Political Animal* does little to dispel the belief that they've played a support — or archetypal — role in Abbott's drama. From his mother and sisters who were convinced he was 'cut out' for political greatness, to his wife Margie, who has next to no voice in the book.

His former pregnant girlfriend Kathy McDonald is presented as the woman who almost stood between Abbott and the Rhodes scholarship and priesthood; and Barbara Ramjan, the fellow student who beat him in student politics, as the woman who provoked him.

The Ramjan affair really threw Abbott, didn't it Barry? Despite denying that any threat took place during his only (off-the-record) interview for the book, we didn't buy it. How could we? One look at his moves tells us something of his motives. 'He walks as though he has to will each leg forward,' Marr writes. 'His face is skin and bone. He smiles but his eyes are hooded. The overall effect is faintly menacing, as

if he's about to climb into the ring.'

Marr has such a distinctive voice that towards the end I grew more aware of his presence on the page — and of a shift in mood. Somewhere along the line — perhaps at the juncture of 'superhero' Abbott plucking children from a burning building — Marr seems to abandon his critical position and, dare I say it, take to Abbott's corner.

I find this burgeoning bromance more than a little disquieting. (Watch Marr championing Abbott on a recent episode of Q&A for further evidence.) If its purpose in the book was to engender empathy then it didn't work on me. [*Barry: I prefer to think of Marr's lissome rapprochement with Abbott as classic Stockholm syndrome.*]

Which Abbott do you think we will get if he becomes our next PM, Barry? Your guess is as good as mine. As for Marr, he's keeping mum. 'I wish I could quote his answer,' he writes cryptically. 'My sense is we'll get the Abbott he decides to give us at any particular time.'

Abbott may not have jumped for joy to be put under the microscope, but in Marr he couldn't have found a more thorough biographer. More worrying for me in this election year is that he may also have found an unlikely ally.

Ensnared by sex abuse paranoia

FILMS

Tim Kroenert

***The Hunt* (MA). Director: Thomas Vinterberg. Starring: Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo Larsen, Annika Wedderkopp, Lasse Fogelström, Susse Wold. 116 minutes**

This excellent Danish film is difficult to write about in the context of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. One of the most unpalatable aspects of such abuse cases, notably within the Catholic Church, is the way in which the word and wellbeing of perpetrators has seemed at times to be given precedence over those of their young victims. No one would doubt that the reverse should be true.

Yet on the surface *The Hunt* appears to be a cautionary tale about the consequences of vigilance succumbing to paranoia. It centres on small-town kindergarten teacher, Lucas (Mikkelsen), whose life falls apart after he is wrongfully accused of abusing a young female student. To the viewer he is clearly a victim of persecution, and yet his persecutors' actions are based simply on the fact that they have taken an alleged victim at her word.

Well, in a way. His 'accuser', Klara (Wedderkopp), is a sensitive and imaginative child, confused by the emotions of a pre-adolescent crush on her kind and handsome teacher. Her comments are first misconstrued and then blown out of proportion by genuinely concerned and well-meaning adults. She is the daughter of Lucas' best friend Theo (Larsen) and so gets a front seat view of the subsequent fallout in Lucas' life.

We are entirely sympathetic to Lucas, but also to Klara, who intended no harm, had no inkling of the damage she would set in motion and, once the destruction begins to unfold, is powerless to stop it; the adults in her life are as slow to accept her retractions as they were fast to accept her 'accusations'. The film is exceptional in its sensitive and nuanced treatment of Klara and her responses.

I have seen *The Hunt* twice — once at last year's Melbourne International Film Festival, and again at a recent media preview — and both times could not deny the outrage and sense of injustice felt on behalf of Lucas, and those few who are loyal and unlucky enough to stand by him (including his until-recently estranged teenage son, played by Fogelström). What makes the film difficult though is that it is hard to apportion blame for the injustice.

After all, the town's adults are guilty only of wanting to protect their children. It is Lucas' senior colleague at the kindergarten, Grethe (Wold), who initially mistakes Klara's perturbation for post-abuse trauma, and she simply takes the situation seriously, as well she should. That said, the speed with which she begins to inform other parents of the allegations is questionable. They are, after all, the

kind of allegations that stick like mud.

There is an excruciating scene early in the film in which a counsellor interviews Klara in Grethe's presence, and together these well-meaning adults lead the young girl to confirm the conclusion that they have clearly already reached. The picture that emerges is one of a denial of due process and natural justice for the innocent Lucas. The acts of implied and actual violence that he is subjected to as the film progresses reinforce this impression.

These are good reasons to feel outraged on Lucas' behalf. But given the nature of the crimes he is supposed to have committed, can we condemn his tormentors outright? Isn't child abuse a crime that demands utmost vigilance? Isn't it right that a child's right to safety should be absolute, despite an adult's protestations of innocence? Isn't this one of the key lessons of the Church's abuse crisis? Few could disagree.

But there is a genuine ethical dilemma here that is explored with tremendous nuance and gravity and which gives great moral tension to this outstanding film. Rather than a cautionary tale perhaps *The Hunt* is best viewed as a tragedy; a sense of inevitability hangs over the proceedings, as if there is no other way that the events could have played out, for which only the very existence of the evil of child abuse in the world can be blamed.

Catholicism beyond slogans

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

In the Catholic Church over recent years there has been much talk of evangelisation, the New Evangelisation and, more recently, of Evangelical Catholicism. These phrases are often used as slogans, but the questions to which they are answers are important beyond the Catholic Church.

The question is how to hand on a tradition, whether that be of a church or a nation. In the Catholic Churches of the West it has long been recognised as an acute challenge. When societies were Catholic, or Catholics formed a cohesive cultural group, the ascription of young Catholics to the Catholic Church could be taken for granted. It was part of communal identity.

In Western societies today communal allegiances are weak. They are not automatically handed on but need to be chosen. Comparatively few young people born into Catholic families choose to commit to their church.

That is why preaching the gospel (evangelisation), a phrase previously used mainly of missionaries going into non-Christian societies, came to name a task for Catholics in nominally Christian societies. If people were to choose to be or stay Catholic, faith had to be commended as a personal choice.

Towards the beginning of the new millennium Pope John Paul II spoke of a new evangelisation. He emphasised the importance of a personal commitment and relationship with Christ within the Church. Out of the happiness found in that commitment would follow the desire to share faith with others. A church whose members had such a strong commitment, too, would be a vibrant body that could contribute effectively to building a better society.

Evangelical Catholicism is a more recent description of that deep personal faith in Christ, nourished by prayer and the scriptures and lived faithfully in the Catholic Church. It is an attractive personal ideal.

Many Catholics have had reservations about the boosting of New Evangelisation and its variants. It often functioned as a slogan, avoiding reflection on the reasons why the Church was unattractive to young people.

By many of its advocates, among them [George Weigel](#), it has also been presented in sharp opposition to other forms of Catholic membership, particularly to liberal Catholicism and cultural Catholicism. These were seen as only marginally or selectively Catholic and as unable to encourage a personal commitment to Christ.

