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Australia slips in generosity ranking

AUSTRALIA

Paul O'Callaghan

Australians are a generous bunch. Every year, almost two million households donate to the work of Australian aid and development agencies. Among 5.4 million Catholics nationwide, around 90 per cent of parishes and 70 per cent of schools support Caritas Australia's work with the children, women and men most vulnerable to poverty and injustice.

While Australians readily reach into their own pockets to protect human rights and dignity around the world, they also expect that their government will continue a decades-long tradition of using the overseas aid program to help ease the burden for the world's poorest and open opportunities for their economic prosperity.

Though far from the global target to commit 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI) to foreign aid by 2015, Australia's aid budget increased to 35 cents (0.35 per cent) in every \$100 of GNI in 2012. Both major political parties had committed to lift that level to 50 cents in every \$100 of GNI. In the absence of any timeline, there is effectively no such commitment now.

Yet, for a country with a proud half century history of constructive international engagement, this federal budget marks a notable shift to a more *inward*-looking Australia; an Australia that heavily prioritises its own interests in our immediate neighbourhood. The combined effect of the three successive cuts to foreign aid in less than 12 months equates to a decrease of nearly \$8 billion over the next 5 years.

Based on the budget, by 2016-17 Australia's aid funding will fall to 0.29 per cent of GNI, which would see Australia regress from its current 13th position among OECD countries to a ranking alongside Portugal. As the 10th wealthiest country in the world, according to the IMF, this downward shift demonstrates a withdrawal from a respected, co-leadership role in international affairs.

It is worth recalling the constructive policy approach of former Coalition leaders. Prime Ministers Fraser and Howard successfully pursued active foreign policy engagement through Australia's significant contribution to the economic transformation in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, and further afield through deepening ties with African nations too. These policies improved opportunities for trade and investment and are also recognised as having contributed to improved regional security.

It was the Coalition that instigated for the first Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in 1971. It was Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser who played a critical international role in pressuring South Africa to dismantle its apartheid regime. And Coalition Governments have sent or supported sending 53 Australian peace keeping missions beyond Australia's region.

Last week this Coalition government committed to a much smaller and a 'just in our neighbourhood' aid program for the long term. This major change had sent a signal to the world; for the first time in decades, last week's budget marks a notable turn to a more insular Australia. We can, and should, do better.

Given that a substantial part of publicly donated Australian aid is directed to programs in Africa, and Australian mining investment means our bilateral trade with Africa is booming,

Australia need not - and should not - shrink down to a one region role.

In just over 10 years, Africa will be home to 80 per cent of the poorest people in the world. Caritas Australia has worked with the poor communities in Africa for several decades and we know that accountable, sustainable and community-centric aid works. With support from the Australian Government, our local partners in Malawi have succeeded in cutting the average number of months when 16,000 community members have almost no food from five months of the year to one month. And in just six months, almost 7,500 people in one community have saved USD 153,669 in village savings and loans.

All Australians expect their government to use tax payer funds prudently and in a very accountable way. At the same time, given that one in five households give privately to address the causes of poverty overseas and take pride in Australia's long bipartisan tradition of constructive international engagement, there is no clear rationale for now becoming a "small Australia" on the world stage.

But last week's budget hasn't just downsized our role in the international community. It is a decision to largely exclude most of the world's poor from an aid program that has great potential to address the causes of inequality and drive stable and sustainable growth in Africa. At a time when Australian investment in Africa is booming, our decision to divest the poorest communities is more than perplexing.

Waiting room blues

MEDIA

Brian Matthews



The first sentence of S.J. Perelman's brilliant send-up of pulp fiction — 'Somewhere a Roscoe' — is 'This is the story of a mind that found itself.' Purporting to have been 'moody, discontented, restless, almost a character in a Russian novel', Perelman is shaken from his lethargy by a chance encounter with the magazine *Spicy Detective* in which he discovers with growing amazement the amorous and violent adventures of Private Eye Dan Turner. It is the sort of thing that only happens to someone like Perelman, ever vigilant for the odd and the weird. And yet, and yet ...|

During the past couple of months, I have spent many hours in assorted specialists' waiting rooms. Knowing from experience that the medical and dental fraternity — and sorority, for that matter — have literary tastes in inverse proportion to the impressiveness of their qualifications, I made a point each time of taking a book with me. Thus I could while away the hiatus between a scheduled 2.30 pm appointment and its actual manifestation at four with something more interesting than the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's Australian holiday — utterly different apparently from preceding Royal diversions except for the fact that, like all those earlier jaunts, we paid for it — or the romantic/financial/social/sexual/misadventures and achievements of various nobiles and viriles jostling and harassing each other on the 'A' List.

One day, however, forced to park a postcode or two away from my medical destination, I left my book in the car. And that was why — slumped with several other supplicants and mendicants in the downlighted waiting room sullenly contemplating a dog-eared, serially thumbed and carelessly discarded spread of magazines — I was 'moody, discontented, restless, almost a character in a Russian novel'. What snapped me out of my Slavic dejection was not alas the adventurous Dan Turner ('Somewhere a roscoe went ...œKachow... and a bullet creased my think tank') but a magazine that seemed to be called *Soa*.

This was because its luridly colourful cover was partly obscured by other mags. For a while I puzzled over this — it was something to do after all. Society of Actuaries? Service Oriented Architecture? Sons of Anarchy? Succumbing at last to extreme boredom I got up, slid *SOA* out from under its ragtag competitors and all was revealed: *Soap World*. Well, to steal another of Perelman's lines, 'Talk about your turning points.' My Dan Turner moment had arrived.

The cover of *Soap World* announces in various strident fonts, 'Fatal Car Crash', a 'House Fire Horror', a couple of assaults and a planned murder. Pretty much the standard tabloid fare. But wait: though reported as if it were breaking news, all of this — and much more when you turned the pages — was happening in another, surreal world, the world of the 'soap opera'. Though *Soap World's* breathless prose reveals cryptically in brackets that its star-crossed, malevolent, lovelorn or conniving characters are actors playing roles, it's very easy to overlook this because the tone, reporting style and layout all insist that it is in the 'real world' that Lady Mary is 'drowning in her own grief', that Emily has 'Father Paul under her thumb', that 'a badly injured Joshua turns to drugs as his hopes of swimming stardom are cruelly dashed' and that 'the Renwood girls are living on precarious tenterhooks as they deal with the shocks of Zach's violent mugging and Jenny and Callum's cancelled wedding,

as well as Sophie's hidden pain from her Kenyan attack, Bec's fear of moving on without Matt, and Sam's lurking passion for Flynn'.

I'm as partial as the next casual viewer to a good soap — 'The Paradise', 'The Time of Our Lives', 'Redfern Now' — but what intrigued me about *Soap World*, and moved me to theft in the interests of research — was its apparent assumption, aided by torrents of bad prose, that Bec and the Renwoods and Father Paul and Liam and the rest are real people leading real, if impossibly crowded and sensational, lives. It's as if a photo is double-exposed and we're living in the bit that's the just off-key replica of the original.

That at least was what I was thinking until I raised my head out of *Soap World* and looked around me. There I found that 'No cuts to the ABC or SBS' meant \$43.5 million in cuts over four years; that 'No cuts to education or health' meant \$80 billion to be cut in the next decade; that a promise of \$2.5 billion in management funds to ARENA (Australian Renewable Energy Agency) meant the agency would be abolished; that a promise of \$500 million for solar roofs meant the solar roof policy would be abolished. And that when asked to explain these anomalies, the Prime Minister, like any accomplished pulp fictioneer, simply denied they existed.

For all the phoney intensity of their lives, not even Bec or Callum or Hope could cop that one. As for Dan Turner, it would just be a matter of raising the Roscoe and going 'Kachow!'

