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## **Beware conservative slogans for Indigenous inclusion**

AUSTRALIA

*John Warhurst*

The choice of Adam Goodes and Fred Chaney as Australian and Senior Australian of the Year respectively will help to build much-needed momentum for the campaign to recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution. They are both committed to the reconciliation movement. But such necessary change must be approached in a way that is open-ended rather than closed.

The Prime Minister has chosen initially to frame the changes as not about changing the Constitution but completing it. He may have done so in the search for an approach which might resonate with Australians who are risk-averse when it comes to constitutional change by referendum.

Tony Abbott's tactic to soothe any concerns that may exist in the electorate looks at face value to be a clever one. He may see it as just playing with words. If 'Completing the Constitution' becomes his campaign slogan it may even be adopted by the Opposition and other advocates of a Yes vote. That would be a mistake.

The idea of a completed Constitution may be attractive but it is a dangerous one for advocates of any future constitutional change. To complete something, according to dictionary definitions, is to end, conclude or finish it. Alternatively something which is complete is perfect, full or entire. Such language is inappropriate when discussing a constitution and reformers should beware of it even if it improves the immediate chances of passing any particular constitutional change.

Reformers always need a good angle and this Abbott angle is quite a good one. But constitutions shouldn't ever be described as complete or incomplete. Rather they evolve just as communities evolve. Constitution-making should be an ongoing process.

Constitutions should be on the table for discussion and not on the mantelpiece for adoration. They are living documents that should reflect community attitudes, rather than relics of a time many years ago. As community attitudes change so it makes sense for constitutions to change. Realistically constitutional change will lag behind social change. But constitutional change should come eventually. Reformers should be upfront about challenging conservative opposition to change and ready to make the arguments for change, as difficult as that might be.

Though the overall success rate is low the conservative parties have a much better record than the Labor Party when it comes to sponsoring constitutional change. This improves the chances of these Indigenous proposals being accepted by the Australian community. Conservative parties are inherently better at reading and reflecting the conservative leanings of the Australian community.

But progressive parties and groups should hold the line on how issues are framed, because their long-term electoral success needs the community to be always open to evolutionary change. The short-term should not be allowed to crowd out the longer-term even for seemingly good reasons.

The Prime Minister may or may not have thought through the wider implications of his choice of words. Give him the benefit of the doubt. If he has not then he should think again. But very few words are uttered in politics these days without being road-tested in focus groups.

If he has thought through his approach then reformers should reject the wider implications of 'completing the Constitution'. It may have a nice ring to it but it incorporates a very conservative message about constitutional change. Future constitutional reform should not be dogged by a reading of history that says that there is no need for further change because the Australian Constitution was completed in 2014/15.

Rather than 'Completing the Constitution' what Australians should be about in this referendum is 'Doing the Right Thing' by putting in place 'A Constitution for a Modern Australia'.

We should be open to changing our constitution just as its drafters were in S. 128. Change is not a dirty word and that should never be inferred just for the sake of a catchy slogan. All reformers should put their heads together to come up with a better one as the Indigenous referendum draws near.

## The baleful life of Stalin's favourite actress

INTERNATIONAL

*Brian Matthews*

Had she been favoured by unusual longevity, the famous Russian actress, Lyubov Orlova, would have been 112 on 29 January. Our paths crossed because that same date was my first *Eureka Street* deadline for 2014 and also the day on which, idly skimming the newspapers, I came across a piece in the British *Telegraph* headlined 'Cannibal Rat Ship Adrift in Atlantic'.

Over the nearly 73 years of her actual span — she died in 1975 three days before her 73rd birthday — Orlova had a notably successful but tumultuous life. Descended from the aristocratic family of Prince Orlov and related to Count Leo Tolstoy, she showed early promise as a musician in the Moscow Conservatory and as a neophyte actress in the Moscow Musical Theatre of Stanislavsky.

When, however, her husband of four years, Andrei Berezin, was arrested and imprisoned indefinitely as an outspoken opponent of the Stalin regime, she became depressed and alcoholic. Film director Grigori Aleksandrov rescued her by choosing her to star in *Moscow Laughs*. This was no doubt a barrel of fun for Muscovites, but for Orlova it was a turning point. She became Aleksandrov's mistress, later his wife, a screen star and, perhaps most important of all, she attracted Stalin's benign attention.

Stalin appointed her Honourable Actress of the Russian Federation in 1935 and, for her leading roles in *Volga-Volga* and *Cinderella* (re-named *Shining Path* by order of Stalin), he personally awarded her the Stalin Prize in 1941. In 1950 she became the first woman to be named People's Artist of the USSR.

Prefiguring Berlusconi, Stalin held sumptuous parties for his friends, supporters and intimates. Orlova was a favoured guest and these excesses and all the temptations of her growing fame brought her again to the brink of alcoholism and again it was Aleksandrov's influence and discipline that saved her.

In the dangerous world of Stalinist dictatorship, she was buttressed by privilege and public fame, but she remained haunted by the disappearance of Berezin. As advancing age exacerbated her chronic insomnia and a rare condition — sensitivity to daylight — she retreated literally into the shadows.

Two further and unusual recognitions ensured that her name would live on outside Russia. In 1976 she had a ship named after her — the *MV Lyubov Orlova*, specially adapted to cruise in Antarctica and the Arctic. In 2010, with US\$251,000 owing to the charter company, Cruise North Expeditions, and with the entire crew having walked off unpaid, the *Lyubov Orlova*, like Orlova herself, was destined for the shadows.

On tow by tugboat *Charlene Hunt* and bound for the Dominican Republic to be

broken up, she drifted off when the tow line snapped. A bigger vessel, the *Atlantic Hawk*, took over and moved the stricken ship into international waters — by some extraordinary means the captain was able to work out when his ship had crossed an invisible territorial line — at which point Transport Canada abandoned the tow.

Drifting aimlessly across the Atlantic, the subject of intermittent sightings, reportedly crewed by hundreds of cannibalising rats, the *MV Lyubov Orlova* had become that most beloved and venerable of metaphors, the aimless ship on a trackless ocean crewed by — fools, skeletons, heedless hedonists, cadaverous pirates, absolutely no one, as in the *Mary Celeste*, fearful asylum seekers, or — an entirely new twist — rats. Eerily, the ship's emergency position-indicating radio beacon (EPIRB) has twice sent out signals.

In March 2013 the *MV Lyubov Orlova* seemed to be about 700 nautical miles off the Irish coast and was dubbed the 'Ghost Ship' in the world's press.

If the *Lyubov Orlova* had drifted south and entered Australian waters, she would have become what Immigration Minister Scott Morrison calls an 'on-water' episode, part of a 'sovereign borders operation' and as such could not have been described, referred to or discussed in the unlikely event of there being a press conference.

So, 'operationally', the RAN would have carefully nudged the *Lyubov Orlova* into a U-turn, the sailors puzzled no doubt by the hundreds of beady eyes hungrily watching them from its rusting decks instead of the usual crowd of desperate, terrified and broken 'illegals'. In due course, someone would 'leak' from some source or other that this ship had arrived, that it had an odd and suspicious provenance and toxic passengers, and that it had been turned back. Everything would have been normal.

The *Lyubov Orlova* will no doubt eventually be chased down, dry-docked, fumigated and plundered for its US\$600,000 worth of scrap. But the name of *Lyubov Orlova*, the actress, will live on because of a second recognition she was accorded: in 1972, a Soviet astronomer named Lyudmila Zhuravlyova discovered a new, minor planet. She called it 3108 *Lyubov*, in honour of the famous actress.

So *Orlova* lives on as an actual star. Given the vicissitudes of her life, however, and the baleful aura with which she seems to have endowed her nautical namesake (whose sister ship, incidentally, hit a well-known, charted rock hazard in Nunavut's Coronation Gulf in 2010) God alone knows what's happening up there on 3108 *Lyubov*.

## Cardinal sins in beautiful Rome

### REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***The Great Beauty (MA)*. Director: Paolo Sorrentino. Starring: Toni Servillo, Sabrina Ferilli, Roberto Herlitzka, Giusi Merli. 144 minutes**

Talk about your genius envy: when Nick Cave gets writers block, [this is what happens](#) .