Central to some presentations of Evangelical Catholicism, too, was a strong and narrow focus on Catholic teaching on issues of life and sexuality. Commitment to the poor, to peace, to social justice and to the environment were seen as

discretionary, political or as a distraction. The central political issues for Catholics were named as those of personal morality, not of social morality.

The core insight of Evangelical Catholicism is correct. Those who belong to the Catholic Church and to other religious groups, will increasingly do so, not through birth into Catholic families or Catholic schooling, but by personal choice. Their commitment will be counter cultural, and will need to rest on a personal commitment to Christ and a strong allegiance to the Catholic community.

It is also true that the future of Catholicism will not rest with Liberal Catholicism. But neither will it rest with Conservative Catholicism nor Evangelical Catholicism. Not because those who would define themselves as members of such groupings are liberal or conservative, but because they are essentially reactive.

They derive their strength and energy from opposition to the perceived weakness or wickedness of other groups and of their clerical champions. People are rarely motivated to take out a membership of a footy club simply out of hatred for a faction within it. Nor are they much of a gift to their chosen club if that is why they join it.

If it is to be more than a slogan Evangelical Catholicism must also be a radical Catholicism. Not for sociological reasons but to show that it is rooted in the following of Jesus Christ. And that implies attitudes to human life, to the use of wealth and power, to conflict, to relationships to one another and to the environment, which will be counter-cultural in any society and in any economic or political order.

These attitudes will be expressed naturally in a personal simplicity of life, in an affinity with those deprived and despised in society, and in an engagement with society based in respect and compassion. They will also be reflected in a diversity of theologies, spiritualities and political priorities among Catholics. Evangelical means good news, and good news always makes its hearers more free.

Giving stick to incipient police violence

NON-FICTION

Brian Doyle

I have never been arrested (yet), but I have been asked politely to accompany a police officer to the local station to sort out what he called a misunderstanding, and it is that bright crystalline afternoon, on a beach, that I wish to recount here.

I had been strolling along the beach with two college friends, one of whom had never had a drop of drink in his life, and the other who had, that day, too many. He was in a cheerful mood, addressing raffish remarks to passersby, until one passerby was an officer of the law, who stopped us and inquired as to sobriety.

We sober gentlemen reported ourselves so, and we made excuses for our companion, who stood swaying gently as we explained that he was not altogether what you would call sober, but we were escorting him safely back to a place of rest, and we were not driving, or armed, or contemplating any other flouting of the law other than intoxication on the beach, which, however, applied to only a third of us, all things considered.

The police officer was a youngish man, sturdy and tanned, and while he seemed slightly amused, he was not very amused, and his thoughts became clear when he asked our unsober friend what he had in his pockets, and our friend replied, in a much clearer firmer voice than you would expect from an intoxicated young man replying to a question from a policeman, *Why don't you reach in there and find out, copper?*

He said the word *copper* with a particular flourish, just like he was in a movie and he was a gangster making a terse remark about an officer of the law, and perhaps it was this little extra emphasis that tipped the cop from slightly amused to *come with me, boys*, which he said, tersely, and which we did, dragging our friend.

The police station was only a block inland from the beach, and it looked more like a lifeguard shack than a regular police station, but inside there were other policemen, and a booking sergeant, and a drunk tank, and posters of wanted men on the walls, and the jangle of handcuffs on belts, and I saw, for the first time in my life, a nightstick, sitting on the booking counter in front of the grim sergeant.

Now, a nightstick doesn't sound fearsome — I think it's the word stick that dilutes the word, stick being a cousin of twig — but when you see one up close you have a lot of respect for the inherent and incipient violence of the thing. I stared at it for a while, contemplating how a burly policeman with his feet set could deliver a terrible cracking blow to a head or a shoulder or an arm flung across your face to protect your eyes and brains.

Well, the misunderstanding was cleared up fairly quickly, and stern admonitions

were issued, and vows and promises sworn, and every time our unsober friend opened his mouth to make some witty remark he got an elbow sharp as a stick in the ribs, so much so that he said his ribs hurt for days afterwards, and soon enough we had been bundled back onto the beach and were slogging through the sand with our friend, who began to sing.

For years afterwards my sober friend and I told this story with glee, because there is a comic element to it, but curiously now what comes back to me first when I think of that brilliant crystalline afternoon is not the foolish remark, or the calm of the policeman, or the sadness of the drunk tank, but that nightstick on the counter.

We have hammered each other with sticks for a million years now, and even now that we have invented the most astounding and devious weaponry, we still lean on sticks and rocks when we lose our tempers and wish to bash out the brains of our cousins.

All my life I have spoken against violence in some forms and loved it in others, and now that I near 60 I despair of ever rooting it out from my own heart; and every day, I tell you, every day, I wonder deep in my soul if we will ever evolve to the point where we have finally lost the urge altogether, and settle our arguments with chess, or laughter, or games of darts.

When I was younger I was absolutely sure that there would come a day when to see a nightstick you would have to visit a museum; now that the night is ever so much closer for me, I am not so sure. Will you tell me, can you tell me, that this will come to pass? That however many of us are convinced, that is how much closer it is?

Banksters' deadly game of Sheldon's three-person chess

ECONOMICS

David James

There is a disease plaguing the global financial system that can be characterised as a willingness of governments to give up the responsibility to set the rules of money, and hand it over to private traders and the banks that facilitate the trading. In effect the umpire, government, has handed over the rules of the game to the players.

It is reminiscent of the three-person-chess that the eccentric character Sheldon invents in the television show *The Big Bang Theory*, which, according to the [Big Bang Theory Wiki](#), 'utilises a non-standard, three-sided board with transitional quadrilateral-to-triangular tessellation to solve the balanced centre combat-area problem, additional (or fairy) pieces, and different rules for capture, move order, and game objective'.

Such gobbledegook sounds suspiciously similar to the application of mathematical models to financial securities in derivatives markets: high tech nonsense that can be brought undone at any time by the vagaries of crowd behaviour. The results have been sputtering economic growth, virtually no cost of money in most of the developed world and continual financial crises, mainly in the peripheral countries of the Euro zone.

The 'three-person chess' that financiers were allowed to create is called the derivatives market: transactions derived from more familiar activities such as bond markets, stock markets, currencies and bank debt.

Derivatives are a legitimate form of insurance if they are on the margin, but they have taken over. The global economy — the buying and selling of goods and services — is about \$60 trillion. According to the McKinsey Institute global financial assets (shares, bonds, bank debt) are about \$250 trillion. The Bank for International Settlements estimates the stock of derivatives is about \$700 trillion.

Derivatives markets are driving what is happening in the 'real' economy and 'real' financial markets (the Greek and Italian financial crises, for instance, have a lot to do with the use of derivatives by those governments to cover their real debts). And that is proving extremely hard for economists and regulators to analyse. In effect, they are accustomed to analysing chess moves, not Sheldon's three-person meta-chess.

The International Monetary Fund recently conducted a conference to consider the future of macro economics as a discipline, which is looking distinctly frayed at the edges. IMF economist Olivier Blanchard expressed the widespread confusion:

Five years into the crisis, the contours of the macroeconomic policy of the future are only slowly coming into focus. From macroeconomic to financial stability, policy

makers have realised that they have to watch many targets. They have also realised that they have potentially many more instruments at their disposal, from macro prudential tools to unconventional monetary policy.