Budget makes asylum seeker vilification official

AUSTRALIA

Kerry Murphy

The Government's vilification of people arriving by boat has now reached the level where the term 'illegal' features in the Budget documents.



Immigration Minister Morrison has insisted on referring to people arriving by boat as 'illegals' for some years. When he became Minister, he directed his staff to refer to people as 'illegal', despite the Migration Act using the less pejorative term 'unlawful non-citizen'.

This is not just a lawyer's linguistic debate; if it were not important, the Government would not insist on the term. 'Illegal' has a connotation of criminal behaviour, and that is why they use it. It is vilifying and dehumanising and is linked to smuggling. 'Unlawful' evokes something more in line with getting a parking ticket.

Using the term 'illegal' in formal documents to describe boat arrivals is like calling people who receive social security payments 'dole bludgers', and insisting that bureaucrats use this term in documents and meetings.

The term in the Migration Act for those arriving without a visa is 'unlawful maritime arrival'. Yet the Budget papers have a section entitled 'Illegal Maritime Arrivals (IMA) Onshore and Offshore Management'. It is ironic that after this deliberate vilification, one of the stated objectives is to 'treat IMAs with dignity and respect'.

We 'treat them with respect' by refusing to give them permanent residence or family reunion. We remove access to funded assistance with refugee applications and to any funded advice whatsoever. Those to whom the Labor Government 'recklessly' granted permanent residence now have the lowest priority in sponsoring spouses and dependent children, which means years of waiting.

The Government has stated its intention to reintroduce some form of temporary protection visa, despite reports by psychologists about the harm such a program caused in the Howard years, and two recent attempts to reintroduce it by regulation being disallowed in the Senate.

Previously people who arrived by boat or air without a visa and were taken to detention could obtain migration and legal advice. Legal Aid has not been available for asylum seekers for many years, as the funding comes from Immigration. Without funded legal assistance in detention or in the community, people do the case themselves, or rely on pro bono help. A few may have funds to pay for private lawyers and agents.

Now the Government has ceased funding to help people with review cases in the Refugee or Migration Review Tribunal. This cut is short-sighted as it means more unrepresented applicants in a system which is legally complex. Access to justice is a basic right, but now access is seen merely as a privilege for those with means.

Further to all this is the proposed 'Australian Border Force', which sounds like some leftover from Empire on the North West Frontier, like 'Morrison's Border Rifles'. This furthers the militarisation of this humanitarian issue under Operation Sovereign Borders.

Probably the day-to-day work of Customs and Immigration officers will not change with

these titles, but there is a legitimate concern about transparency here. Once you refer to issues as a security matter, transparency becomes opaque and the risk of unlawful acts by government increases. Remember Cornelia Rau?

The rhetoric of this and the previous Government is that 'saving people from drowning at sea' is a good thing. But what happens then? We dump them on Pacific processing colonies, and encourage them to return home to what they fled in the first place. Nowhere in Morrison's [speech](#) to the Lowy Institute does the term 'human rights' appear. In fact, 'rights' is only mentioned in connection with 'property rights'. 'Human' does not feature.

In Italy, when boats sink and people drown, they have days of mourning, and the Pope calls it a *vergogna* — disgrace/shameful. In Italy the naval operation is called *Mare Nostrum* and their focus is on rescuing people at sea and bringing them onshore to assess their cases. In Australia we call it 'Operation Sovereign Borders', vilify the asylum seekers and sub-contract dealing with their human rights to poor countries.

In his Lowy Institute speech, Morrison claimed he has 'freed up' 20,000 places in the refugee and humanitarian program over this and the next four years 'by ensuring their places are not taken by those who came illegally by boat'. This is disingenuous, because firstly the Coalition reduced the program from 20,000 places annually to 13,750, a 30 per cent cut. So really they have reduced the number of visas by 31,250 over five years.

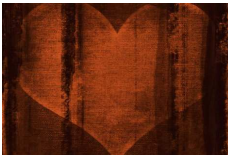
For every person who is granted a visa, whether onshore or in a camp or urban area overseas, thousands miss out. That is the reality. There are 2.7 million Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, few of whom would ever have a chance here, and there are now reports on Australian officials trying to encourage Syrians in Nauru to return to their war-ravaged country.

Maybe in 20 years we will have a judicial inquiry and an apology in Parliament. I would like to see that. In the meantime, the vilification and demonising of a group of asylum seekers continues because it serves a political purpose to have a group in society who are unwanted and can be blamed for our failings. This is our *vergogna*.

Love creates space for restorative justice

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton



One of the notable developments in the justice system in recent years has been the attention given to the victims of serious crime. Those directly affected and their relatives have been given a chance to speak and so to influence sentencing. As a result the consequences of crime receive wider publicity.

This development has been welcome. By highlighting in human terms the human consequences for those affected by crime it invites the court, the perpetrator and the community to recognise its seriousness. It shows that no crime is an event without consequence but brings hurt and loss to individuals and to different groups beyond the immediate victim. The response of the community to crime must take this into account..

The attention to victims has come at a time when political attitudes to crime and sentencing have hardened. Statutory minimum sentences, the reduction of parole and the loss of judicial flexibility embody an emphasis on the retributive aspect of punishment, with corresponding less emphasis on the place of rehabilitation and restoration. Imprisonment is seen as the principal way of safeguarding the community.

As a result jails are becoming more crowded with less funding and opportunity for rehabilitation.

Although imprisonment is an essential part of any response to crime, this emphasis fails to serve well the needs of victims of crime or of the community. These are inextricably interwoven with the needs of the perpetrators.

The challenge for all affected is to find the inner space to address these needs. Crime restricts space: the inner freedom we need to take responsibility for our lives and the consequences of what we have done, to accept our predicaments, and to recognise that we are vulnerable to events and people over which we have no control.

This space is crowded out by the anger, fear, guilt and horror that we naturally feel when confronted with the crime we have done, suffered or seen enter our world. In addressing crime, we need to restore and amplify that space so that people can find healing, make changes to their lives and make rational decisions.

The prosecution and sentencing of perpetrators help restore space to victims and the community, restoring their faith in an ordered world. The opportunity for victims to describe their hurt and have it taken into account in sentencing also gives space. It affirms the wrongness of the crime and ensures others will be protected.

But many victims discover that no finite punishment can ever satisfy their anger, make up for their loss or guarantee their future security. The hope frequently expressed that the perpetrator will rot in hell reflects their insatiable desire for retribution, but also the hell into which the crime has plunged them.

Anger is a natural response when we are affected by crime. But ultimately we find space only when we let go of our rage. In many cases we can only do this when those who have wronged us feel remorse for what they have done. To that extent the space for freedom of the victim depends on the space found by the perpetrator.

That is true also for the community. The anxiety about crime that afflicts society can be assuaged only by assurance that the community is safe. Such assurance will not be believed unless people turn from crime to sociable living in the community.

But contrary to popular opinion the imposition of harsher sentences under more rigorous conditions make it more, not less, likely that people will reoffend. More public funds then need to be spent on keeping more people locked up, with the result there is little left to fund counselling and transition back into the community.

The stigma of prison translates easily into self-loathing among people whose sense of themselves is already weak. Harsh physical conditions and natural resentment intensify self-blame and hopelessness. Self-preoccupation leaves little room for consideration of others, imaginative identification with the victims of their crimes and for reflecting on how they'd like to live. So they return to the patterns of life that led them to prison.

For the good of victims and of the community prisoners need to find the space in which they can recognise and feel remorse for the harm they have done, reflect on and change the patterns of life that contributed to the crime, and come to act accountably. To develop this space of freedom is not easy. It demands building relationships in an environment that encourages self-reflection and self-confidence.