In that stunning 2004 song 'There She Goes my Beautiful World', the angsty songsmith Cave raises nature's beauty, rages against his mute muse, and rattles off a litany of writers whose works he admires, yet whose achievements came amid hardships he can only imagine: 'John Wilmott penned his poetry riddled with the pox ... St John of the Cross did his best stuff imprisoned in a box.' Cave must surely be aware that in the process of lamenting his own relative writer's block, he has managed to write one hell of a good song.

Nonetheless the song comes to mind when reflecting upon Italian filmmaker Sorrentino's Golden Globe winning masterpiece *The Great Beauty*. Jep (Servillo), the film's aging hero, might quietly sympathise with Cave's rage against frustrated creativity. He once wrote a famous novel but, during the decades since, he has all but ceased to write, except as a sometimes columnist for a Roman arts and culture magazine.

Cave has his 'beautiful world', and Jep has his beautiful Rome. The film follows him as he moves about the city, encountering its stunning streetscapes and ancient ruins, galleries and other cultural spaces. He is lately steeped in the hedonistic lifestyle of Rome's social elite, and the film catalogues the excesses of his peers to sometimes shocking effect. During one elaborate soiree, the hosts' young daughter is forced to perform a stunning and disturbing artistic display in which she roars and slams tins of paint against a massive canvas. Jep is unmoved by the child's tears, rationalising that her art will earn her millions.

The film features several thrilling party sequences, where the camera picks out smaller human moments amid the colour and noise and general debauchery. We first encounter Jep at such a party, celebrating his 65th birthday. It is perhaps his last great party; the next day he hears some shocking news that forces him to stop and take stock, and to search beautiful Rome for the 'great beauty' he has somehow missed out on.

During his wanderings, Jep is privy to innumerable moments of wonder, small and large: he takes an after-hours tour of a darkened museum; an illusionist friend disappears a giraffe before his very eyes; he visits a photographic exhibition in which the artist has photographed his own face every day since he was a child.

Yet it is often the human moments that are the most arresting. Jep is oblivious

to the nubile young bodies at a strip club where he visits an old friend, but is stopped in his tracks by the vision of an older, elegantly dressed woman whom he passes on a half-lit stair. He is a likeable but not a kind man: at one party he brutally disparages the life and livelihood of a close acquaintance, in a misguided attempt to disillusion her. But elsewhere, he reconciles with a rival, reconnects with an old friend, and forms a bond with the man's daughter (Ferilli), in whom he sees a possible companion on his quest for deeper meaning beyond superficial beauty.

In fact the city around him is pervasively beautiful, a truth that is captured exquisitely by cinematographer Luca Bigazzi, and by Lele Marchitelli's achingly bittersweet score. Only in his twilight years is the libertine Jep starting to realise it. Perhaps the great beauty he seeks is in the accumulation of all of these smaller beauties.

Jep's journey culminates in encounters with two contrasted religious figures. One is a cardinal (Herlitzka) touted to be the next pope; the other a celebrated, ancient nun, dubbed 'the Saint' (Merli), who is now being trafficked like a living artifact by a smarmy, salesman-like minder. The cardinal is senseless to Jep's enquiries about faith, and prone to missing ordinary human connections in the midst of his politicking and self-obsession.

If this is an unflattering reflection of institutional Catholicism, it finds its counterpoint in the Saint, whose humility reveals to Jep the possibility of transcendence. In 'There She Goes My Beautiful World', Cave's epiphany is that 'You weren't much of a muse, but then, I weren't much of a poet'. Jep, too, may discover that recognising one's insurmountable, human limitations is as liberating as it is agonising.



## **Pope's pointers for Australian welfare review**

AUSTRALIA

*Andrew Hamilton*

Economics and religion usually do not talk to one another. So Pope Francis' message to the World Economic Forum at Davos aroused some interest. It was brief. It developed the Catholic understanding that government and business economic actions should be governed, not by trust in the benign working of the free market, but by care for the good of the whole human community.

Coincidentally in Australia Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews announced a review of welfare payments. It is instructive to reflect on the review in the light of the Pope's approach.

The Pope commended to the delegates at the Forum a view of economic growth governed by ethical reflection on the human good:

In the context of your meeting, I wish to emphasise the importance that the various political and economic sectors have in promoting an inclusive approach which takes into consideration the dignity of every human person and the common good. I'm referring to a concern that ought to shape every political and economic decision, but which at times seems to be little more than an afterthought. Those working in these sectors have a precise responsibility towards others, particularly those who are most frail, weak and vulnerable.

He insisted that the economy should serve human beings, and not human beings the economy. He proposed a view of economic equality that 'demands first of all a transcendent vision of the person. It also calls for decisions, mechanisms and processes directed to a better distribution of wealth, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality.'

This vision of equality demands that the most disadvantaged in society can enjoy the conditions that the better-off members of society would regard as essential for themselves to live with human dignity.

The Australian proposal to review welfare payments is in itself compatible with this Catholic vision. Its goal of helping people to find work and so connect with society is laudable. Regular review is essential to guarantee that government resources are directed to the frail, weak and vulnerable. Over time needs change and policies have unintended consequences.

The review of course will not be judged by the goals set for it but by how it enables those who are frail, weak and vulnerable to live in a way that respects their human dignity and removes the obstacles to finding employment that face those able to work.

The current system certainly has limitations. The Newstart allowance needs to

be increased. It is indexed to the cost of living, whereas the disability allowance is indexed to the average wage that rises more rapidly. Those living on it struggle to shelter and feed themselves and their families.

The difficulty facing the review, and the reason why it has alarmed many commentators, lies in the difficulty of reconciling the two goals enunciated by the minister. It is to reduce the cost of welfare payments in the light of the claimed impossibility of funding it in future. The second goal, seen as the means to reducing the burden, is to encourage the unemployed to find work.

These two goals may be compatible in a rising economy when employment is growing and resources are available to assist people to enter or rejoin the work force. But in coming years the unemployment rate seems likely to grow. The Government's decision not to subsidise businesses such as General Motors, and presumably Toyota, will bring abrupt and unplanned closures with the resultant pressure on employment by suppliers and local businesses. The increased unemployment will leave more people reliant on Newstart and disability.

It is difficult to see how expenditure on welfare can be reduced by people finding work at a time when large numbers of employees are losing their jobs. The difficulty for the review in cutting costs is exacerbated because expensive programs like pensions and paid maternity leave from which better-off Australians also benefit have been exempted from review.

So there are reasonable grounds for fear that the review will focus simply on cutting the welfare budget. It will not raise the allowances of people who are unemployed, will make it more difficult for them to live with dignity, and so extend the inequality between them and working Australians.

In previous times of financial stringency governments have cut costs by imposing on recipients of benefits such onerous conditions that the most disadvantaged will not be able to meet them. Their loss of benefits is then justified by fanning public scorn for 'dole bludgers'. The poor then must beg and live in constant humiliation.

It is to be hoped that the review will not lead to such a result and that the measures taken embody Pope Francis' Catholic insistence that they are 'directed to a better distribution of wealth, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality'.

## **Fawly thinking about the aftermyth of war**

AUSTRALIA

*Ray Cassin*

'Don't mention the war!' admonishes John Cleese in the classic television comedy series *Fawlty Towers*. And of course he himself never stops mentioning the war in front of his hotel's German guests, with ever more embarrassing consequences.

It's a famously funny scene, but not only because it reveals Cleese's character, the hapless Basil Fawlty, at his bumbling worst. It is a reminder that, although we must talk about the events, including war, that have shaped us, we can never do so with complete detachment. To mention the war — any war — almost always ignites debate about whether it was worth fighting, however much the speaker feigns neutrality on the subject. And sometimes, mentioning the war becomes a way of continuing to fight it.

The war that Fawlty would rather not have mentioned was the Second World War but his predicament applies equally well to the mention of its great precursor, which began in 1914.

As the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War approaches (variously in July or August, depending on which of the belligerent states is being discussed), we shall be deluged with mentions of it, and they will not stop when the clocks click past midnight on 31 December. The deluge will last at least until the centenary of the armistice on 11 November 2018, and will probably extend beyond that to the centenaries of the peace conferences — there were several, not just the best-known at Versailles — that began in 1919.