But how to map instruments to targets remains very much a work in progress.

If regulators and financial analysts are confused, the big banks are not. They know where their interests lie — in protecting the derivatives markets from either scrutiny or change.

Dr Robert Johnson, executive director of the Institute for New Economic Thinking, recently commented that the problems started with the Thatcher era — when financial ‘deregulation’ was instituted mainly using economist Milton Friedman’s ‘snake oil’ philosophy, the illusion that markets are stable and self correcting.

The attorney general of the US, Eric Holder has said he cannot prosecute crimes in the largest banks because it might undermine confidence. Clear evidence that the umpires cannot umpire because the game has been handed over to the players.

Johnson describes the US as a ‘money politics system’. The derivatives system, he estimates, is 97 per cent dominated by six banks, which make about \$35 billion a year. If derivatives were properly structured, put on exchanges, made more transparent and properly capitalised, it is estimated that the banks would lose about a fifth of their profit, about \$7 billion a year.

‘You get a financial bill through Congress about every five years. So the excess profit is about \$35 billion,’ said Johnson. ‘As it turns out the banking lobbies spend about \$600 million, which overwhelms American politics. It is the dominant force in American politics given the importance of money and how our society works. For \$600 million these guys can protect \$35 billion of profit. Fabulous risk return for them. Terrible for society.’

Francesco Musolino, in a paper ‘Game Theory for Speculative Derivatives: a Possible Stabilising Regulatory Model’, [describes](#) how self contained the financial world has become:

The current financial system is based on virtual money, which does not confluence into the real economy, remaining stuck in the finance. Possible solutions? Before arriving to a point of no return (which is actually not so far), it becomes appropriate, and perhaps vital, to establish the ‘rules of the game’, in order to redistribute the social wealth in a way at least close to the concept of equity.

Establishing better financial rules is what is needed, but the banks will resist it, and with such financial power they are likely to succeed, making another crisis likely.

Bitter battles between the banks and governments are not new; they have occurred for about two centuries in the United States. Franklin D. Roosevelt, for instance, in the 1930s used the word 'banksters' to decry 'the ruthless manipulation of professional gamblers and the corporate system' that allowed 'a few powerful interests to make industrial cannon fodder of the lives of half the population'.

But financial globalisation means that what used to be mainly an American problem is now a danger for the whole world.

Frantic chat on the world wide spider web

POETRY

Various

A question for Jane

'A mind lively and at ease, can do with seeing nothing, and can see nothing that does not answer.'

Austen, Emma

And in the raucosity of blogs
the avidity of trolls
the ubiquity of porn
the vidvidvidity of tubes
the facebookery of profiles
the aviary of twittervation —
can the mind still find
that space to stretch itself,
is ease possible amongst such sticky webs —
or are we all half-fly now,
wrapped in frantic, silken chat?

P. S. Cottier

My old typewriter

It sat upright, piano keyboard height,
Keys sparkled, tip-tap order,
I found, or someone did for me, I won't explain why,
It was a Qwerty Who invented the neighbourhood
Of letters, fidget, digit, gadget.
The Remington was always hot-to-trot, randy,
You could hit hard, tantrum strength, writer's block,
Desperation, until the bell rang,
End of line, end of story, nobody heard,
Not even the children in the schoolyard.

Now Gutenberg is sleeping, printing presses
Are next to a used-car lot, letters lying prone.

Peter Gebhardt

Perspective

Stick out your tongue,
the right side of your mouth.
Find a mirror.

Don't bite down.

No photographs, believe me.

Breathing through the nose
send an email to a friend
who lives in her illness.

Help Douglass with his shopping.

Fall into No Noise.

Don't beg.

Collect a prize & be puzzled.

Les Wicks

This suburb

This suburb — beginning, middle and end —
was once entirely bushland.

One hundred percent banksia and marri woodland.

Or, that's what's claimed.

So let's just pretend:

No access roads, no shopping mall, no cinema.

Nowhere for coffee, nowhere at all to spend.

Just an unrelenting community of trees.

The scrambled Jackson Pollock calligraphy of undergrowth.

The cicadas' unceasing, seething unease.

Unviable, yet remarkably, it seems
some still have regrets.

Ross Jackson

My family connection to Aboriginal genocide

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Paul Newbury

In 2012, I began to write a memoir of my active involvement in support of the rights of Indigenous Australians and I have been seeking information about the Kamilaroi people who were part of my growing up in the NSW country towns of Werris Creek and Walgett.

Kamilaroi traditional country roughly covers the New England district where many of my forebears lived and I sought information on massacres that have been documented regarding Kamilaroi people.

These include the Waterloo Creek massacre on the Gwydir River in January 1838 where troops and stockmen under the command of Major James Nunn massacred up to 200 Kamilaroi people over a number of days.

In June 1838 a party of convicts and former convicts led by a settler murdered over 40 Kamilaroi people camped peaceably on Myall Creek Station. They were executed by gun and sabre and most victims were beheaded.

An account by historian Lyndall Ryan of Newcastle University, '*A Very Bad Business': Henry Dangar and the Myall Creek Massacre 1838* [reveals](#) that those responsible returned the next day to murder 12 people absent on the first occasion. Seven of the 12 men charged with the crime were hanged.

In my research into the New England area, I came across *Bluff Rock: Autobiography of a Massacre* written by Katrina Schlunke (Curtin University Books 2005). Schlunke is unknown to me but she is my cousin by birth. She discusses two books of the local history genre written by her aunt Genevieve Newbury, *Mother of Ducks* and *Echoes on the Wind*. The books make a number of references to my father, grandfather and great grandparents.

Under the heading 'The Pioneering Families of New England', Schlunke reveals that the children of John Eckersley Newbury and Bridget Newbury owned 18 pastoral leases in New England with names like Snowflake, Ward's Mistake and Deepwater. I was gobsmacked to learn that my great-grandfather was a convict and a squatter.

I wondered how he had progressed so well from his convict beginnings. So, I sought to gain a profile of his life.

John Eckersley Newbury (1820—1900) was born in Manchester, England, and he worked as an errand boy. In 1838, he stole a pair of boots and lead from a roof. He was sentenced to seven years transportation to Australia.

He arrived in Sydney on the John Berry on 22 March 1839. He had one attribute that many did not — he could read and write. By 1850, he had gained his

freedom. He married Bridget Kennedy at Yarrabin near Mudgee on 24 April 1857 which is where her parents moved after arriving in Australia as immigrants in 1841. They raised 15 children, the first of whom was my grandfather, William Henry Newbury (1858—1931).

By 1850, land-hungry squatters were overlanding their herds through the Hunter Valley, New England and on to the Darling Downs in Queensland. They formed a self-interested group who dominated the politics of the colony. 'Squatting' became so widespread by the mid-1830s that government policy in NSW towards the practice shifted from opposition to regulation and control. Newfound respectability earned many squatters seats in parliament.

John Eckersley Newbury became wealthy through a generous land policy and because the Kennedy family helped set him up as a squatter. In 1866, he drove 12,000 sheep from Mudgee to Inverell where he established himself. Returns on squatter activities were considerable from the 1850s with great demand for mutton and beef on the goldfields as well as the rapidly expanding British market for fleece and tallow.