Good relationships are built on love. If they are to change people need to be valued and loved as persons. When we remove judicial discretion, the realistic possibility of parole, and place people in overcrowded and under-serviced prisons, we measure them as things.

To include love in penal justice may seem impossible. But recently in court a man was sentenced to jail for dangerous driving that led to the death of a young woman. Her father then embraced the driver. The health of the victims of crime and of the community depends on people trying to make the impossible possible.

Feelgood celebration of white male privilege

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (PG). Director: Ben Stiller. Starring: Ben Stiller, Kristen Wiig, Adam Scott, Shirley MacLaine, Sean Penn, Kathryn Hahn. 114 minutes**

Last week I drew [comparison](#) between UK filmmaker Richard Ayoade's black comedy *The Double*, and American actor-director Ben Stiller's lighter and brighter *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (released this month on DVD). I noted that in the week of the Bleak Budget, the cynicism of the former resonated more strongly than the optimism of the latter. In fact that remark sold Stiller's film rather short. This ebullient remake of the 1947 Danny Kaye film turns 'uplifting' into a veritable art form.

It finds Walter (Stiller) living a staid existence, admiring a co-worker Cheryl (Wiig) from afar but without the confidence to so much as talk to her. Instead Walter is prone to wild daydreams in which he is a hero, an artist, a lover, that play out on-screen as often-hilarious parodies of Hollywood action and romance films.

The film is playfully upfront with its linguistic symbols. Inert Walter is employed as a 'negative assets manager' (he works with photographic negatives) during the dying days of *Life* magazine. He works for *Life*, but his own has stagnated. The man overseeing the magazine's closure, Ted (Scott), identifies himself as 'manager of the transition'; a euphemism for his villainous role, but also signifying the catalytic part he plays in Walter's journey.

Inspired by Cheryl, and spurred by a number of clues left for him by wild and enigmatic photographer Sean O'Connell (Penn), Walter soon finds himself on a global quest to locate a priceless negative. His experiences — jumping out of a helicopter, battling a shark, skating down the side of a volcano — begin to supplant his flights of fancy, and revitalise his life. The shamelessly inspirational message here is 'Don't dream. Do.'

There is an uncomfortable aspect to all this. Walter's ability to jet around the world in order to 'find himself' is implicitly an expression of affluent, white privilege. The film also gives short shrift to its female characters: Scott is delightfully obnoxious as Ted, and Penn brings suitable gravitas to the almost mystical role that Sean plays in Walter's life, but either of these substantial characters could easily have been women.

The only female characters are Love Interest, Mother and Sister; Wiig, MacClaine and Hahn are admirable in these roles, but they are essentially there only to provide motivation and exposition relevant to Walter's story.

There's no escaping these reservations, though ultimately they don't undermine Stiller's achievement at turning the warm-and-fuzzies up to 11. Consider the film's use of music. Stiller has selected songs that brazenly signpost his hero's emotional journey while also running fingers up and down the viewer's spine. The emphatic stomp and yowl of Arcade Fire's 'Wake Up' is perfectly placed to jolt Walter out of his rut. The aural embers of Jose Gonzales' croon warm him during his more retrospective moments.

David Bowie's 'Space Oddity' — a song about a doomed astronaut — is presented somewhat incongruously as an anthem to self-actualisation, but it works: Walter is growing despondent in a bar in Greenland when Cheryl appears as a vision, strumming a guitar and urging him on with the song's opening lines. As Walter rouses, Bowie's more expansive

original fades in to help shake and speed him along the road from stupefying safety towards risk and incomparable experience. The soundtrack is a significant part of the film's power to inspire.

Perhaps the film's greatest achievement and its most distinctive feature is its forays into Walter's fantasies. These capture intuitively the ways in which an overactive imagination works; the exaggerations, the surreal digressions, the impossibilities that are neatly integrated with the more mundane aspects of daydreams.

See the way Walter leaps from a train platform and falls neatly through a window on the opposite side of the street during a 'heroic rescue'. His fantasy of engaging the repugnant Ted in hand-to-hand combat joyfully ignores the laws of physics. Walter imagines declaring his love for Cheryl and then — apropos of nothing — spirals off into a bizarre Benjamin Button fantasy that is one of the funniest scenes in any film of the past year. (And hats off here to Wiig for her sublime delivery of one of the most unlikely lines of dialogue you'll ever hear.)

I'm a sucker for a feelgood film, and this is as feelgood as they come. Given last week's unequivocal iteration of the dire state of Australian politics, perhaps we've earned the right to a bit of escapism.

Let's be good neighbours with Timor

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan

On Saturday, I had the pleasure of joining Timor Leste's erstwhile First Lady Kirsty Sword Gusmao and the Timorese ambassador Abel Guterres (pictured) at a public meeting at the Mary MacKillop Centre in Sydney, convened by long time campaigners Sister Susan Connelly and Tom Clarke from the Timor Sea Justice Campaign.



The message was simple: 'A fair go for East Timor'. The lecture hall was full to capacity with Australians concerned about the decency of our dealings with the Timorese over the oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea.

In 2006, Australia and Timor Leste signed the Treaty on Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea (CMATS). The treaty came into force early in 2007 with a provision requiring the submission and approval of an appropriate development plan for the Greater Sunrise oil and gas deposit within six years. The treaty was finalised at a time of considerable political instability in Timor. It was not subject to the usual treaty review processes by the Australian Parliament, there being bipartisan criticism of Alexander Downer's wanton haste to grab a small window of opportunity for implementation of the treaty. In exchange for an increased share of the upstream revenue flow from any Sunrise development (increased from 18 per cent to 50 per cent), Timor agreed to Australia's demand that we put boundary negotiations on hold for 50 years.

Timor Leste already receives a steady revenue flow from the development of the Bayu Undan oil and gas field in the Timor Sea. With this revenue, Timor has the money to employ the very best international lawyers to advise on boundary delimitation. These lawyers think that Timor has a very strong case for establishing that the whole of Sunrise would fall within the Timor jurisdiction. Equally, Australia's lawyers continue to argue Sunrise is located under the Australian continental shelf, and that even if there be agreement on a median line between Australia and Timor, there would be little prospect of Timor getting any more than 20 per cent of the upstream revenue flow.

A year ago, the joint venturers for the Sunrise project submitted their development proposal for a floating natural gas facility (FLNG), avoiding the need to pipe the gas to either Darwin or Timor. The Timorese leadership are not interested in an FLNG proposal which would yield no significant downstream revenue, would contribute nothing to the development of infrastructure in Timor, and would do little to assist Timor employment and training. There is a political imperative for the Timorese leadership to be able to deliver to their people an oil and gas project which develops tangible onshore benefits, and not just another offshore revenue flow like Bayu Undan.

Armed with evidence of Australian spying on the Timorese during the negotiation of CMATS, the Timorese decided to challenge the validity of CMATS, commencing an international arbitration. Australia then conducted raids on premises which housed material relevant to the arbitration.

In March, the Timorese had a spectacular win in the International Court of Justice, causing great embarrassment to Australia. The Timorese challenged Australia's raid on the Canberra legal offices of one of their lawyers, Bernard Collaery, and on the home of witness K, a retired Australian intelligence officer. They asked that Australia return the seized materials. Last week, Mr Collaery informed the Senate that he was acting as a lawyer for Witness K with the knowledge and approval of Ian Carnell, the Director General of Intelligence and Security. Collaery informed the Senate Privileges Committee: 'Witness K alleged he had been constructively dismissed from ASIS, as a result of a new culture within ASIS. The evidence indicates that the change sought included an operation he had been ordered to execute in Dili, Timor Leste.'