For Australians, mentions of war will probably flow thickest and fastest next year, with the centenary of the Gallipoli landings on 25 April, a date that for many has become the de facto national day. And beyond that there are other significant anniversaries we shall not be allowed to forget, most notably those of the great slaughterhouse battles on the Western Front, such as the Somme (1916) and Passchendaele (1917).

Mentioners who want to remind us that the war of 1914–18 was indeed a global conflict, not only the Anglo-German one familiar from popular culture, will also cite other slaughterhouses such as Tannenberg (1914), Verdun (1916) and Caporetto (1917). They will note that the modern Middle East with its discontents was created by the Allied dismemberment of the Ottoman empire, and that the map of modern Europe is a consequence of the collapse of the Habsburg, Hohenzollern and Romanov monarchies.

They will trace the decline of imperial Britain to the staggering cost of victory, and the end of European ascendancy to the presence of Japan among the victors and, above all, to the US entry into the war.

Yes, for most of the decade ahead the war buffs will be in overdrive. We shan't escape them, nor should we try. What matters is which lot of buffs seize control of the public narrative, and thereby of the collective understanding of the war's significance.

There will be a swag of popular histories — indeed, they have already begun to appear — with titles like *The Year the World Ended* (1914, according to the author of that work, Paul Ham). Most of these will follow a formula publishers know to be successful, as the well-stocked shelves of military history in bookshops testify. They will mostly focus on particular battles or campaigns, and will extol the courage and resilience of ordinary soldiers.

With varying degrees of enthusiasm and overtness, these books will feed from, and nourish further, conceptions of national identity as having been forged by the experience of war. The Gallipoli anniversary will be a magnet for accounts of this kind. Most will not be sufficiently critical of received views to ask why a nation that, uniquely among the world's democracies, united itself by peaceful negotiation has since chosen to regard Federation as a lesser achievement than the waste of its youth in an imperial military adventure abroad.

There will be works of academic history, too, addressed to the general reader as well as to professional peers. One well-reviewed example, Joan Beaumont's *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, has already appeared. These works will raise critical questions that the popular histories shun and, like Beaumont's work, they will focus on the home front and its debates about the war as well as on the military action.

Some of the academic historians, like Clare Wright in her article 'A Splendid Object Lesson', to be published later this year in the *Journal of Women's History*, will vigorously take issue with the militarisation of national identity in the Anzac legend. And as their arguments gain media coverage the critics of the legend, and of received views of the First World War generally, will become targets for politicians, shock-jocks and bully-pulpit columnists. As the real war recedes into an imagined past, the history wars are starting all over again.

The politicians have already fired the first shots, predictably directed at the teaching of history in school curricula. Britain's education secretary, Michael Gove, has complained about the portrayal of the First World War in satirical films such as *Oh! What a Lovely War* and television series such as *Blackadder Goes Forth*. Their emphasis on incompetent generals, conniving politicians and mass slaughter, Gove says, has distracted from the sense that the war was a just crusade against German militarism.

Meanwhile, out here in what used be the Antipodean colonies, the Government has taken its cue from Westminster, as it did in 1914. Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne has said he hopes a renewed emphasis on Anzac Day will result from the review of the history curriculum that is underway.

As the anniversaries are reached, one by one, during the next four years, many people will wish, Fawlty-like, that the war had not been mentioned. Or they might find themselves saying with Fawlty: 'I mentioned it once, but I think it's all right.' It will never be all right, Basil. The dead are too many. But we still owe them a debt, which we should repay by confronting the legends, the aftermyth of war, with the truth.

## **My life as a tourist trap**

CREATIVE

*Patrick McCabe*

When I have achieved universal fame, and I am dead, they will probably turn my childhood house into a tourist attraction.

In order to do so, it will be necessary to build a ticket booth on the front lawn. This will require the removal of the old tree that grows in the front garden, which will be a shame, but a small price to pay to grant the masses the privilege of entry to my childhood house — for a fee.

In any case, the booth will be done in a very tasteful, modernist style — that is, it will be a large, featureless concrete block, with holes in the wall from which underpaid teenagers will sell the tickets.

There will be one queue for those who reserved tickets online or who are with an authorised tour guide, and another for everyone else. Of course, owing to my universal fame, both queues will bend far down my street. A large steel fence will be erected across the front lawn, to ensure people don't get in without a ticket.

Unfortunately, the entrance to my childhood home is not wheelchair friendly. So it will need to be redesigned. Purists will complain, but they'll still come.

Since they have to redesign the entrance anyway, it will make sense to enlarge it just slightly to include space for an information desk. At the desk, you will be able to pick up a map and hire an audioguide.

It won't destroy the appearance of the original facade too much to also add a toilet block.

My mum and dad's bedroom won't be of much interest to many me enthusiasts, so that room will be converted into a me museum, housing various artefacts such as my plastic tricycle and some bedraggled picture books. Plaques will declare each artefact's provenance and significance, and explain what part it played in shaping my life such that I would go on to do whatever great deeds I did in order to attain my universal fame. The artefacts themselves will sit inside inlets in the wall, glassed off to protect them from prying fingers, and the elements.

In the lounge room, visitors will be excited to see the original family lounge suite. Of course, visitors will not be permitted to sit on the original family lounge suite. They will be prevented from doing so by an elegant red rope, suspended by two stainless steel poles, and a pictogram sign that will indicate 'do not touch' to all visitors, regardless of their native language.

The highlight will of course be my own bedroom. There will be a permanent queue at the door. The tourist attraction's management will arbitrarily decide that photography is banned within my bedroom, and they will appoint guards to

enforce this edict. Tourists will pay these guards no heed, but the guards will perform the Sisyphean task of preventing photographs with admirable gusto nonetheless.

Unfortunately, visitors will be disappointed to find my bed gone, substituted with a sign featuring a photo of the bed and advising that thanks to the kind donation of a particular American philanthropist, my bed is currently undergoing a restoration to ensure it maintains its original character for future generations to continue to enjoy. Visitors will inwardly curse the philanthropist in question, and outwardly exclaim at the very unfortunate timing of their visit. They will remain unaware that the sign has in fact been there three years.

It is unlikely my Ikea bookcase will have stood the test of time. However, happily, visitors will be able to enjoy a faithful reconstruction of the original bookcase, built by an artisan specialising in the 'Allen key' method of furniture design, popular in the early 21st-century period.

In the ultimate settlement of sibling rivalry, my brother's and sister's bedrooms will be the logical places to establish the museum cafeteria and shop. One wall of my brother's bedroom will be removed so that the cafeteria will open up onto our backyard patio, thus enabling patrons to enjoy al fresco dining. There would be no better way to finish a trip to my house than an overpriced baguette under my patio's original fibreglass roof, watching the sun set behind the clothesline.

Visitors will go home happy, their bags filled with miniature replicas of my house and stuffed toy replicas of me, and their minds filled with an authentic insight into what my inspiring life was actually like.

When I achieve universal fame, but before I am dead, I think I will ensure my house is demolished.

## **Bleeding hearts alone won't save asylum seekers**

AUSTRALIA

*Fatima Measham*

Last month, *Guardian Australia* published a [letter of concern](#) prepared by 15 doctors working at the Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centres. Its forensic description of indignity and neglect bring new meaning to the expression, 'the devil is in the detail'.

Inappropriate transfers, prolonged delays, immunisation and prescription errors, substandard antenatal and paediatric care, medication and equipment shortages, patient identification errors, haphazard handling of test results. The totality of these conditions would shut down any medical facility on the mainland.

Yet the doctors' report was met with muted outcry, confirming the Faustian compact that Australians have made in exchange for guarantees of security and order. 'Sovereignty'.

In the end these seem to have more weight than ethics or decency. If this weren't true, there would be political repercussions from evidence that 'generally accepted medical standards' do not uniformly apply in this country. Instead, a recent [survey](#) conducted by UMR Research found that 48 per cent of a nationally representative sample (weighted against census data) approve of the present treatment of asylum seekers, while 60 per cent think that the Government should increase the severity.

The subtext is that any entitlement to humane treatment is forfeited if one had attempted to enter the country by boat from Indonesia. Against such priorities, no appeal to compassion, statement of fact or context will work, no matter how persistently they are made. We need to reckon with this if the goal is to change the status quo.