During this period, the Kamilaroi fought a guerilla war of resistance against the British. The conflict is known as the Frontier Wars where the natives lived off speared cattle and sheep because British land practices had a negative effect on marsupial numbers. Eventually, the tide of war favoured the well armed and mounted British.

The Myall Creek Memorial of the infamous massacre has seven plaques dedicated to the lives and the experiences of the Wirrayararaay people who were a tribal clan of the Kamilaroi nation. The bronze plaque on the main memorial stone reads, in Kamilaroi and English:

In memory of the Wirrayararaay people who were murdered on the slopes of this ridge in an unprovoked but premeditated act in the late afternoon of 10 June 1838.

Erected on 10 June 2000 by a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians in an act of reconciliation and in acknowledgement of the truth of our shared history

We remember them — Ngiyani winagay ganunga.

The most significant outcome of my discovery of my New England ancestry is that I acknowledge the role my forebears played in the genocide and dispossession of the Kamilaroi. Many Australians hesitate to associate settlers with genocide in the dispossession of Australia's Indigenous peoples but the evidence is overwhelming.

The UN Convention on Genocide 1948 defines genocide as the 'systematic attempt to destroy a defined group's essential foundations'. Australian genocide expert Colin Tatz believes Australia is guilty of at least two specific acts of

genocide, namely the massacres of Aboriginal people committed by settlers in the 18th and 19th century while colonial governments stood silently by; and the Australian practice of forcibly transferring Aboriginal children from one group to another with the express intention that 'they cease to be Aboriginal'.

The UN Convention recognises three parties to genocide — perpetrators, victims and bystanders. The category of bystander includes those who condone what is happening, those who are indifferent to what is going on, and those who fail to do everything in their power to stop what is going on.

The promising feature of the Myall Creek Memorial is that people have turned it around, making commemoration of the massacre the foundation of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Hope for a Malaysian Spring

POLITICS

Sven Schottman and Lily Zubaidah Rahim

Malaysians will soon vote in one of their country's most anticipated elections since independence in 1957. Prime Minister Najib Razak (pictured) has yet to lead his government to success at a federal election, having been appointed when his predecessor stepped down in the wake of the ruling party's worst performance in decades.

Amid uneven economic growth, anxieties over increased levels of crime and anger over the government's mishandling of an insurgent stand-off in Sabah state, Najib had long been reluctant to call for elections. The government appeared intent on exhausting the opposition in an undeclared, two years long campaign period.

Almost four years to the date he was appointed, Najib dissolved parliament, and elections are to take place next Sunday 5 May . Most analysts expect his Barisan Nasional/National Front coalition (BN) to scrape in, largely through gerrymandering, control of the mainstream media and other impediments to the increasingly popular opposition.

But the BN is widely predicted to lose further seats in federal parliament, continuing the process of attrition that became evident at the 2008 elections, when it lost its customary two-thirds majority.

Malaysia's ruling coalition faces a dilemma similar to the People's Action Party in neighbouring Singapore, which experienced its worst performance in the island republic's 2011 elections. Ironically, both appear to have sowed the seeds of their own decline, having delivered prolonged periods of economic growth and overseeing the emergence of a sizeable, educated and prosperous middle class.

But for how much longer can a party like the BN retain its claim to uninterrupted rule without reinventing itself and adjusting to new realities?

Amid the democratic transitions that have swept Asia over the last 20 years as well as the protest movements of the Middle East, a growing number of Malaysians appear unwilling to countenance any further the BN's paternalistic brand of politics — or acquiesce in the myriad corruption and political scandals to which some of its politicians have been linked.

Large-scale protests, including the 'Bersih' rallies demanding electoral reform, have galvanised civil society. There is a palpable demand for change, particularly among younger voters. While Najib's personal popularity remains relatively high, polls suggest that only 45 per cent of Malaysians are satisfied with BN rule.

Whether this groundswell of dissatisfaction will translate to a change in government is in some ways immaterial. What does matter is that the old ways of

governing have lost much of their former appeal, and the government can no longer afford to treat general elections as foregone conclusions.

A change in government in Malaysia has also been hindered by lingering doubts about the viability of the opposition Pakatan Rakyat/People's Pact coalition — a tenuous alliance of Islamic and secular parties that has yet to clearly spell out its alternative nation-building paradigm. Nonetheless, the PR's de facto leader, former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, has succeeded in bringing together these disparate forces.

PR won control of five states in the 2008 elections, and has performed reasonably well in federal politics. Whether it can ultimately succeed in unseating BN at the federal level will depend on the degree to which the Islamic party PAS can position itself as a centrist party to 'middle-Malaysia'. Reformist elements in PAS recognise that the party must modernise if it is to emulate the success of Turkey's pragmatic AKP government.

This includes reaching out more effectively to non-Muslim Malaysians who make up just below 40 per cent of the population. To do this, PAS must clearly articulate its position on the Islamic state, constitutionalism, religious pluralism and gender and citizenship rights. Thus far, it has managed to remain opaque.

BN is at a crossroads. Does Najib have the political will and vision to initiate genuine political reform? Or is the son of Malaysia's second and nephew of the country's third prime minister too closely embedded in the old order? In his four years as prime minister he has exhibited a somewhat uninspiring and sometimes dithering leadership, with bold visions for renewal often melting away into inaction.

What Malaysia needs is a new governance paradigm to meet its many pressing socio-economic and political challenges. The country has to make critical adjustments in order to reposition itself over the next decade. Economic growth appears to have plateaued and Malaysia must reinvent itself in the face of growing competition from Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and China.

The road ahead will also entail some serious rethinking of what it means to be Malaysian. As a growing number of Malaysians look for alternatives to the racialised status quo, political elites are called upon to provide better leadership to consolidate notions of 'Malaysian' identity.

As the eminent Malaysian social anthropologist Professor Shamsul Amri Baharuddin remarked recently, the country has made progress in state-building but is still no closer to achieving nationhood nearly 60 years after independence. Whoever wins the elections will have to confront the daunting task of rebuilding state institutions and forging a new consensus on what it means to be Malaysian.

Aged care dirty work done dirt cheap

THE AGENDA

Michael Mullins

The Federal Government's \$1.2 billion plan to lift the wages of aged care workers from July is in danger of collapsing. This is due to employer dissatisfaction with an increased role for unions, and frustration that the package falls short of the Productivity Commission's recommendations for aged care reform.

The ageing of the population will require the size of the notoriously underpaid workforce to treble by 2050, and the Labor Government is offering to contribute towards pay rises above the award wage. But the industry is unhappy with the condition that employers sign up to enterprise bargaining agreements, which is deemed necessary to ensure that employers do not pocket the funds.

An industry body [argues](#) that the plan discriminates against the 65 per cent of the aged-care sector that are small and standalone providers, with nearly half the large Catholic component of the sector unlikely to sign up. But inaction that leads to failure to reach an agreement to secure the earmarked funds amounts to discrimination against one of the most vulnerable groups of the population.