Back in March, the International Court of Justice ruled by 12 votes to 4 that Australia not use any of the seized materials from Collaery's and K's premises to the disadvantage of Timor Leste and that Australia keep the seized documents under seal. The majority of judges were not satisfied that the undertakings by George Brandis, the Australian Attorney-General, were sufficient to safeguard Timor's interests. Even more embarrassing for Australia was the court's all but unanimous decision to order that Australia 'not interfere in any way in communications between Timor-Leste and its legal advisers'. The decision was all but unanimous in the sense that the one Australian judge on the case was the only one to dissent from this order. Sir Christopher Greenwood, the UK judge, offered this damning indictment of Australia's behaviour:

In view of the seizure of papers which clearly related to legal advice and preparation for the forthcoming arbitration from Timor-Leste's lawyer, it is entirely understandable that Timor-Leste is concerned that there might be future interference and it sought an assurance from Australia that there would be no such interference. To my surprise, the undertaking from the Attorney-General makes no mention of this matter. In the absence of any undertaking not to interfere with Timor-Leste's communications with its lawyers in the future, I accept that there is a real and imminent risk of such interference which requires action on the part of the Court.

The day after the decision was delivered, the Australian stable of Murdoch newspapers carried the [headline](#): 'Australia wins East Timor UN court fight'. This was no win for Australia; it was a humiliating defeat.

What is to be gained for Australia and Timor as neighbours airing dirty laundry in such exalted international fora? It is time for both countries to agree to put the unresolved boundary issue to bed. The situation is similar to neighbours agreeing not to settle the boundary of their back fence. That is all very fine unless and until

there is a problem. Once there is a problem, it makes good sense to determine the boundary. The boundary should be left unresolved only if there can be the assurance that both parties can get what they want in the meantime, living amicably as neighbours. The Timorese want to find an economically feasible way in which Sunrise can be exploited with the gas being piped onshore to Timor for processing. Unless that can be done, Timor has no interest in the short term development of Sunrise. They think it is time to settle the boundaries. It's time to pipe the gas to Timor or to draw the line and get back to being good neighbours.

Moral teaching that falls on deaf ears

AUSTRALIA

Neil Ormerod

At a time when we are preoccupied with the shock of the budget, and Scott Morrison has been seeking to justify his proposed Australian Border Force, a recent [media release](#) from the Catholic Bishops seems to have passed with little or no notice from the mainstream media. It is hard to recall such a strong and direct call by the Catholic Bishops on our politicians on a matter of major public policy.

On 8 May, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference released a statement on asylum seekers which pulled no punches in terms of its evaluation of the policies of the present Coalition and former Labor governments. The language was to the point, tough and desperate in tone. It spoke of human rights being 'seriously violated', and of making an 'urgent plea for a respect for the rights of asylum seekers.'

The word which is often repeated is 'cruel/cruelty'. The current policy displays 'a cruelty that does no honour to our country'. It notes that our politicians 'are not cruel people', but 'they have made decisions and are implementing policies which are cruel'. In desperation they call out, 'Enough of this institutionalised cruelty'. While acknowledging the desire to 'stop the boats' (to use the Coalition slogan) they ask, 'Does this require such cruelty?'

In their analysis of the underlying causes for the current policy settings, the bishops again pull no punches. Referring to our past policy of 'White Australia' they acknowledge not only 'a xenophobia in us but also a latent racism' in our society. In this regard they could easily have pointed to recent efforts by the Attorney General Senator George Brandis to repeal sections of the anti-discrimination legislation, a move that has raised concerns with a number of ethnic groups in Australia. There is a real fear that the ugliness of racism will once again raise its voice.

Noting also the relative wealth of Australia as a nation, they also claim, 'There may also be the selfishness of the rich' in our refusal to recognise the claims of refugees and asylum seekers. Here again we find the present government seeking to send asylum seekers to Cambodia, one of the world's poorest nations rather than accept our international responsibilities to asylum seekers.

They conclude their statement with a 'call on parliamentarians of all parties to turn away from these policies, which shame Australia and to take the path of a realistic compassion that deals with both human need and electoral pressure. We call on the nation as a whole to say no to the dark forces, which make these policies possible. The time has come to examine our conscience and *then to act differently*' (emphasis added).

Of course the argument is made that the policy is saving lives by discouraging

boats from undertaking a perilous journey that puts lives at risk. But such a justification amounts to ends justifying means. Undoubtedly it is laudable to seek to save lives, but if the means to do so requires a serious violation of human rights and the imposition of a harsh and cruel system of indeterminate detention in remote settings, then the moral calculus shifts. We are not responsible for the moral decisions of others, but we are for the ones we make and the cruelty we impose.

The bishops are saying directly and forcefully that the current policy implemented by these politicians is immoral. 'The time has come to examine our conscience and then to act differently.' But it seems no-one is listening!

My phone addiction nightmare

CREATIVE

Isabella Fels

Mobile phones. What a trap they are. I get all wrapped up in conversation until the electronic voice almost politely tells me to shut up and to put more money on my prepaid.

Sick of running out and guzzling up money I turned to what looked like a great affordable new phone plan. Not only did I get a snazzy phone with all the latest features, but also what looked like unlimited access to everyone and everything I knew. \$550 worth of calls on a \$69 a month plan seemed like a total dream. I could keep myself hanging on the phone talking to my boyfriend and family all day and night long at my own convenience.

Instead I woke up screaming over the \$700 bill I incurred in just two weeks. *What have I done?* I felt weak. My future now felt bleak. There was simply no way I could pay it off.

I charged to the phone dealer and complained that I had been taken for a ride. I got very little sympathy. He told me that the service provider is a business, then gave me some very tough options to choose from, which all required vast amounts of money to exit or change plans. I knew I was going to have to toss aside the phone that almost felt like an appendage to me. I couldn't imagine how I'd get through life without it.

I had loved my phone to the point where I couldn't hold back even when I was put on hold. I kept hanging on, listening to the piano or boring elevator music or advertising or large beeps that pierced my eardrums, totally unaware that this was coming at a huge price.

In the end I had no choice but to give it up. For a while I did not have a phone. I don't know how I coped. It had been like an expensive designer drug. It kept me in touch and highly animated. How I loved ringing up everyone from banks to psychics to my wonderful parents, boyfriend and friends. How much fun I had! I felt a sense of empowerment and freedom that I never felt before.

I know now that I abused the hell out of my phone. It was like a rag doll which I'd drag around everywhere. It came at a huge price that kept inflating like a huge balloon until it finally burst and the party was over.

It also just about caused me an early mid life crisis. I have never spent more money on anything else, even designer clothes, jewellery and furniture. It even topped the electricity bill. I used the phone like running water.

Every second counts as dollar amounts. As the old saying goes, time is money, and this is the very first strict rule which applies to the mobile phone.

Now I can credit myself with controlling my new phone better, by keeping calls to a minimum, and by not fearing to tell people when I cannot afford to ring them. After switching back to a prepaid I now have no choice but to switch off and use other forms of communication such as chatting online, or even doing old fashioned things like writing letters and talking to people face to face.

Just like the phone plan I now find myself exiting conversations with grace, and disciplining myself to the limitations of the prepaid.

More political fairytales

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas



Old men playing bocce

CREATIVE

Shane McCauley

Five poems by Shane McCauley

Memory of Rain

They said it happened a lot
in the last century
a gathering up some sort of folding
in of the clouds

the ancients even had gods for it
and priests to beseech the gods
They said it could make rocks
give birth to flowers
that mountains could be dissolved
that fields would burst with food
people danced in it
sheltered from it
felt safe as it grazed their roofs
They said without it
there will be famine and chaos
loss and destruction
deserts will fill our mouths
They said it is hope
that water brings
They said so many things

Rasas

WONDER- To take the obvious



since we cannot escape it
have overused our words
to make sense of it —
that the night of stars
has no end that the night
of stars has no beginning
no end no seeming purpose
no plot no destiny than
to pattern dark nothing
with bright nothing
or perhaps everything after all.