As long as the majority are convinced that norms of Western civility — queues, procedures and authority — outweigh humanitarian obligations, then appealing solely to their sense of humanity has limited effectiveness. Those who campaign for more humane treatment of asylum seekers cannot keep assuming that the elements of the debate that matter to them most are the most persuasive.

The hardest thing to accept may be that the socioeconomic anxieties for which immigration serves as proxy, as well as the insecurity and resentment generated by state impotence and political opportunism, do not necessarily make for 'bad' people.

Framing resistance against seaborne asylum seekers as racist and xenophobic is a simplistic and useless construction of the debate, even if it is a credible and personally satisfying one. It cedes the issue to spectres. It leaves no room for persuasion, which in turn does not serve vulnerable people inside detention



centres. After all, we cannot expect to restrain the current momentum against asylum seekers without critical mass.

If we really mean to change the status quo, then we need to confront how the harsh language and treatment of asylum seekers has become normalised. How can it be that it is the compassionate alternatives that are perceived to be inappropriate and wrong?

It is easy to see how a cycle of repetition and validation of negative views of asylum seekers, perpetuated by both sides of politics, has been instrumental in this. But it does not completely explain a fundamental failure to persuade Australians that such views do not justify callous treatment of human beings. To lay the entire blame on politicians is to confer on them a level of sophistication that they do not deserve.

The reality is that people are fickle; they are swayed by the most persuasive voices of the time. It is what makes progress even possible. In this regard, clearly asylum seeker advocates are yet to deploy the most persuasive voices. It is an area rife with opportunity, perhaps even the final resort.

This is not to diminish the passionate efforts of many advocates, NGOs and professionals who continue to uphold the dignity and rights of detainees. The Christmas Island doctors, for instance, are only the latest in a long line of whistle-blowers who have exposed the conditions endured by immigration detainees.

But these are not the most persuasive voices — not for those who most need to be persuaded. A cursory glance at the demographics of resistance suggests that the involvement of sport and entertainment figures may be what is required. This is how we counter the normalisation of cruelty: by making it uncool.

This is not a flippant proposition. Everything that ought to be said has been said, but not enough people are listening. It is time that we move beyond the message and look for the right messengers.

## **Abbott pays a heavy price to stop the boats**

AUSTRALIA

*Tony Kevin*

Tony Abbott has kept his pre-election promise to stop the boats, but at what huge cost! Let me count the ways.

### **1. Violation of international law and human rights law obligations**

*International maritime law* — It is [illegal](#) to stop boats in international waters and then forcibly to transport these boats or their passengers through international waters without their informed consent. It is not unreasonable to define such actions, which violate the right of innocent maritime passage, as piracy or even as people trafficking. Yet Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) is doing this.

*Refugee Conventions* — It is illegal under the Refugee Conventions which Australia has signed, forcibly to return to Indonesia passengers in boats that have entered Australian territorial waters, and there requested consideration of their claims to be admitted as refugees under the Conventions. Every forced towback or escort out of Australian waters gravely transgresses our obligations under the Conventions. Yet OSB is doing this.

### **2. Offending Indonesia**

It is diplomatically offensive to our important near neighbour Indonesia either to abandon boatloads of returned asylum seekers at the outer edge of Indonesian territorial waters, or to violate Indonesian sovereignty by trespassing in their territorial waters without prior permission. OSB is doing both these things.

In the latter case, OSB has confounded the offence by an insincere 'apology' that claimed falsely that our Navy ships made 'positional errors' in Indonesia's complex archipelagic waters: a lie so readily refuted by commonsense logic and seamanship as to be grossly insulting to Indonesia.

There was a thorough [discussion](#) of the impact of such acts on Australian-Indonesian relations by an Indonesian academic on the ABC 7.30 Report on 22 January. I will return to this point later in this article.

### **3. Human rights violations**

OSB has violated Australia's human rights obligations to asylum seekers in various reported ways: by lying to them and tricking them as to where they were being taken; by various reported acts of abuse and cruelty during interceptions and forced returns; and by leaving them in life-at-risk situations without due care when abandoning them either within or at the outer edge of Indonesian territorial waters.

Again, Immigration Minister Scott Morrison has insulted Indonesia, by claiming

that multiple Indonesian police reports of such acts of Australian cruelty are not to be given credence.

The reported decision by Senator Eric Abetz, the Government's leader in the Senate, to grant OSB personnel immunity from prosecution for any acts done in the course of their border protection duties as state agents is offensive and almost certainly illegal. It violates the spirit of accepted international norms governing crimes against humanity. Under Abetz's ruling, the Nuremberg Trials would have been impossible.

#### **4. Adverse impacts on Navy and Customs service morale and professional standards**

The Government's general secrecy and arrogance are setting a poor example to our service personnel engaged in OSB duties, and encouraging a general debasement of service standards. The free expression on the internet of Navy prejudice against asylum seeker — one hopes these are isolated views — has already happened.

This is a punitive climate that makes such reported acts of abuse as forcing asylum seekers to hold onto hot engine pipes quite possible. Although we await the results of the Indonesian investigation, Morrison has not categorically denied these claims: he has only said that they are 'unsubstantiated'.

#### **Cost and benefit**

To my mind, all of this adds up to a rather heavy bill to pay for the Government's claimed success in deterring boats. Reportedly, it is now weeks since any asylum seekers arrived in Australia. This, of course, takes the pressure of numbers off detention facilities in Christmas Island, Nauru and Manus. Morrison is understandably trumpeting the Government's success in these terms.

Another success — to which I attach the most weight — is that under the Abbott Government there have been no reported deaths at sea involving Australian border protection interception action or failure to act. This is a striking improvement on the high death rate under the Rudd and Gillard governments. By Marg Hutton's authoritative [analysis](http://www.sievx.com) on [www.sievx.com](http://www.sievx.com), over 1100 people probably died under Labor. This is certainly restraining Labor's criticisms of OSB: both Bill Shorten and Richard Marles have been very circumspect so far.

My explanation for those 'accidental' border violations by OSB ships: I am sure that Morrison has given OSB the strictest riding instructions that there are to be no avoidable deaths of asylum seekers for which Australia might be held to account. If this has required OSB ships deliberately to trespass in Indonesian waters to take boats safely close to shore in Indonesia, and then to lie about it, so be it.

If I am right in this logic, it will happen again.

## **Risky realities**

In summary, the Abbott Government is walking a very fine line — and accruing heavy legal, diplomatic and ethical costs — in implementing its pre-election pledge to turn back the boats. What can go wrong now with this ruthless, fanatical, but successful (in its own terms) policy? I see two main risks.

First, risk of deaths at sea. Any asylum-seeker deaths brought about directly or indirectly by present Australian aggressive towback policies will force Indonesia to take the most forceful action against Australian interests, because Indonesia's international diplomatic standing will then be at stake.

Second, navy-to-navy incidents. Now that Indonesia has ordered its own navy into the territorial waters south of Indonesia to which Australia has been returning asylum seekers, it is not hard to visualise scenarios of ugly navy-to-navy confrontations in those waters.

In either case, damage to Australia-Indonesia relations and to Australia's global standing could be severe.

## No Buddhist bullets in Thai turmoil

INTERNATIONAL

*Peter Kirkwood*

It's often said in Thailand that the three pillars of Thai society are Buddhism, the monarchy and the nation, or political system. In recent months I've witnessed many noisy anti-government protests in Bangkok where political groups have been very visible. But amid the turmoil, Buddhism and the monarchy are notably absent.

The low profile of the monarchy is easily explained. Absolute rule of the king ended in 1932, and since then Thailand has been a constitutional monarchy. The king does not comment on day to day affairs of the country.

The absence of Buddhism is more puzzling. Thailand is the heartland of Theravadan Buddhism, and Buddhist temples, shrines and monks are ubiquitous. 95 per cent of Thais claim Buddhism as their religion and, alongside the 250,000 permanent monks and nuns, most men spend at least a few months of their youth in a monastery.

Perhaps the low profile of Buddhism in the present crisis is a good thing. Thais look nervously at recent events in nearby Buddhist countries where firebrand Buddhist monks have led militant ultra-nationalist movements against religious minorities, mainly targeting Muslims. There has been a string of articles in Thai newspapers denouncing these movements. Thais clearly don't want this type of religious leadership infecting their country.