What is often regarded as 'basic' nursing care is actually a demanding and complex role, dependent upon both an often unrecognised level of skill and discretion on the part of the worker. As Sydney University health educator Professor Mary Chiarella [argues](#), these workers are invariably the ones who make or break the dignity of a person in aged care, by how sensitively they choose to perform their role.

Despite what those who don't do this work might think, it is not basic — it is extremely psychologically complex. Cleaning patients who are soiled with excreta, blood, or vomitus, who feel ashamed of themselves for being 'dirty' or for 'losing control, and restoring both their hygiene and their sense of self worth in the process, requires the highest order of skill.

Chiarella describes much of what nurses do as 'invisible', performing the most private of functions for a patient, such as washing genitalia. Nurses do things which have the potential to strip patients of their dignity, but most of the time they choose to enhance it. Managing sensitive issues to do with the body is not given the same status as a psychiatrist handling sensitive issues of the mind, because it is considered 'dirty' menial or domestic work.

As is the case in many workplaces, there is an important link between pay and performance. If the workers are treated with dignity, they are more likely to treat the patients with dignity, which is what aged care is all about.

It's time to step up negotiations. Wage increases for aged care workers should not be allowed to become yet another laudable but failed Gillard Government

initiative that an incoming Coalition government refuses to countenance because of its stated commitment to fiscal responsibility.

The dignity of older Australians is not expendable.

High Court hedges bets on free speech

POLITICS

Patrick McCabe

The Westboro Baptist Church dwells on the furthest extremities of the Christian right. Its tiny congregation believes God kills US soldiers to demonstrate his disapproval of the US's tolerance of gay people. It feels this belief is best propagated by staging inflammatory 'protests' at these soldiers' funerals.

One might expect that these sickening demonstrations would fall foul of US law. But in 2011 the US Supreme Court decided otherwise. It effectively decided that the church's right to freedom of speech trumped the right of families to farewell their loved one in peace.

Most Australians would no doubt declare 'Only in America'. But something similar almost happened here.

Over the last few years, radical Muslim cleric Man Haron Monis and his friend Amirah Droudis have written letters to the families of Australian soldiers who have died in Afghanistan, insulting the recently-departed soldiers' memories by, to take one example, referring to a soldier's corpse as the 'dirty body of a pig'.

These men were charged under a law that prohibits sending 'menacing, harassing or offensive' letters. They appealed the charge to the High Court by arguing that this law against sending offensive letters ran against the 'freedom of political communication' that is implied in our Constitution.

Noone used to think our Constitution had a right to freedom of speech in it. But in the 1990s, the High Court decided that in fact our Constitution necessarily implied that a certain amount of 'freedom of political communication' must be allowed.

The argument is that our Constitution clearly establishes a system of representative and responsible government, but you can't have that unless people know what the government is doing, who the candidates to be our representatives are, what those candidates stand for, and so on.

So our Constitution implies that there must be at least some freedom to communicate about political and government matters. Any law that unreasonably restricts that freedom is unconstitutional.

The freedom isn't absolute — only laws that unreasonably restrict the freedom are unconstitutional. But what's unreasonable? That's been a tricky and divisive question ever since this implied freedom was 'discovered'.

The early cases involved serious threats to political speech — a law that banned criticism of the Industrial Relations Commission, and laws that made it difficult for anyone except an established political party to run political advertisements. But

over time, the freedom has been slowly developed and extended.

In this case, six High Court judges heard the case. Each of them applied the doctrines the Court has developed over the years for answering knotty questions regarding the freedom of political communication. In the end, three judges decided a law against sending offensive letters was an appropriate restriction on the freedom to communicate on political matters, while the other three decided that it was inappropriate and therefore invalid.

The unusual end result was a three-three 'tie'. When there's a tie, the law says the lower court's decision stands. A lower court had decided the law was valid. By reason only of that technicality, the law against sending offensive letters remained valid, and Monis and Droudis remained charged of that crime. The High Court came astonishingly close to a decision similar to the US Supreme Court's decision about the Westboro Baptist Church.

Retiring judge Dyson Heydon was one of the three judges who decided the law against offensive letters was unconstitutional and invalid. But he reached this conclusion begrudgingly, and felt compelled to comment that it was 'an outcome so extraordinary as to cast doubt, and perhaps more than doubt' on the freedom of political communication 'and the chain of reasoning which led to it'.

Close examination of the freedom 'may reveal that it is a noble and idealistic enterprise which has failed, is failing, and will go on failing'. But he was bound by existing law, and 'on the existing law, there is no alternative'.

'The law is supposed to be about justice — no, fairness,' said another great legal scholar, Darryl Kerrigan of *The Castle* regarding his own legal woes. 'I know that sometimes what is right and fair is not clear-cut, it's a bit iffy. But this is not iffy. This is as clear as day. It is right and fair that a family be allowed to live in its own house.'

Darryl's logic is instructive here. The implied freedom of political communication is certainly not clear-cut — it's as iffy an issue as one is likely to encounter. But what is not iffy is that a family should be protected from cruel letters insulting their dead child.

A modest solution to Morrison's asylum seeker woes

BY THE WAY

Brian Matthews

Scott Morrison, the Shadow Minister for Immigration, missed a golden opportunity during the recent controversy about what he called 'behaviour protocols'.

Morrison's idea was that neighbourhoods should be told if any asylum seekers were about to live in their vicinity so that residents might be warned of the potential for rapine and social degradation that such incursions might engender. Though this plan worryingly echoed limitations placed on the movements of known pedophiles, Senator Eric Abetz gave assurance that asylum seekers were not being compared to pedophiles — 'necessarily'.

But if Morrison had read Jonathan Swift's 'A Modest Proposal', a whole new front in his asylum seeker campaign would have opened up. The aim of Swift's proposal was to prevent the children of poor people in Ireland 'from being a burden to their parents or country, and [to make them] beneficial to the public', just as Morrison's aim is to prevent asylum seekers from being a burden on and a threat to law abiding residents of our towns and cities.

Swift's solution was, to put it briefly, cook and eat the children, thus solving a number of social and economic problems in the one hit. Morrison would benefit by reading the works of Swift whose account of the travels of that famous asylum seeker, Lemuel Gulliver, would be instructive. But more pointedly, the proposal's fearless confrontation with a festering problem would surely stand as a useful model.

Morrison is an indefatigable stalker of asylum seekers. He turns his wintry gaze on them and, like Yeats' spectral horseman, casts 'a cold eye on life, on death'. But he doesn't 'pass by'. He sticks around.

When the boat wreck occurred at Christmas Island, killing more than 30 asylum seekers — enough death for any cold eye — Morrison said that the Government's paying for relatives to fly to Sydney for the funerals demonstrated its failure to 'understand the value of the taxpayer's money'. Relatives of the dead could 'have paid for themselves to get on a plane'. He later apologised — not for the sentiment, only for its timing.

If only Morrison had been aware of Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' he could have sharpened his 'Behaviour Protocols' with a modest proposal of his own that would have thoroughly deflated critics and enthused supporters. All he needed to do was take notice of the curious machinations of the Premier of New South Wales, Barry O'Farrell.