FEAR- Is it in this case
no different? Standing
aslant the universe
and daring it to do its best
or worst. Fear that
the night of stars
has not even noticed me
not noticed my alert attention
or is it perhaps
fear that it has?

Old Men Playing Bocce

autumn's last sunshine
splinters shadow
muffled exclamations
send Italian syllables
into the far pale blue
the small cannon balls
bounce across

the peaceful green
three women joggers
and a dancing dog puff by
the men huddle
convene for a verdict
and each breath seems to say
that this is what
such days are for

Monsoon

'The summer starts in April' — Madhur Jaffrey

Nothing is predictable
but heat's onset
south-western wind
like shards of hot metal.
If you touch anything
on this earth you burn.
Dust arrives and paints
the world dead.
Salted lime juice
and green mango tease
with a moment's coolness.

Then the planet's essence
inhabits your nostrils
a horizon army gathers
and rushes forward
releases lightning
bursts open your cocoon

of heat. The first relief
pierces like love
hearts as in some fable
explode with rain
and like love too
nothing is predictable.

Haiku

in pre-dawn dark
geiger-counter
of sleeping cat
in silence
only this deep-breathing
of the washing-machine

The trust deficit is international

INTERNATIONAL

Evan Ellis



China's recent decision to lob a billion dollar oil rig into the disputed South China Sea, some 220 km off the coast of Vietnam, seemingly embodies the old maxim that possession is nine-tenths of the law.

The rig is located near the Paracel Islands, which the Chinese Communist Party won part of (the Amphitrite group) during their civil war with the Nationalists in 1950 and the remaining islands (the Crescent group) from US backed South Vietnam in 1974. After the collapse of South Vietnam two years later the newly unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam inherited South Vietnam's claim.

Until recently the islands were just one more piece of disputed territory in the South China Sea. No less than seven sovereign nations — Brunei, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam — push their claims for the expanses of water, submerged minerals and islands that make up one of the world's most important shipping lanes.

As such any action that might tip the balance to one claimant over another is recorded with the precision of a seismometer's needle. An operational deep sea-drilling rig is analogous to a sizeable geopolitical quake. And Vietnam has [responded](#) in kind.

Flotillas have been launched, ships have allegedly rammed each other like angrily jousting knights, an anti-Chinese protest has lurched into pogrom-like violence and businesses have been burned to the ground for even using Chinese characters. China is now evacuating its citizens from potential danger as Vietnam's leaders seek to reign in the anti-Chinese sentiment they are accused of stoking.

Much commentary has focused on the turbulent and intertwined history of Vietnam and China. The great nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh illustrated Vietnam's longstanding ambivalence towards their on-again, off-again ally when he declared in the midst of First Indochina War:

You fools! Don't you remember your history? The last time the Chinese came, they stayed a thousand years. The French are foreigners. They are weak. Colonialism is dying. ...| But if the Chinese stay now, they will never go. As for me, I prefer to sniff French s—t for five years than to eat Chinese s—t for the rest of my life.

However there is a deeper, structural cause to the current conflict that can be explained outside of the unique history of these two nations. It is also an explanation that raises worrying questions for the future of peace in the region.

Despite all pretences of civilisation, modern international relations remain deeply anarchic. Not in the Hobbesian sense that chaos reigns and life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. But rather as an ordering principle, where in our current system of independent states there is no central authority above us.

If Eastern Ukraine was invaded tomorrow, for example (regardless of the likelihood of this happening), there is no strong, impartial arbitrator that might step in to adjudicate. Each independent state is left to their web of alliances and whatever military strength they can marshal to defend itself. The United Nations might provide a forum for international collaboration but it is hardly a 'government of governments.'

This might be called the *night watchman rule*. When things go bad, as they have in Tibet, West Papua, Palestine etc. there is no night watchman to swoop in and help out in the same way a modern police force and judicial system does *within* a nation state.

The implications of this is teased out in a masterful if depressing work by John Mearsheimer called *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

The best way for states to survive in an anarchic system in which others states ...| might be hostile is to have more rather than less power. This logic...| drives states to maximise their share of world power.

And so the astronomical rise of China is leading to a commensurate increase in defence spending in neighbouring nations. This [explains](#) why, when defence spending at a global level has fallen the last two years in a row, in Asia it actually increased last year by 3.6 per cent. China might rise into a peaceful, responsible Middle Kingdom, but without a night watchman to offer any insurance, sovereign states place their assurances in their own armouries.

Australia is no different. Despite the bloodletting of the recent budget, the Coalition could still fork out some 12 billion dollars for 58 Joint Strike Fighters that might be '[flying lemons](#)'. Why? Because no one wants to be caught without a big stick in a genuinely dangerous world.

The tragedy is more than the absence of a 'government of governments'. Those seeking a solution in the night watchman should surely recall Plato's sage observation that 'this and no other is the root from which a tyrant springs; when he first appears he is a protector'.

But without it we are doomed to seemingly endless competition. China looks out and [sees](#) a ring of antagonistic states. As it increases its military spending to assert itself — something the US did with great effect following the [Monroe doctrine](#) centuries earlier — those neighbouring states will follow suit by increasing their defence spending, which only adds further impetus for China to continue upward defence spending.

In a world where trust is always in deficit, the only one who wins is the arms

dealer.

So the current conflict between Vietnam and China is sadly somewhat predictable. As China grows, its 'core interests' will increase. As its ability to project its power increases, so does the likelihood of it taking inflammatory unilateral action. The potential for dangerous missteps, even with rational actors on all sides, should be obvious.

This is part of the reality of the Asian Century. Australia will need statesmen and women of the highest calibre to navigate these waters. But ultimately, if we are to secure a lasting peace, we may need to navigate out of these waters all together and create an international order that is actually that; ordered.

Budget points to new sectarianism

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

When Tony Abbott reintroduced knights and dames back in March, commentators [said](#) it was a sign he was 'stuck in the 1950s'. Another characteristic of 1950s Australian society was its sectarianism. The nation was bitterly divided along religious lines, with 'mixed' marriages frowned upon and Protestants often denied employment in Catholic dominated workplaces, and vice-versa.



There are echoes of 1950s sectarianism in last Tuesday's Federal Budget announcement that schools will lose the option of appointing non-religious welfare workers under the national school chaplaincy program, which has had its funding increased by \$245 million when there were cuts to most other areas of education.

What is currently known as the [National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program](#) was introduced in 2007 as a Howard Government initiative that provided for religious formation in a way that could have inflamed sectarian tensions had its original formulation remained intact.

Chaplaincy services were specifically religious and mostly Christian, though they were not permitted to engage in direct proselytisation. But critics were asking questions such as how a successful and charismatic Protestant chaplain could not draw Catholic students towards the faith or his or her own denomination.

Significantly Labor education minister Peter Garrett cleared the air in 2011 when he revamped the program to give schools the option of employing a 'secular student wellbeing officer' in place of a religious worker, and to require qualifications such as a youth work certificate.

This was seen to reflect the growing proportion of the population identifying as non-religious, and the increased regard for professional standards in the wider community. 96.5 per cent of the program's chaplains were Christian, even though only 64 per cent of Australians identified as Christian. By contrast, 0.01 of the chaplains were secular, whereas 19 per cent said they were not religious.