In neighbouring Myanmar (formerly Burma), the so called 969 Movement, led by 46-year-old monk Bhikku Wirathu, began in mid-2012 and quickly spread. The number 969 alludes to notions central to Buddhist belief: to the nine special attributes of the Buddha, the six special features of the Dhamma (Buddhist teaching), and the nine characteristics that should distinguish the Sangha (Buddhist monks).

But Wirathu has subverted these Buddhist ideals, as attested to by a *Time* feature from July 2012. It was entitled 'The Face of Buddhist Terror' and [referred](#) to him as 'the Burmese Bin Laden'.

His movement began with calls to stop the spread of Islam by boycotting businesses run by the Muslim Rohingya minority, ethnic Bengalis living in Myanmar since British colonial times. But it quickly escalated into open violence, with scores of Rohingya killed, many doused in petrol and burnt to death, entire Muslim villages and communities burnt to the ground, and tens of thousands of people forced to flee areas where they had lived peacefully alongside majority Buddhists for generations.

Around the same time in Sri Lanka, the Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force)

emerged. Its founder is 37-year-old Buddhist monk Galagoda Atte Gnanasara. While his movement so far has eschewed violence, he has led a virulent public campaign of intimidation against minority Muslims. He has said Sri Lanka is 'a Buddhist nation (and) not everyone can live under the umbrella of a Buddhist culture'.

While this type of extremist Buddhist leadership seems absent in Thailand, and monks do not have a strong presence in the political protests in the Thai capital, there is concern about the partisan involvement of some high profile monks and Buddhist associations.

Well known 58-year-old Luang Pu Buddha Issara, abbot of Or Noi Temple just west of Bangkok, was appointed to oversee one of the seven main anti-government protest sites designed to shut down the capital. Another Buddhist group supporting the protestors is Santi Asoke, the so-called Dhamma Army, led by monk Phra Bodhirak. Begun in the 1970s, this is a small ascetic splinter group of socially engaged Buddhists.

On the government side, many point to the wealthy [Dhammakaya](#) sect's support for the Shinawatra clan. Begun in the 1970s, the centre of this sect's activities is an enormous futuristic shrine just north of Bangkok whose huge dome is encrusted with thousands of gold Buddha statues.

A recent opinion piece in the *Bangkok Post* criticised Dhammakaya's association with the powerful Shinawatras, saying it 'has heightened public concern that the Dhammakaya's capitalist version of Buddhism — that money can buy merit and nirvana — will dominate the entire clergy and Thai Buddhism'.

So there are a few monks and some Buddhist groups openly supporting one side or the other in the conflict. But what seems absent is any bigger religious discussion of the morality or basic principles that might guide a way forward. The only cogent discussion in this vein I've seen has come from Sanitsuda Ekachai, an assistant editor at the *Bangkok Post* in a series of [incisive opinion pieces](#) she's written over the last few months.

A few brief quotes give a flavour of her arguments: 'Buddhism teaches tolerance and inter-relatedness of all beings. What kind of Buddhists are we — red (pro-government), yellow (anti-government), or in between — to support violent acts to purge the objects of someone's hatred from the earth?'

'As self-proclaimed Buddhists, we must ask ourselves a few questions too. Should we let hatred prevail over goodwill? Should we allow extremism to lead to more bloodshed? Are our political views worth dying for or having other people killed? ... We don't need monks who side with a particular political camp and fan hatred. We need monks who live by the Buddha's teachings.'

In this time of turmoil and political upheaval, perhaps Thailand needs monks and lay leaders who not only live by the teachings of the Buddha, but who also

Speak out forcefully in a non-partisan way about them.

## Journalistic ethics in transgender tragedy

MEDIA

*Ellena Savage*

Last week a troubling story broke on the high-profile ESPN subsidiary *Grantland*. '[Dr V's Magical Putter](#)' began as a quirky sports story, an investigation into a potentially game-changing piece of golf equipment. The putter's inventor, Dr Essay Anne Vanderbilt, was challenging the old-hat wisdom of golfing technologies with hard physics. An attractive, eccentric inventor with a higher degree from MIT and a decade in secret dealings with the US Department of Defence, Vanderbilt, or Dr V. as she was known, cut an irresistible story for any journalist.

But after the journalist in question, Caleb Hannan, tested the putter and found it roadworthy, he began to investigate not only the science behind it but also the inventor herself, against her wishes. In the process of learning that Vanderbilt's credentials were falsified, Hannan also discovered that Vanderbilt was a trans-woman. In the article, this knowledge is conveyed as part-and-parcel with her fraudulent business claims. Hannan even outed her to one of her investors.

Some months later, a few days after a disturbed email exchange with Hannan, Vanderbilt killed herself.

The internet does not need one more person to stoke the fire against a piece of ethically tenuous journalism, or use one person's tragic decline for the sake of rhetoric. This topic been written about by much more erudite and sensitive people than me — for example [here](#) , [here](#) , [here](#) , and by *Grantland's* own editor-in-chief Bill Simmons [here](#) . But I do want to talk about the aftermath of the tragedy, what it means for both journalists and their subjects, and what reporting might mean in a post-internet world.

In following this issue closely, I am reminded that there are profound cultural changes brewing. The internet has changed what we say and how we say it. How we produce and legitimise knowledge is becoming more collectivised, and more frequently informed by the people who have historically played object to news stories.

'Dr V.'s *Magical Putter*' was written in a journalistic tradition that may struggle to exist in the post-internet world: the tradition of long-form narrative journalism championed by the great American magazines like *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Harpers*, and *Rolling Stone*. Narrative journalism is a highly regarded literary tradition that students and professionals of writing dream of mastering. Some of its finest examples have endured the same cultural longevity and impact on our collective imaginations as the great movies and novels of our times.

It does what traditional news journalism cannot: it addresses the fact that by the act of writing a story, a journalist is present in it, changing it; and that this



has potentially dire ethical outcomes. I don't know of any journalist who doesn't ask ethical questions of themselves and their work frequently. It takes some resolve to continue working in a field that is perhaps, by its nature, unethical. Janet Malcolm's opening line in *The Journalist and the Murderer* comes to mind: 'Every journalist who is not too stupid to notice what is going on knows that what they do is morally indefensible.'

Narrative journalism challenges the ethical lines of writing nonfiction. It addresses the bind journalists feel most troublingly: on the one hand, the obligation to be true to the singularity of your necessarily limited perspective; on the other, to refer to the absolute and baffling limits of knowledge and risk writing unconvincingly, dishonestly, ineffectively. The change in practice will come about because of publishing realities: the speed and infinite possibility of response — to correct, reprimand, enrich — tests the imaginative authority of journalists.

One widely-held assumption about journalism is that it is some form of Truth Telling. It's not so much journalists who believe that; it is laypeople upon whom journalism is put daily. The internet is coming closer to the realisation that journalism is simply the compilation of research that reaches certain ends and is broadcast to certain audiences. That talking back is a possibility. In this changing game, the people who have historically been written about have the means and reach to interpret and respond.

While I feel for Hannan, who has received death threats among his penance, and of course feel terribly for Dr V., whose mental health may have suffered under the stress of a story she did not wish to have exposed, it is quite remarkable that a poorly executed story and the death of a person on the margins can hit a cultural nerve and engender some sort of rhetorical change so quickly.

But perhaps this is just more noise being made to fill the gap left by Dr V. While this saga has brought vital conversations to the mainstream, this is only true because she is dead. Dr V. is the only person who knows what it was to be her; and Hannan is the only one who knows what it was like to author that story.

The rest is, you know, silence.

## The joke is on Wall Street

### REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***The Wolf of Wall Street* (R). Director: Martin Scorsese. Starring: Leonard DiCaprio, Jonah Hill, Margot Robbie. 179 minutes**

This is tough going. In *The Wolf of Wall Street*, the great Martin Scorsese has sketched a thoroughly unpleasant portrait of 'the American Dream' at its most corrupt and debauched. For his subject he has taken the rise and fall in the 1990s of stockbroker Jordan Belfort (played here by DiCaprio), whose memoir has been adapted for the screen by *Boardwalk Empire* and *The Sopranos* showrunner Terence Winter. As portrayed by Winter and Scorsese, Belfort's world is steeped in drugs, sexual promiscuity, and brutal, bottomless greed. Unpleasant, sure — and made less palatable by the fact that *The Wolf of Wall Street* is a comedy.