To the delight of the Shooters and Fishers Party in the NSW Upper House,

O'Farrell hopes to open up 77 national parks and reserves to hunters. Ostensibly the target is feral animals though armaments have been shown to have an insignificant effect on the feral animal population.

All Morrison has to do is come to an agreement with O'Farrell. Like 'Capability' Brown, the 18th century genius of parks and gardens design, O'Farrell is a dab hand at coming up with an arrangement, a 'capability'.

Who would have thought, after all, that O'Farrell, the implacable opponent of Premier Morris Iemma's electricity privatisation, would later, as Premier, turn to the Shooters and Fishers to give him the crucial support for — electricity privatisation. O'Farrell has the capability and Morrison could exploit it.

As a member of what many expect will be the government after 14 September, Morrison, spurning Nauru and other 'solutions', simply has to channel asylum seekers into hunting-specified NSW parks and reserves and let O'Farrell's hunters do the rest.

To distinguish them from innocent citizens enjoying the bucolic, if occasionally gunfire-shattered peace of the natural surrounds, the asylum seekers — as Dennis Shanahan suggested in *The Australian* — could be made to wear an identifying sign.

Here Morrison, with further literary tuition, could take a line from American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne whose heroine, Hester Prynne, is made to wear a large scarlet letter 'A'. In her case, 'A' stands for adulterer and 'it drew all eyes ... that SCARLET LETTER ... it had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself'.

And isn't that exactly what Morrison is after: get these people out of the ordinary relations with non-detainee humanity by warning everyone of their impending presence, enclose them in a national park sphere by themselves — well, until the S&F Party marksmen and women nail them.

Meanwhile, Tony Abbott will have turned back the boats thus gradually switching off the supply of the 'A' team, and then the national park targets will diminish. As on the original Armistice Day, a dreadful silence can ensue while the bodies are discreetly gathered up and buried, and Australia, the home of the fair go and mateship, breathes a sigh of relief as the alien peril is averted.

And there could be something in it for Morrison. To quote Swift again, 'whoever could find out a fair, cheap and easy method' of solving the problem of unwanted adults and children 'would deserve so well of the publick as to have his statue set up as a preserver of the nation'.

Abbott's GG gripe reignites republican sentiment

POLITICS

Ray Cassin

Restarting the republic debate was almost certainly not what Tony Abbott had in mind when he wrote to Julia Gillard about the appointment of Australia's next governor-general. Indeed, since the Opposition Leader then moved quickly to hose down speculation that former prime minister John Howard is his own preferred candidate to succeed Quentin Bryce when her term ends in March next year, it is not clear just what he had in mind.

Abbott has unwittingly done Australians a service, however, by writing to the Prime Minister. He has reminded us just how muddled are the terms in which the head of state/viceregal role is usually described, and why the people, not politicians, should choose the person who holds the office.

The letter to Gillard cites recent public service appointments, such as renewing the tenure of the present Australian Electoral Commissioner, which Abbott alleges subvert 'the established convention that no government should make decisions that are legitimately the province of a potential successor'.

The 'established convention' invoked here is spurious. The Prime Minister has set a date for the election of the next Parliament but writs for that election have not been issued, so it cannot be credibly claimed that the government is in caretaker mode.

Abbott is worried, however, that the Gillard Government is intent on depriving him of the right to appoint Bryce's successor if the election hands him the prime ministership, as opinion polls strongly suggest it will.

'The announcement of appointments expressed to take effect almost nine months into the term of the next parliament and some 15 months before they become operative is a blatant abuse of power,' he admonishes Gillard. 'Quite properly, arrangements regarding the appointment of a new governor-general would be, and should be, a matter for a new or a returned prime minister after the 14 September election.'

'Thus, I seek your specific assurance that this precedent will be respected.'

Abuse of power? Abbott really must have a prospective GG in mind to use such language. After all, the government has announced nothing, so why is he worried?

But Gillard staffers seized the opportunity to have some fun at Abbott's expense, hinting that he intends to replace Bryce with his mentor Howard. The Fairfax press ran gleefully with this idea, which Abbott was obliged to kill off within a day of the original story appearing. The rumour mill is now turning again, with suggestions that retired Defence Force chief Peter Cosgrove would be the preferred candidate of a coalition government.

Whether the Howard-for-GG campaign was real or illusory, the Fairfax papers squeezed all the mileage they could out of it, with the *Sydney Morning Herald* publishing a leader every bit as silly as Abbott's appeal to an 'established convention' that does not in fact apply.

Citing Howard's comment in 2001 that 'as a general principle' it is better to have a viceroy who is not identified with one side of politics, the *Herald* firmed this up to 'former politicians should not become governor-general'.

Apparently lack of partisan history is essential to doing the job properly, a point that the *Herald*, without awareness of self-contradiction, tried to shore up by quoting the late Paul Hasluck, who had served as governor-general — and before that, as a Liberal cabinet minister.

Of course a governor-general must act in a non-partisan manner, but the notion that former politicians should thereby be excluded from the job is belied by Australia's history.

Some of the most successful viceroys have been former politicians: Hasluck, for example, who was much admired for his independent judgment by ministers in the Whitlam Government, or William McKell, a Chifley Labor appointee who in 1951 had no hesitation in granting the Menzies Government a double-dissolution of Parliament that the ALP did not want.

There is a difference between acting out of partisan bias and acting in a way that merely happens to advantage one side of politics. Sometimes viceroys, like monarchs, cannot avoid making decisions with political consequences, yet in Australia debate about the head of state's role is still beset by mystical monarchical claptrap about the job being 'above politics'.

It can be no such thing, and the fact that it can't is the most important reason why Australia should become a republic with a head of state elected by the people. It isn't merely because our notional head of state is an absentee hereditary monarch, but because the person who actually carries out the head of state's duties is a creature of the government of the day.

The best viceroys, like Hasluck and McKell, may act independently anyway but there have been enough duds and timeservers in Yarralumla to demonstrate that we cannot presume a governor-general will always do so.

We need a better democracy than the one we have, but our political leaders have neither the inclination nor the courage to take up the task of building one.

Refugee's tram ride to freedom

FICTION

Margaret McDonald

Salman jumped on the tram just before the doors closed. Melbourne was still a mystery to him. He knew he should be happy to be free, but there was still much sadness in him.

He felt Melbourne didn't welcome him. It seemed always to sulk under clouds. Only occasionally the sun showed its face, promising something but never delivering: just like his life. He was confused and often afraid.

His family had sacrificed much to send him here. His mother and aunt had sold jewellery and furnishings that had been passed down for generations. His father had sold his share of a partnership, then had borrowed more. His grandparents gave what they could spare. They had all wanted to buy freedom for him in a country of safety.

His parents had told him they were sending him to a place where there would be many opportunities. But those opportunities had been slow to materialise. He felt he had let them down.

The tram rattled down a hill and jerked to a stop.

Salman had left his home two days before his 17th birthday. He had not wanted to leave his family, his friends, his country. He put on a brave face when his mother and sisters cried over him and kissed him goodbye. He didn't want to go, but his father told him he must. He obeyed.

The trip had not been easy. The scale of the ocean amazed him; he couldn't imagine how a man could travel on top of so much water. When he first saw the boat he was afraid. It was tiny and crowded, so low in the water that each ripple splashed close to the deck. He remembered stories he had heard of storms and great waves that smashed boats. He didn't want to go on board, but it was what his father wanted. He trusted his father's love.