Australian Primary Principals Association president Norm Hart [described](#) the delicately balanced role of the chaplains in the program's current incarnation:

School chaplains work with primary schools students, not as religious workers but really as support officers, helping children with questions of, well, moral dilemmas that they might face in the playground and you know, questions about right and wrong that kids have and also where they're emotionally challenged or they have feelings of being hurt, a chaplain might well suggest ways that a child could help themselves in that situation.

The balance is bound to shift from the beginning of next year, when the

National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program becomes the [National School Chaplaincy Programme](#). Oddly the new program's [fact sheet](#) does emphasise the students' emotional wellbeing ahead of their religious development, but the removal of 'student welfare' from the title and non-religious welfare officers from its workforce is significant.

The Atheist Foundation [wonders](#) why education minister Christopher Pyne insists that student welfare is the responsibility of the state education departments while the Commonwealth considers the funding of 'religious' chaplains a priority. It's unlikely that the Government wants us to return to the sectarianism of the 1950s, but it does need to explain why it is protecting the religious — and not welfare — role of its chaplains from the cuts of the harshest Federal Budget in nearly two decades.

Bill Shorten's WorkChoices moment

AUSTRALIA

Fatima Measham

There was plenty of material for the Federal Opposition Leader to work with as he delivered the budget reply. But it's hard to tell how much of it merely reflects the diabolical nature of the proposed changes to longstanding social compacts such as universal healthcare and youth unemployment assistance, and how much signals a genuine, substantive escalation of Labor opposition.

If the response from the public gallery and social media is any measure, then Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Treasurer Joe Hockey may have just done Bill Shorten a huge favour.

In the decade under John Howard, Labor leaders in opposition slid to the middle, perhaps in the belief that offending the least number of people was a suitable strategy for winning office. Kim Beazley and Simon Crean, with three turns between them, were an unremarkable blur. Mark Latham proved a combustible anomaly.

Then came WorkChoices. It came into effect in March 2006, exempting companies with under 101 employees from unfair dismissal laws, removing the 'no disadvantage test' for workplace agreements and restricting industrial action. Kevin Rudd became leader of the Labor Party later that year. Notwithstanding his merit as a candidate, including that his candidacy came at the tail-end of Howard's fourth term as Prime Minister, there is no doubt that the unions-led campaign against WorkChoices was pivotal to handing government to Labor.

In other words, successful opposition seems to rely heavily on people getting terribly het up about something. But it takes a clever opposition leader to channel this in his favour. What Shorten has been handed this week is several WorkChoices with which to galvanise people. He needed it.

Since he became Labor leader in October last year, the running gag whenever someone mentions the Opposition Leader is to feign shock and say 'We have one?' It seems harsh until one takes into account the tepid response over the past few months to the strangulation of the Gonski school funding reforms, the National Broadband Network (NBN) and DisabilityCare (NDIS). These are legacy items. Frankly I had expected far more screaming and eye-gouging from the Opposition. A bit of blood on the floor, even.

I'm not alone in my exasperation. Prior to the Budget reply, the descriptors people offered to me about Shorten included 'invisible', 'wet lettuce' and 'damp loo paper'. These are people I think of as critically engaged and progressive. It's not a good sign when natural allies think you're letting them down whether or not you turn up.

Shorten should find their disappointment encouraging. Despite the abysmal theatrics of the past few years, complicity in ever more severe immigration policies, the persistent threat from the Greens and ensuing punishment at the polls, Labor is still — perhaps inexplicably — expected to have something to say. People expect it to say so forcefully, with the ring of conviction. They want it to get in the way of the Coalition.

Shorten seems to have delivered last night, offering a glimpse of the sort of Opposition Leader that Australians deserve. Those who had expected a bland presentation were caught by surprise, which is probably the nicest thing that has been said about a Labor leader in a long time.

The speech employed revivalist Labor rhetoric regarding family budgets and equity in education. But it also prioritised battlegrounds that set up a poll-friendly fight: the six-month delay for Newstart payments for unemployed under-30-year-olds, the loss of family tax benefits when the youngest child turns six, the \$7 co-payment for GP visits and the \$80 billion cut from schools and hospitals.

There is an element of predictability here, of course. The hazard of being in Opposition is that you oppose, the terms of your reaction set by somebody else. People tune out. This is why Shorten's anaemic presentation style has been a liability.

He can take better lessons in this regard from Julia Gillard's failed salesmanship than Abbott's scorched-earth opposition strategy. Labor made that strategy effective through its own missteps and internal conflicts. It is therefore too simplistic to suggest Shorten mimic the hollow thuggery that became the Coalition's signature. Nor would it be enough for him to reason sensibly with the public, a strategy that failed Julia Gillard spectacularly.

Somewhere between these, Shorten might be able to craft an approach that will unlock the support of the majority of Australians. The Federal Budget has given him plenty of opportunity to do so. We can only hope it won't be squandered.

Blessed are the moneymakers

ECONOMICS

David James

The 2014 Federal Budget has attracted considerable attention for its deleterious effect on the welfare safety net, education and health funding. The impact on the disadvantaged is likely to be considerable, especially young unemployed people, some pensioners and the disabled.

But there is a bigger message in what the Coalition is setting out to do. Investors wielding significant capital are deemed to be useful, while those who can save little, and so have little to invest, are deemed to be a burden. It is not so much class war as a war between capital and the rest of society.

The bias towards investors and against the less well off can be seen in three areas. One is the inattention to negative gearing, which has a doubly adverse effect. It contributes significantly to Australia's Budget deficit — current annual losses on rental properties are running at about \$8 billion. And it is a major cause of Australia's inflated house prices, a price spiral that has caused Australia's overall debt profile to deteriorate.

Australian government debt is just over \$300 billion, which is unusually low by OECD standards. According to the Australian Office of Financial Management, Australian government debt as a percentage of GDP actually declined from 27 per cent in 2013 to 21 per cent this year.

Australian household debt, by comparison, is out of control: a massive \$1.8 trillion, much of it mortgage debt. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the nation's debt burden is among the highest in the developed world. Household debt is 1.8 times household disposable income. In the US it is 1.1 times disposable income.

It means that despite Australian public debt being unusually low, Australia's overall debt position is as poor as most other developed economies.

A large part of that soaring private debt is due to investors using negative gearing to buy houses (over 90 per cent of their purchases are in existing dwellings, disproving claims that it adds to housing stock). At the moment almost half of total finance commitments for housing are undertaken by investors looking to exploit the negative gearing tax loophole. But that is fine, apparently. Well-off investors good; the disadvantaged bad.

The second free pass for investors is superannuation. Superannuants are investors. By having them pool their savings and giving them tax breaks, the idea is that they will take the pressure off the pension system.

But a study by Towers Watson has found that when superannuation, the age pension and other retirement savings are all taken into account, only 53 per cent

of couples and 22 per cent of singles are on track to reach or exceed their target retirement income. There will be a heavy reliance on the pension, which to a significant extent defeats the purpose of the tax concessions.

Yet the Government has not looked at super, which is estimated to equate with \$28 billion in tax concessions this financial year, because that would mean penalising investors. True, there are many administrative problems with taxing income from super in the pension phase, but this, too is an example of the privileged status of the investor class. In effect, payments from super in the pension phase are treated as return on investment, not income. Well-off investors good; the disadvantaged bad.

The failure to include negative gearing or super in the Government's 'shared pain' can perhaps be understood as political expediency — although the attack on health, education and welfare shows an appetite for political risk that some have described as suicidal.

But the sheer nastiness of the Coalition's priorities is most clear in the attitude to lower income people who can, on a small scale, become investors through their super.

The Budget announced the withdrawal of the Low Income Super Contribution scheme (LISC), which is a refund of the 15 per cent contributions tax deducted from the super account of people who earn less than \$37,000 a year when their employer makes concessional (before-tax) superannuation contributions.