Numerous commentators have suggested that Scorsese stops too far short of condemnation; that the film revels in rather than rejects its characters' debauched behaviour. I can see their point, but I'd suggest that the director is trusting his audience to reach their own moral conclusions. The story is told from the perspective of Belfort, a character who has no moral compass. If you are repulsed by the things he does and the choices he makes, that only means that you have a conscience. Anyone who sees Jordan as someone to be revered or emulated is probably not going to be persuaded by heavy handed moralising.

Whether or not Scorsese does 'enough', the film is pointedly satirical. It repeatedly holds its characters up to ridicule and scorn. In one scene, a heavily drugged Belfort writes off his car, and subsequently almost causes the death of a close friend (Hill). Yet the scene is played for laughs, with DiCaprio committing bodily to some hilarious slapstick. These characters are walking, talking black holes who suck the joy and wellbeing out of anyone who has the misfortune of coming into their orbit. That we the audience feel no qualms whatsoever about laughing at their self-inflicted misfortune reveals how effectively unsympathetic the portrayal actually is.

*The Wolf of Wall Street* gets darker still. When Belfort endangers his loved ones by steering his yacht into perilous seas, or brags about his profligate use of prostitutes, or belittles women, or beats his wife (Robbie), or betrays his friends, Scorsese exposes the extent of the character's moral vapidness. That he at times does it with a nudge and a wink and a shake of the head, rather than with a moral sledgehammer, is a valid stylistic choice. It doesn't offer any easy catharsis. But it's not the film that's offensive. It's Belfort's life.

If ultimately Belfort's comeuppance for his innumerable evils is modest, and his lessons remain unlearned, it is deeply and frighteningly ironic, in a way that has parallels in the real world. The global financial crisis resulted precisely from the

kind of unbridled amorality that the characters in *The Wolf of Wall Street* gleefully embrace. Money is their morality, and after all is said and done, 'I'm still rich,' Belfort rationalises. Lives are left battered and bruised, but the Wall Street party keeps raging on.

## **Celebrating diversity on Australia Day**

AUSTRALIA

*Andrew Hamilton*

This week began with Australia Day and ends with the Chinese New Year. The juxtaposition suggests pertinent questions about Australian identity, especially the ways in which Australians have alternately included and excluded those seen as outsiders. This is most evident in the relationship between Australian settlers' attitudes to Indigenous Australians, but it is also seen in Australian attitudes to Chinese and other Asian peoples.

Chinese people first came to Australia in considerable numbers during the Gold Rush, and for a time formed up to seven per cent of the population. They came first as miners, and later supported themselves by farming and small business.

From the beginning their position was precarious. The colonies passed laws to exclude Asian immigration; on the gold fields there were anti-Chinese riots. The grounds of hostility lay in their virtues, not their vices: they worked so hard and were so thrifty that others found them difficult to compete with.

After Federation, hostility found expression in the White Australia policy. It was based on the threat posed by cheap imported labour to Australian workers but also reflected the belief that the Chinese and other races were inferior. In speaking to the 1901 immigration restriction bill Edmund Barton, the first Australian prime minister, was explicit on this point:

I do not think (either) that the doctrine of the equality of man was really ever intended to include racial equality. There is no racial equality. There is basic inequality. These races are, in comparison with white races — I think no one wants convincing of this fact — unequal and inferior.

The doctrine of the equality of man was never intended to apply to the equality of the Englishman and the Chinaman. There is deep-set difference, and we see no prospect and no promise of its ever being effaced. Nothing in this world can put these two races upon an equality. Nothing we can do by cultivation, by refinement, or by anything else will make some races equal to others.

British opposition to measures that would inflame its relationship with its colonies deterred the legislators from explicitly excluding immigrants on the grounds of race. But the dictation test provided a genteel mechanism for exclusion, the forerunner of such smarmy devices as the exclusion of the Australian mainland from the immigration zone.

In the 1960s the policy of exclusion changed to one of inclusion as Australians began to realise that their prosperity depended on building good relationships with their Asian neighbours. The abolition of the White Australia Policy and the later grant of citizenship to Chinese students after the Tiananmen Square massacre

established complex circular patterns of immigration and belonging. Chinese migrated to Australia, established citizenship and residence and then returned to China, sending their children in turn to study and gain residence.

These exchanges benefited both societies.

The alternation between exclusion and inclusion characteristic of Australian attitudes to the Chinese reflects an ambivalence in Australian identity. Many groups have been the targets of the language and measures of exclusion: Indigenous Australians, Irish, Italians, Germans, Muslims and asylum seekers.

But there have also been instances of great hospitality. The European immigration and settlement program after 1945, the popular pressure that pushed the Fraser Government to expand its intake of Indochinese refugees, and the acceptance of African immigrants have all led to a broader sense of Australian identity. Australia Day allows us to celebrate this.

The tension between a narrow and a hospitable definition of Australian identity also invites us to celebrate the lives of those who worked to establish a more generous and self-assured Australia. These include neighbours who have helped people settle in Australia and befriended them, the teachers and social workers who have honoured the gift that differences in faith, race and culture bring to our society, and the nurses and civil servants who have worked to respect cultural and linguistic differences when tending to immigrants' needs.

In times of anxiety it is never easy to argue for a hospitable and respectful society. Those who argued against the White Australia Policy, who insisted during wartime that Australians of German birth and descent were worthy of respect and freedom, who welcomed the gift that Jewish and Muslim refugees are to Australia, and who insist that people who seek asylum in Australia be received with respect, swam against the riptide and were mocked for their tenacity. But they preserved, and in so doing they sowed the seeds of a better society.

Australia Day is an occasion for celebrating those whose lives have encouraged our better selves and for renewing our commitment to a better society. The experience and presence of Chinese immigrants to our land remind us how important that commitment is and what a gift our differences are to our nation.

## The war on asylum seekers

INTERNATIONAL

*Justin Glyn*

The current dispute with Indonesia over border incursions by the Australian Navy is symptomatic of a deeper problem — the militarisation of political discourse. Von Clausewitz famously claimed that ‘war is politics by other means’: in other words, that military force is employed in service of political ends. In Australia, as elsewhere in the West, this is being taken to an extreme not previously seen outside authoritarian societies.

It is true that the Westminster tradition of politics has always viewed the deployment of the armed forces as a matter for the executive (with the governor-general being head of the military). Nevertheless, there were two clear understandings underpinning this tradition.

The first was that military actions were international, involving other states. Secondly, the military was always to remain subject to strict civilian control and oversight — demonstrated, for example, by the fact that control of the military’s purse-strings is a matter for the elected parliament alone and not for the executive.

The rhetoric of the ‘War on Terror’ has undercut these assumptions and thereby opened the way for military action to become a blanket invocation by which Western governments (like their traditionally more authoritarian counterparts) could shield their less appetising workings from inconvenient scrutiny. Thus, even Members of Congress are [petitioning](#) the US Government to reveal to them how its US\$52 billion ‘black budget’ is spent.

The spying scandals which have rocked the West in the wake of the Snowden revelations have revealed just how much power has been surrendered by democratically elected legislatures to their militaries in the name of ‘security’. This growing militarisation of the state not only affects domestic human rights policy but cuts across government operations and philosophy more generally, tainting all aspects of democratic life.

So it is that in Australia the militarisation of refugee policy under the guise of international conflict (which names like ‘Sovereign Borders’ is obviously designed to connote) is used as a device for concealment. Even the once-weekly press conferences on boat interceptions have stopped and Parliament itself (which, under the Constitution, funds the military) is [denied](#) answers to straightforward questions about refugee policy on the basis that these have become military operational matters.

In a perverse twist, refugees — themselves often the victims of war — are now an enemy to be fought with all the might of the nation’s armed forces. Even Melbourne’s *Herald Sun*, not traditionally known for its outspokenness on refugee

issues, [notes](#) that government secrecy on this issue has little impact on genuine people-smugglers, falls short of democratic standards of accountability and harms relations with Indonesia.

And, as the news of recent days demonstrates, this military rhetoric in the service of secrecy runs the risk of generating the very international conflicts against which the armed services are supposed to defend. When even the most routine border patrols are removed from oversight, it is scarcely surprising that abuses should occur.