Salman sat on the deck, his knees touching his chin as there was little room to stretch his legs. Soon they were floating over the ocean. Time lost all meaning.

The men and women who came with the dawn were young and assured. They wore smart uniforms, and when they shouted orders the crew obeyed. The boat was towed to an island. Someone shouted 'Christmas Island'.

Salman had been told the country they were going to was an island, but he had not expected to be able to see from one side of the island to the other. How could there be cities on such a small island as this?

There was little time to think about such things. They were hurried off their boat and taken to a compound surrounded by a tall fence topped with razor wire. They called it Detention. To Salman it was prison. He was afraid; perhaps his parents had been mistaken, perhaps this country was no different from his own.

In the months that followed he became bored, restless, frustrated and angry.

Twenty days after his 18th birthday, he was told he was free, put on a plane and brought to Melbourne.

He began the search for work. He should feel happy to be free, but instead he felt lost and alone. People tried to help, but they talked at him, sometimes shouting louder and louder, impatient that they could not make themselves understood. They spoke in languages Salman had never heard. They spoke fast.

He knew his parents were not to blame, that they had put all they had into his future. They had wanted him to live, not be dragged into an army to be killed as his older brothers had. He felt he was letting them down.

He tried to write to tell them he was happy, but it was hard to reassure them when he could not see a clear future. He didn't tell them he could not understand what people were saying, that he couldn't ask the questions he needed to ask. They had suffered enough pain. He lied to them.

Salman was thrown against the side of the tram as it jerked to a stop.

Finally, three days ago he had found work. He had been told that today was the day of the week everyone would be paid. Soon he could begin to look for a better place to live. At the moment he was one of many crowded into a small flat. Two other young men shared his room; they were from another country.

He recognised the Showgrounds: he must get off at the next stop. As he made his way towards the doors, his eyes momentarily met those of a girl wearing a turquoise headscarf. She demurely lowered her eyes, but not before Salman detected the hint of a smile in them.

His eyes rested on her face; the eyes his had met were deep brown, fringed with dark lashes, the longest he had ever seen. She had burnished her lips with gloss to emphasise their natural curve. The girl's conversation with her friend was in English sprinkled with some Arabic phrases he could understand.

He almost missed his stop. He jumped off carrying the memory of the girl with him as he crossed the road and walked through the vast carpark. He was happy as he entered the supermarket where he worked.

A man he had worked with the day before waved to him and shouted 'Hi.' He acknowledged the greeting; it felt good. His manager was from Africa, a man Salman's family would look down on. He spoke Arabic, not quite as Salman's

family spoke it, but Salman was glad to be able to understand what he was being told to do.

The work day had begun. At the end of it he'd have some money. He had taken another step towards freedom.

Philosophical kissing

POETRY

N. N. Trakakis and Vivien Arnold

Have you not heard of that ancient custom?

Have you not heard of that ancient custom?

Two people breaking a piece of pottery

As though breaking bread

Each keeping one fragment

Because 'each one of us is a fragment of a man' (Plato, Symposium)

And when they met again years later

Barely recognisable to each other

They put the pieces back together

— a symbol of their enduring friendship:

Have you not heard of that ancient custom

Reenacted tonight

In the Kiss

Taking us beyond subject and object

('When it comes to the kiss, philosophy has very little to say,'
you once protested, adding soon after:

'It would seem that the lovers of wisdom don't know how to kiss!')

How things have changed!

Always longing for union

With my other (and better) half

The two pieces, long astray

Finally fitted together

Mouth-to-mouth

In a union of knower and known

'For knowledge becomes love' (Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et resurrectione*)

As though it was 1975 again.

N. N. Trakakis

Love Psalm

Afterwards, in the indigo evening
We lie in crushed grass
Soaking up its sweet scent and stain.
Our fingers loosely entwine.
Suspended in calm
Our single mind listens
To the nightingale of our tenderness.
Vivien Arnold

Real men don't rape

HUMAN RIGHTS

Andee Jones

What if you lived in a country where one in every four men had raped a woman or girl? Or where one in every 25 had perpetrated gang rape? Rape with impunity.

Precisely these figures have [come to light](#) in a current Australian co-sponsored study of sexual violence in six Asia-Pacific countries. They are data averages from more than ten thousand men interviewed by the United Nations Partners for Prevention 'Change Project'.

In one country, of the men who admitted to rape, more than one in two said they'd started raping in their teens. Across the entire region, one in every two men said they had used violence against an intimate partner.

Why do men commit sexual violence? This is the question driving the research.

The study's preliminary findings, presented at the United Nations in March, show that, on average, nearly one in two perpetrators says they rape women 'for entertainment' or out of 'boredom'. Roughly one in three says he rapes out of anger and the desire to punish.

Perhaps the most disturbing finding was that almost three out of every four claim rape is men's prerogative. Men, they say, are entitled to take what is rightfully theirs — women's bodies — regardless of consent. This chimes with Australian research showing that men who kill their partners do so mainly out of possessiveness.

Why, to date, have we heard so little from rapists about why they rape? Is it out of the misguided belief that trying to make sense of criminal behaviour is the same as condoning it?

Some say involving men in analysing the problem either excuses the perpetrator or blames the victim. Neither is the case. Working toward getting perpetrators to take responsibility and accept the consequences — preferably restorative justice, incarceration if necessary, but not the death penalty — is part of resolving the problem.

The idea that, by raping women, men 'prove their manhood' is not just a key part of the problem; it also points to its source: the way men are socialised into manhood.

Nearly nine out of every ten men in the study said that 'to be a man you need to be tough'. Of the men who were subjected to peer pressure to join in gang rape and refused, many said they had been ridiculed as a result: 'You are not a real man; you are gay' is the usual taunt, said one anti-violence educator.

'Above all else', said an interviewer, the men who raped 'wanted to fit in with

their friends, even if it was at the expense of women': 'We are good friends', said one man she interviewed, 'so we want to have sex together with one girl.' They show off to each other, said one researcher, about who can have sex the longest.

What's going on here? How does such appalling treatment of women come to sound so ordinary, no more than a variation on masculine competition — a step up from who-can-pee-fartherest?

What's going on is that making the grade as a 'real' man brings hard-won privileges that can be lost at any moment. Such loss makes the man the equivalent of a woman, that is, open to despal and violence. Some men are so alarmed by the idea that they participate in gang rape to prove their 'real' manliness.

According to Ravi Verma of the International Centre for Research on Women, men who perpetrate gang rape are more likely to have been bullied by other men for 'failing' some test of manhood, for example masculine heterosexual performance, dominating women or perfecting emotional disconnection from sex.

Men learn to dread the 'softer' side of their own nature — more precisely, to dread being punished for it by other men — and to blame women for it.

To observers who say it's not that simple, I agree. There are complex layers to this phenomenon that little short of a thesis can address. One critical factor in male violence is the experience of early trauma.

Not all violated boys grow up committing violence. But, the UN study found, compared to non-abused men, men who were abused as children or raped by men were twice as likely to perpetrate sexual violence against women. Men who had been subjected to homophobic violence were three times more likely to take part in gang rape.