The LISC ensured that people on lower incomes, who pay very little income tax, are not disadvantaged by their compulsory super contributions, on which they pay higher tax. Withdrawing the LISC means that when low income workers become investors, by putting money into their super, they get hit with more tax. Well-off investors good; less well-off investors bad.

Although the amounts saved in super by low income earners are not likely to fund a happy retirement, it nevertheless reveals the underlying priorities of the Government. Capital, and the well-off investors who wield it, come first. Everything else, such as a welfare system, health, education and wages, is simply a cost burden that has to be kept strictly under control.

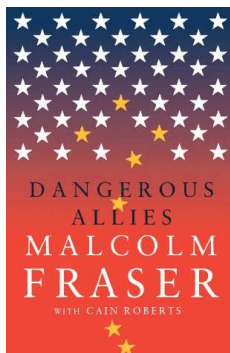
Malcolm Fraser whacks lackey Australia

REVIEWS

Barry Gittins and Jen Vuk

***Dangerous Allies*, by Malcolm Fraser, Cain Roberts. MUP, May 2014.**

[Website](#)



Barry From 11 November 1975 (when, post-dismissal, he replaced Gough Whitlam, as a caretaker PM) until electoral defeat on 5 March 1983, Malcolm Fraser was known as a ruthless, inherently conservative political animal who, nonetheless, was that rarest of Australian scarcities: a genuine small-l liberal.

Having quit his own party in protest in 2009, the soon-to-be-84-year-old Fraser has long been one of the nation's most prominent human rights champions. Now, aided by researcher/contributor, PhD candidate Cain Roberts, Fraser delivers a tour de force overview of Australia's troubled pursuit of security in the bosom of Great (Super) Powers.

This elder statesman is quite the angry young man in print. Fraser delights in telegraphing his haymakers and following through with a well-placed elbow or two. The loosely-affiliated British colonies, he says, federated into the nation of Australia not to gain independence from the UK but to ensure Big Mumma would smack down any French, German or Japanese interloper looking to settle in PNG, the New Hebrides or Fiji.

Australia's job was to carry out British foreign policy, so we legislated inequity through the White Australia Policy; and our treatment of Aboriginal Australians and asylum seekers has a glaring common denominator: racial prejudice.

The whacks keep on coming: Australia's 'naïve faith in the wisdom and righteousness of the United Kingdom' was jettisoned after Singapore fell. Faced with Japan's space invaders, we wrapped ourselves around the Yanks' Star Spangled Suspenders. Dominoes falling, the Cold War froze any independent thought; but we fearfully outstayed our sensible sojourn on Uncle Sam's hind teat.

And Fraser's coup de grâce: following the US into Vietnam was a dud decision, as was invading Afghanistan and Iraq. The latter act was 'a major error not only because the justifications for that war were based on falsehoods but also because the result is, and was always going to be, disastrous ... We need the United States for defence, but we only need defence because of the United States.'

Put bluntly, Fraser suggests we need to shed our lackey status. Australia should close down the US' Pine Gap Joint Defence Facility and seek a dignified distance, engaging maturely with conflicting powers such as the US, Japan and China.

Having amply demonstrated that Australia has never consistently sought or

possessed strategic independence, Fraser declares in measured terms that it's about time Australia advanced fairly and squarely on her own.

Jen

As former foreign minister Gareth Evans writes in the introduction to *Dangerous Allies*, 'there was no greater advocate than Malcolm Fraser during the Cold War years for the rewards of Australia's alliance with the US'.

Today it's a very different world. And, as you remind us, Barry, it's also a very different man writing this book. Our 22nd prime minister and one-time advocate of an US-Australia alliance — or ANZUS — changed his stance after the end of the Cold War. As he saw it, this conflict had not only tilted world politics on its axis, but it ushered in the growth of 'American exceptionalism'.

For Fraser this wasn't only a change of heart; it was to be his road-to-Damascus moment — and he has followed this new direction with all the passion, zeal and commitment befitting St Paul.

To understand just how far Fraser has come, we need to travel back through Australian politics. From our early colonial foundation of 'strategic dependence' to the 'consolidation' of that position during the leadership of John Curtin ('I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America') this co-dependency was, as Fraser writes, 'in many ways a necessary evil'.

Haunting the Australian consciousness at the time was the 'aggressive, dangerous and monolithic' spectre of Communism. So spooked were we Australians that even the Labor Party was viewed with suspicion. (Fraser diplomatically points that while communist parties used often brutal means to achieve their aims, socialists such as the Labor Party were 'firmly committed to democracy').

As Fraser writes, he, too, did his bit to foster this fear. It was 'in the environment of the time' and 'the knowledge' he had then that he 'fully supported the commitment in Vietnam'. A decision he now rues. Bitterly. As he writes, the Vietnam War 'is a case study of the perils of blind strategic dependence'.

I must say, Barry, that while I greatly admire this latter-day Fraser, *Dangerous Alliances* is not what I'd call a page-turner. That said, Fraser's considerable experience and thoughtful musings bring blessed relief, and while the format may be turgid, the message is simple: 'When the difficulties are great and seem insurmountable,' as Fraser writes, 'you must rely on yourself, your own efforts.'

Dangerous Allies poses far from a perfect argument, but it lays down more than adequate ground for debate. Life after politics has allowed our self-confessed 'flawed' former PM time for self-reflection and righting a few wrongs. And if this book is anything to go by, then we are all better for it.

Seeing double in Hockey's dystopia

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

***The Double* (M). Director: Richard Ayoade. Starring: Jesse Eisenberg, Mia Wasikowska. 93 minutes**

Satirical dystopian fantasies don't get much bleaker. Richard Ayoade's *The Double*, freely adapted from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novella of the same name, sees a man come face to face with another who is physically identical, but personally his opposite. The film interrogates notions of meaning and identity against the backdrop of a degraded, urban near-future that is frighteningly familiar. Its conclusions are not pretty.

It bears more than a little comparison to Terry Gilliam's 1985 masterpiece *Brazil*. Ayoade, like Gilliam, has a background in television comedy (Gilliam was an original Python and Ayoade cut his teeth on the likes of *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* and *The Mighty Boosh*). This pedigree sees both filmmakers marry a sublime sense of the absurd to their darker preoccupations.

Brazil posited a post-Orwellian nightmare in which bureaucracy, rather than autocracy, was the source of brutal oppression suffered by its hero, office drone Sam Lowry (Jonathan Pryce). *The Double* takes place against a similarly dehumanising white-collar backdrop, that seems more industrial than corporate; coldly monochromatic, and rickety with the click and wheeze of ubiquitous technology.

Here, humans, too, often seem like machines. At one point Ayoade's protagonist Simon (Eisenberg) is obstructed from exiting a train by the synchronised actions of two luggage handlers. In general the characters that populate this dystopian world seem sedated by the depressing and dependable fug of routine. This is especially true of Simon himself, whom this existence has all but drained of personal agency.

Simon is a consumer of cheesy television, and a voyeur of the woman of his fancy, beguiling co-worker Hannah (Wasikowska), who lives in an apartment opposite his own; in short, an observer, not a participant in life. He is not alone in this bleak existence: while watching Hannah through his telescope, he witnesses a suicide, and soon learns that the city is in fact in the grip of a suicide epidemic. Someone quips that Simon's time, too, will come.

In *Brazil*, Sam is taunted by dreams of himself as a mythical warrior in flight, and in combat against hideous but vincible monsters. These dreams of a more heroic and liberated version of himself are the only escape available to him from the oppression that surrounds him.

In *The Double*, Simon's vision of a more empowered version of himself takes tangible form. Simon is disquieted by the sudden appearance of his cocky

doppelganger, whose confidence bordering on ruthlessness allows him quickly to attain more professional and personal success than his ineffectual counterpart. The film becomes increasingly surreal as Simon's tenuously arrayed sense of self collapses into a fully blown existential meltdown.