While Australians seem generally to have become inured to breaches of international refugee law (such as return of asylum seekers to persecution), the last few days indicate that even such breaches of individual human rights can have international consequences affecting the most fundamental areas of relations between states. Where these include the violation of another state's 'sovereign borders' (such as with the incursions into Indonesian territory by Australian craft), we are dealing with the most basic attack on international norms.

Yet, in Australia, state sovereignty (at least where the 'sovereign borders' are those of other states) seems to have become yet one more piece of 'collateral damage' in the war on refugees.

## Aboriginal words worth remembering

AUSTRALIA

*Ailsa Piper*

I wish there was a word for what I'm feeling. It's a kind of emotional malnutrition, an emptiness brought on by the lack of vision I perceive in those who would lead us into the future. Such a word should exist in the Australian idiom. We've needed it before.

Other languages provide words for culturally specific sensations.

The Inuit speak of *itsuarpok* — the feeling of anticipation that leads you to keep looking outside to see if anyone is coming. In French they talk of *depaysement* — the unsettling sensation that comes from not being in one's home country. A personal favourite is the German word *zerrissenheit*, which literally means broken-to-pieces-hood.

I'm fifth generation Australian, but I don't have a word to describe my queasiness about short-sighted policy-makers. Maybe there are words for such feelings in Yamatji, or Eora, or Noongar, but most of us wouldn't know, because we don't speak these languages. In the late 18th century, there were over 350 Indigenous languages in Australia. At the start of the 21st, fewer than 150 remain in daily use, and most of those are endangered.

This was a place with more linguistic individuation than Europe, before our boat-people ancestors arrived, but they didn't take the time to learn its words or hear its stories. Colonisers and evangelists do this over and over, insisting they know what is best.

Recently, I heard the tale of a European media executive who decided developing African countries would provide a lucrative market for his empire. A remote village was chosen to pilot his project. For the first few days the villagers were mesmerised by a television, and all their work ground to a halt. But one morning the executive found the screen deserted and the villagers going about their normal work.

'What has happened?' he asked

'We've seen it all,' came the reply.

'But you have access to over 20 channels, transmitting 24 hours a day. You can't have seen it all.'

An elder shrugged: 'We have our own storyteller.'

'But he can't possibly know all the stories on television.'

'Ah, but our storyteller knows our story, in our words.'

We tell stories solely in the words of Milton and Shakespeare, or Pepsi and Nike,



at cost to ourselves. English is beautiful but also ruthless. It morphs, changes and conquers because it must do that to survive. In that march to victory, the loss of cultural specificity is profound. It's the sacrificing of identity, because that is what language is.

But all is not lost.

In Geraldton on the coast of WA, there's a beautiful centre for learning Yamatji, and it's possible, given time and communal desire, that local kids might grow up speaking two tongues — Indigenous and settlers'.

Meantime, there's more hope.

Late last year a news report told how linguistics professor Dr Michael Walsh was browsing the stacks at Sydney's Mitchell Library when he randomly pulled down a box containing two notebooks. Walsh had stumbled across a colonial guide to a lost Aboriginal language.

He instigated a research project, trolling through 14km of manuscripts in search of mentions of lost or endangered languages. Much of the material recorded harsh ironies — many who'd noted words or phrases were colonialists, intent on taking Aboriginal land to settle and open it to pastoralism.

But Walsh remains hopeful, as he takes recovered languages back to communities. People report that once they regain language, they also regain identity; with that comes improvement. He spoke of people who'd been dysfunctional, in trouble with police, with alcohol, and not able to work. They said it was language that brought them back to themselves.

So. Hope.

We are still losing many Australian languages, but I have to hold onto hope — surely one of the most beautiful words in English.

Interestingly, it doesn't exist in Yamatji.

That's right. No word for hope.

There is, however, the word *wirla*.

In Geraldton I learned that *wirla* is the word for a bad feeling in the gut — the kind of feeling you get when you see a person and know something isn't right. It's exactly the word I need to describe my current queasiness. Let's remember it.

## Time to honour Aboriginal frontier warriors

AUSTRALIA

*Paul Newbury*

Professor Tim Flannery of Macquarie University has expressed his 'sense of outrage' that the Australian War Memorial (AWM) refuses to honour Aboriginal warriors who fought and died defending their lands and their people against white invader settlers in the Frontier Wars of 1788–1928.

As reported by Catherine Armitage in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Flannery told a forum of the National Australia Day Council that in any other war, Australia's Aborigines 'would have been awarded the Victoria Cross' but at the AWM in Canberra, they are not even acknowledged. Readers of *Eureka Street* may remember that I raised this issue in April 2011 in my article ['Forgotten Aboriginal war heroes'](#) .

The Frontier Wars began in 1790 when Bidjigal resistance hero Pemulwuy (c1750–1802) killed Governor Phillip's convict gamekeeper near Sydney. In response, Phillip ordered a punitive expedition to bring back any six Bidjigal or their heads. The expedition was a failure, though Phillip's order presaged countless such wanton reprisals against Australia's Indigenous people for the next 140 years.

During this period there were violent confrontations and massacres across the continent. Many Europeans were ruined through despair and bankruptcy following Aboriginal raids on crops, huts and livestock. Native peoples fought the invaders on a tribe by tribe basis because each of them was a sovereign people defending their land. In a battle between the Duangwurrung people and George Faithful's party near Benalla in 1838, natives killed eight of his men. Faithful wrote of Aboriginal women and children running between his horse's legs to retrieve spears.

Frontier conflict was the most persistent feature of Australian life for 140 years. This was an inescapable consequence of the invasion and colonisation of the continent. The invaders saw no need to negotiate purchase of land or make treaties as they had done in North America and New Zealand.

Historians generally regard the Frontier Wars to have ended in 1928 with the killing of a large number of Warlpiri people (officially 30) by a police punitive party at Coniston, NT, in response to the death of a white man.

Australian historian Henry Reynolds estimates conservatively that frontier violence caused around 2000 European deaths while Indigenous deaths were at least ten times that number. In his recent book, *Forgotten War* (Newsouth 2013), he says that in recent times, Australian military historians have followed the lead of conventional historians in acknowledging the Frontier Wars.

In 1990, Jeffrey Gray published *A Military History of Australia* in which he observed that the conflict between the Australian Aboriginal tribes and settler invaders has been persistently downplayed with the result that Aborigines have not been conceded the dignity due to a worthy opponent.

Gray defines war 'as an act of force to compel an enemy to do your will', and views the conflict between Aborigines and the British as warfare. He contends that to deny the status of combatant to Aboriginal people is to deny their bravery and their will to resist the British invasion with every ounce of their being.

In his 2002 book *The Australian Frontier Wars 1788—1838*, Dr John Connor, an historian from the Australian Defence Force Academy, brings the Australian frontier into the mainstream of military history. He says the British Army found it difficult at first to operate on the Australian frontier because Aboriginal guerrilla tactics minimised the effect of muskets, and Aboriginal warriors were able to evade pursuit. The situation changed from 1825 when the army issued soldiers with horses, giving them the mobility to counter Aboriginal tactics over a wide frontier.

In his 1987 book *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land*, Reynolds reviews correspondence in which British settler invaders drew parallels in their letters home with other conflicts the British Empire fought in the world. There were comparisons with Indian mutinies, Jamaican riots, fierce hordes in the Sudan, savage Abyssinians, Apaches, Maoris, Zulus and many others.

For the AWM to say the Frontier Wars do not fit its charter is to exclude a whole people from commemoration based on a trifle. New Zealand, our partner in the Anzac legend, has no problem commemorating the Maori Wars of 1845—1872.

This is a moral issue. It is incumbent on non-Indigenous Australians to own our past and accept that our forebears perpetrated wrongs against Australia's Indigenous peoples. If our Indigenous peoples could go to the War Memorial and see a portrayal of their resistance heroes and testimony to their ancestors' tenacious struggle for their land, what a boost to their morale it would be.