The most hopeful finding from the study is the vast inter-country disparity in the prevalence of sexual violence (ranging from 25 to 80 per cent). The disparity shows that while gender violence is pervasive it is not inevitable. It is a cultural phenomenon that can be altered.

That one in every four men in the study admitted to having perpetrated rape means that the other three don't rape (or didn't admit to it).

Most men who rape say they do so because they are entitled to. When men who don't rape and bash tell the violent minority that they have no such right, the dreadful statistics will start to plummet. Even though the very idea of 'real' men is nonsensical, it would be a relief to know it meant standing up for what's right.

Australia's 'comfortable' racism

THE AGENDA

Michael Mullins



In a week of racist and xenophobic reaction to the Boston Marathon bombings, 2GB broadcaster Alan Jones [said](#) he believed foreign students were responsible.

In the US, there was a [series](#) of racist smears on innocent dark skinned individuals sighted close to the finish line. There was no factual basis to any of the imputations, but certain media commentators and editors simply exploited the hysteria of the moment to make a facile link between dark skin and foreignness, and terrorism.

For Australians who abhor racism, this was another example of other people's prejudice. *We're not racist.* But this week, John Oliver, host designate of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in the US, begged to differ. He [talked about](#) the easy racism he observed during a recent visit to this country.

'Australia turns out to be a sensational place, albeit one of the most comfortably racist places I've ever been in. They've really settled into their intolerance like an old resentful slipper.'

The point he was making is that while signs of racism are a source of shame in the US, they're part of the culture in Australia. The difference between attitudes to racism in the two countries was highlighted in 2009 when the infamous 'Black Faces' skit on Australian television [shocked](#) visiting US crooner Harry Connick Jr. Australians simply did not understand what the fuss was about.

Ethnic jokes and prejudice are a fact of life in every nation. But the reality that visiting Americans find it remarkable that Australians find it so easy to laugh about racial stereotypes can be explained as a product of our history as a nation.

Racism was [embodied](#) in the Australian Constitution in 1901, and it was officially mandated by the White Australia Policy. The policy was finally [dismantled](#) in 1973 but it remains in our psyche. This analysis may be simplistic but it does provide one explanation for why 'stopping the boats' has become a political imperative. Politicians know their electorate like Alan Jones knows his audience.

We asked a US friend of *Eureka Street* who frequently visits Australia what he made of John Oliver's comment on Australia's 'comfortable' racism. He said that he does see racism in the political discourse here.

'The language that both parties use to talk about immigration is simply stunning to me. We certainly have those elements in the US, too, but to have both major parties speaking in such similarly hostile, dog whistle terms ... I'm just not sure that could happen in the US.'

If we consider ourselves a society rather than a country of individuals, we need to own this racism. Moreover most Australians are racist or xenophobic without realising it. If ethnic jokes amuse us, it's because we ourselves are agents of racism and xenophobia.

The Australian wars that Anzac Day neglects

HISTORY

Dean Ashenden

For more than 30 years the Australian War Memorial in the nation's capital has refused to consider any recognition of the long and often violent conflict between black and white.

The proposal that the memorial might commemorate the 'frontier wars' first came in 1979 from Geoffrey Blainey. It has since been repeated by commentators and scholars including the then-principal historian at the memorial, Dr Peter Stanley, and a former army chief of staff, Lieut-General John Coates. To no avail.

The memorial is not alone in its silence. Sydney's Hyde Park, just a few hundred metres from where it all began, has almost as many monuments, memorial gardens and commemorative fountains as trees, most to do with our loss, sacrifice and valour in war, the struggles of our explorers and pioneers, or the sagacity of our civic leaders.

But on the 97.8 per cent of human affairs conducted in this place before colonisation, on the 2000 generations who made their lives where Hyde Park now stands, on what happened in our obtaining of it, and on what became of the 'dispossessed', not a word or stone is spent.

And in 2006 the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a 20-page 175th anniversary edition comprising dozens of stories, illustrations and photographs from the paper's countless thousands of pages. It remembered to include just three short pieces about us and the Aborigines. All showed our good selves in a favourable light.

There have been moments of acknowledgment. In 1967, 90 per cent of Australians voted, as they believed, to end racism; in 1992 the High Court declared that Aboriginal people did have a claim on the land; in 2000 the march for reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge took nearly six hours to pass; and in 2008 a prime minister said that hardest word: sorry.

But compare these spasms of lumpy throats and teary eyes with our annual observation of Anzac Day.

On best estimate around 20,000 people died in a series of violent conflicts between peoples extending across the entire continent and more than half of our history. But we have yet to find a way to remember the loss of those people with anything like the scale and intensity of our other commemorations.

The commemoration gap dwarfs the life-expectancy gap, the educational outcomes gap, even the incarceration gap, but there's no policy on closing it. It is

rarely noticed.

The commemoration gap may prove to be even more recalcitrant than the other gaps. For several decades from the 1960s it was closing fast, under the pressure of an Aboriginal rebellion, in result of the recovery by scholars and others of a story long smothered in the 'great Australian silence', and through responses to these in just about every department of public life up to and including the national Parliament and the High Court.

Then it was all stopped, before we had absorbed the story into our reflex sense of ourselves. But not before we became aware of it. None of the ways catalogued above of getting our history wrong arises from ignorance.

On the contrary, all are reactions to knowing *of* the story, as opposed to *knowing* the story. We know what we would know if we did know, and it doesn't feel good. It stirs not so much guilt, as is so often alleged, but a sense of impotence and frustration, an inability to either make it right or make it go away.

What then is the way forward? I would make three suggestions.

First, there is little to be gained from yet more movies, docos and school texts on 'Aboriginal themes'. They too easily make victims of people who were not only victims, and victimisers of people who were almost always other things besides. That provides an excuse for anger or nitpicking or turning off.

Second, public and popular history should record the things that do us credit as well as the things that don't, not to pander to prejudice but because that's the reality. This society, unlike many others, has recovered the story and has tried, however imperfectly, to take it into our sense of ourselves. The impulse to expose the truth and redress wrongs is as intrinsic to our history and culture as the wrongs themselves.

Third, the 'story of relations between two races in a single field of life' (in the words of the great [W. E. H. Stanner](#)) is sometimes front and centre in our history, often in the wings, always present, never separate, and that's the way it should be represented. It needs to become normal. The scholars have done what they can. Now it's up to popular and public history.

The best single example of what popular history can do is Baz Luhrmann's 2008 blockbuster *Australia*. In *Australia* the movie, as in *Australia* the fact, relations between black and white are complex in thought and feeling, and are woven in and around other stories, of romance, of war, of nation and of the land.

'I could have made a small film about this issue,' Luhrmann said, 'but instead I have put a contentious historic issue at the heart of this big entertainment because I wanted to get to as many people as possible.'

And therein lies a lesson for public history, the War Memorial, the trustees of Hyde Park, the editors of the *Sydney Morning Herald* — and the custodians of our

annual commemorations. It's time we started talking about how Anzac Day can embrace difficult realities of war and nation, and still do the other things it needs to do.