## **In the margins of the Psalms**

CREATIVE

*Poetry*

### **'No pen or paper in paradise'**

—*Nawal Al Saadawi*

Housed within its crystal grotto the giant plasma screen creamily uncoils its mantra, one word chasing languidly upon another, 'Madness Is Pandemic', and, 'In America You Can Get Everything You Want' over a background of hazed, Maya blue, fathomless. Chariots of one sort or another crowd the company car park; Phrygian, Celtic, Illyrian, Thracian; theme park or anteroom one might have thought, but being dead, one does not think, for the moment eternally dissolves one into the other seamlessly; the dream of forever leaning, the fall, the long look back, the forced look down, and again, one thought chasing upon the tail of the next.

### **Written in the margins**

Every distraction arrives complete, absorbs our adoration. This is it. Till again, boundaries blur distances, shuffle like ash. Another ego burn-off. The orchards of the soul might have illuminated a monk's dream, his cell sweetened by the honey of his God. The desert air blown so dry it crackles, like wind at the entrance to a cave; open-mouthed, and silent as any cry of faith. His palms brush one against the other for loss and for love. He knows that in the dark, the stars will rage with light, that the margins of

the Psalms will once again be transformed  
into marble columns set aglow by his thought.

### **What angels throw**

Panels of light and shadow I studied as a child  
became a sort of kit set built into my future — paths of  
sunlight through blocks of dark — foundations to  
somewhere not yet reached; a comforting aloneness;  
one private act of knowing I was only half aware of,  
mood shaded the colour of twilight I trusted, and as I did  
so, aloneness turned to lonely, and I knew I was  
on my way, headed toward uplands that lay years ahead.  
I wondered how to make sense of those patterns,  
that portcullis of light and shadow there before the  
beginning, small corners of the world where angels dallied  
between tasks, taking a break, to toss rings of light  
onto lengthening poles of shadow from dawn to dusk.  
A game for them that can never end, maps of the world  
rolled up from one season's end to the next endlessly.

## Gasploitation in Queensland

AUSTRALIA

*Lily O'Neill*

The Western Australian Government recently acquired 3414 hectares of land at James Price Point, near Broome. It is the latest move in the continuing saga to develop the Browse Basin's liquefied natural gas (LNG), reserves that are now likely to be processed offshore. This controversial story is being played out on the national stage by heavy hitters from Indigenous and environmental organisations, the state and industry.

On the other side of the country, the building of four LNG processing plants on Curtis Island, off Gladstone, Qld, is proceeding more smoothly. Yet, while the traditional owners of James Price Point have received international attention, Gladstone traditional owners have barely been heard.

In WA, the land use agreements struck between the Goolarabooloo Jabirr Jabirr people, the state and Woodside Energy were worth at least \$1.5 billion, including land packages and funds for health, education and training. In Gladstone, the equivalent agreements are 'crumbs off the master's table', say traditional owners.

Walk through Gladstone and you feel the LNG industry's prominence: from the multiple shopfronts of gas companies including Santos, Origin and Arrow, to the lack of discussion about the negative impact that dredging is said to have on the Great Barrier Reef.

The local Indigenous people claiming ownership of Curtis Island are known as the Port Curtis Coral Coast (PCCC) people, an amalgam of the Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang, Bailai and Bunda peoples. All four LNG projects have negotiated land access agreements with this group, none of which are publically available. However, the snippets of information that I hear about them are telling.

Tony Johnson, a PCCC traditional owner, tells me that 'the four of them ... do not total \$10 million. It's obscene. I couldn't honestly say that we got the best of a bad lot.' I ask a manager from Santos' Aboriginal Engagement whether he has seen the Browse agreements. They are 'very generous' he replies. I ask him whether any of the Gladstone agreements are in the same ballpark. 'No,' he says, they are in 'a different stratosphere'.

In Broome, discussions between traditional owners, Woodside and the state took years to complete, and cost at least \$40 million. The Kimberly Land Council was funded to employ lawyers, media advisors, scientists and LNG industry consultants. In contrast, engagement with the PCCC was perfunctory and short. Santos had a negotiation period comprising just five meetings, prior to which the company had already worked out a reasonable 'jump-in' point for compensation.

I ask the Santos manager whether any groups are able to push past that initial

offer. 'They try to,' he says. Do they ever succeed? 'No, not really.'

There are many reasons for these disparities. The Kimberley is iconic and its Indigenous owners — people like Wayne Bergmann, Pat Dodson and Peter Yu — have political clout. Gladstone just doesn't have the same profile.

Another difference is the strength of native title rights at the two sites. At James Price Point, the land has only ever been owned by Indigenous people. Around Gladstone, traditional owners were booted off their land early in the colonial history of Queensland: a loss of connection to country means that native title rights are diminished.

Andrew Fraser, the former Queensland treasurer, says that this explains the gulf between the compensation being offered in Gladstone and Broome. Yet, as the former CEO of Woodside Don Voelte pointed out recently, the Browse package was not only about paying for land, but also 'sharing the rewards' of the LNG project. Indeed, when the land at James Price Point was commercially valued it was said to be worth just \$6–7 million.

Another difference between the two projects is how much traditional owners were funded to negotiate. In Gladstone, they had only legal advice, paid for by the LNG companies. They asked for more help from Queensland, but this was refused. Fraser says the role of governments in these negotiations is to 'set the rules of the game', however 'the idea that government needs to be [traditional owners'] agent in a negotiation is paternalistic'.

Yet, the government did play a role. As Johnson observed of his negotiations with the companies: 'When we were digging our heels in on any particular issue, including protecting significant cultural sites, we would always find ourselves in a meeting with the deputy director coordinator general ... and they would bring out the old compulsory acquisition stick.'

Indeed, Queensland is a major beneficiary of these projects. The day after a 'shut up' deal was signed with Santos, the PCCC learnt that the state would be receiving \$200 million annually in royalties from that company. Several people travelled to Santos headquarters in Brisbane and burnt an effigy of the manager I have been speaking to. He says this did not bother him, that none of the publicity about the protest had gone 'mainstream'.

## Australia is neither Christian nor atheist

AUSTRALIA

*Michael Mullins*

The Greens have called for the dropping of the Lord's Prayer from the opening of each day's sitting of Federal Parliament. The party's acting leader Richard Di Natale says the use of the prayer is outmoded and does not reflect modern multi-faith Australian society.

Senator Di Natale is correct to remind us that Australia is not a Christian country. But we cannot infer from this that religious and spiritual dedication should be dropped from parliament altogether. That would be appropriate only if Australia had adopted atheism or secularism in some official capacity like the totalitarian states of the 20th century.

Rather the changes in the religious composition of Australian society since 1901 imply that parliament should adopt a mix of prayers and moments of reflection that reflect a multi-faith society. That would include various representative religious faiths — as occurs in the US Congress — as well as secular beliefs or values.

The comment from the Greens' acting leader was prompted by a suggestion from the Federal Government's curriculum reviewer Kevin Donnelly, who argued that Australia's schools are too secular. His [point](#) was that school curricula are out of line with the religious assumptions of the Federal and State Parliaments, and that it's the schools that need to be brought into line.

He said: 'When you look at Parliaments around Australia — they all begin with the Lord's prayer. If you look at our constitution, the preamble is about God.'

The Donnelly review was announced by federal education minister Christopher Pyne, who is worried that the curriculum is too left-leaning and — by implication — secular. Subsequently Donnelly said religion does not have enough of a presence in Australia's 'very secular curriculum'.

Significantly he is advocating the teaching of multiple 'religions', and not just Christianity. 'I'm not saying we should preach to everyone, but I would argue that the great religions of the world — whether it's Islam, whether it's Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism — they should be taught over the compulsory years of school.'

Donnelly's main challenge with respect to the teaching of religion in schools is to ensure that teachers are genuine in their attempts to promote understanding of the various faiths, and that they have no interest in proselytising. Unfortunately his initial statements leave the door open to proselytising in a manner reminiscent of the Howard Government's chaplaincy program, which was abused by particular religious interests because it did not include adequate safeguards to prevent such



indoctrination.

Even the president of the Rationalist Society of Australia Meredith Doig [agrees](#) that 'most people are in favour of general religious education'. She has a problem only when a curriculum or program facilitates indoctrination, and this invariably occurs when it focuses on a particular form of religion.

Di Natale is right to urge a change to current practice, but only to bring it into line with modern Australian society, which is multi-faith and not no-faith. Therefore the Lord's Prayer should not be scrapped altogether, but used in a cycle that includes prayers and observances reflecting the non-Christian part of the population.