That Ayoade achieves this without letting slip his deadpan wit is no mean feat.

There is a third film worth mentioning in the same breath as these two. Aesthetically, Ben Stiller's ebullient remake of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (released this month on DVD) bears little similarity. But there are illuminating parallels that may be drawn.

Stiller's Walter, like Sam and Simon, has grown stagnant. He is beset by soulless corporate rationality; the magazine for which he works is about to be downsized and digitalised. Like Sam, he literally dreams of a braver, more accomplished version of himself, via epic daydreams that are wonderfully realised in the film.

But unlike Sam, Walter is able gradually to become this version of himself, drawn along the path of self-discovery by enigmatic photographer Sean (Sean Penn). In this, the film is unerringly optimistic about the potential of the human spirit.

In contrast, *Brazil* and *The Double* are brutally cynical. They proffer nightmare visions in which the human spirit is no match for the corrupt and corrupting power of a society obsessed with productivity and material achievement. Ultimately *The Double* offers no hope or catharsis to its harried hero.

And nor should it. In a week where we have seen an Australian Budget that gives favour to economic rationalism and the wellbeing of the wealthy, over that of some of our society's most needy and 'ordinary' citizens, Ayoade's cynicism resonates far more powerfully than Stiller's optimism. That is a tragedy.

Whose rule book is Abbott playing from?

AUSTRALIA

Neil Ormerod

In late 2010 when Tony Abbott had risen to the leadership of the Coalition, as leader of the Opposition, I wrote a piece in *Eureka Street* [questioning his moral core](#) . I compared him to a high school debater whose commitment is only to the present argument, and what he needs to say in order to win. Put into a different situation, he is more than happy to argue the opposite position if it suits his then objectives.



The article concluded with the following observation:

Much is made of Abbott's Catholic faith, but it seems to me that the rule book he plays from has more in common with Machiavelli. Machiavelli famously concluded: 'Therefore it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain himself to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it according to the necessity of the case.' In the end everything can be sacrificed to gain and maintain power.

Now with the formulation of the budget strategy clearly in the public domain, we have a direct indication of the rule book Abbott is following.

Abbott's election strategy in 2013 was based on two sets of claims. The first was that the Gillard Government had broken the people's trust through the introduction of a carbon tax. There could be no mitigating circumstances, not excuses, no forgiveness for this breach. Abbott's unremitting attack on Gillard was taken up with gusto by various shock jocks — recall Allan Jones' comment that Gillard's father 'died of shame'.

The second was that his government would be a government of no surprises, that there would be no cuts in areas such as health, education, pensions and public broadcasting, no new taxes, and that he would fix the so-called 'budget emergency' created by Labor. The promises on no cuts in vital areas and no new taxes were repeated with the regularity of water dripping on stone, burrowing into our political consciousness.

That these goals of no cuts, no taxes and bringing down the budget deficit were mutually contradictory seemed to escape everyone's attention. But they were what people wanted to hear, and Abbott was more than happy to give it to them. It matched the 'necessity of the case' in order to get elected.

Abbott must surely have been aware that the promises he was making could not be delivered. In fact in government he and Joe Hockey have made several decisions — abolishing the carbon and mining tax, repealing Labor's decision to wind back tax provisions for superannuation contributions for high income earners,

putting billions into the Reserve Bank beyond its current needs — in order to heighten the sense of emergency.

All this to justify the cuts and new taxes. A concocted emergency is now being used to justify broken promises.

Of course what is most disturbing is the way the cuts and taxes are being targeted. While the deficit levy will be temporary, the cuts will be permanent.

The targets are two-fold: firstly, the most vulnerable members of society, the unemployed, the unwell needing medical attention, people with disabilities; secondly are the government's ideological targets, the ABC, the CSIRO for harping on about climate change, the renewable energy sector, foreign aid.

The first of these rubs against the grain of Catholic social teaching, with its strong commitment to the common good, particularly the most vulnerable — but it plays well to those looking for scapegoats in times of social anxiety. The second plays well with the think tanks and business interests who have the Government's ear.

Prior to the election Abbott spoke of the 'trust deficit' created by Gillard's broken promise. He has now presented the electorate with a swag of broken promises and seems to expect to escape unscathed.

In fact this will leave a significant part of the electorate more than a little disillusioned with the political process. It will play into the hands of small populist groups such as the Palmer United Party who will attract support simply because they are neither the Coalition nor Labor.

In the long run it will contribute to the destabilisation of the Australian political system. We can already expect such destabilisation when the Senate begins to reject many of the proposals in the current Budget.

It took John Howard until his third term before he let his personal leanings completely off the leash and attempted to introduce Work Choices to the applause of his ideological cheer squads. It led to his electoral demise, the second prime minister in Australian history to lose his own seat.

Abbott is doing much the same in his first term. He is over-reaching, thinking himself invulnerable to a political backlash. Whereas Machiavelli's prince could rule through force, Abbott must face an electorate whose trust in political promises has been completely eroded. Our political system as a whole, our trust in the political process, will take a long time to recover.

Lady legend of Jesuit Publications

MEDIA

Morag Fraser

Geraldine Battersby, 1949–2014

If you rang Jesuit Publications at its Victoria Street Richmond home during its initial decades, chances are you'd hear a familiar voice. If it was the superbly efficient, ever-loyal Nomeneta Schwalger, you knew your business would be dealt with promptly and effectively. If Geraldine Battersby answered your call, her telephone manner was so impressive you'd think you were going to be connected to the Pope — or at least a cabinet minister.

I used to ring sometimes for the sheer joy of hearing Geraldine switch voices as soon as she realised who it was. We'd often compared notes about Catholic educated 'ladies' and their elocution tones (my mother had a telephone voice as formidably professional as Geraldine's), and wondered what all that meant. Not hypocrisy. Certainly not pretension. Rather, an ability to adapt, instantly, to circumstances. To meet every occasion with a confident, reassuring front.

Perhaps it was a technique picked up from the many Irish Mothers Superior we'd known during our lives and convent educations. And if there was a touch of hauteur about it, there was also a dignity to Geraldine's professional manner that was wholly genuine, and a mark of respect for the person she was addressing.

The corresponding wonder was that Geraldine could change in the flash of an eye. And her eyes did flash. She understood irony and she was gifted with laughter — a gift she shared, liberally. My memories of working with her over so many years are freighted with laughter — at folly, at shared pleasures, at the bemusing, dreadful, wonderful ways of the world.

We watched a kerbside drug bust from our upstairs Victoria Street window one day and celebrated the birth of a daughter to one of our staff the next. We were a family, loving, occasionally dysfunctional, but held together by the essential goodness and dedication of women like Geraldine and Mrs Irene Hunter, who came as a volunteer and stayed, keeping us decent, and in her quiet way, making sure our feet were on the ground.

Geraldine's way wasn't quiet, but it was grounding in related ways. She had an acute sense of class: *Eureka Street*, she would sometimes chide us, was produced by university (over-educated?) scruffs from one post code and read by proper citizens from another.

We didn't mind. She remembered our birthdays, followed our romances and knew the names of our children. She was there for the occasional long nights and she laughed with us, not at us.

Jesuit Publications was a robust workplace, with characters enough to fill a

Trollope novel. Geraldine was one of the characters, but she was also an essential ingredient in the glue that kept us together. We heard her opinionated. We saw her jubilant. We saw her vulnerable, as she did us. We knew sorrow, anger and deep joy together. And she gave us moments that have become Jesuit Publications legend.

One bright morning Geraldine arrived, a little overheated from the long tram ride in, and dressed, as she often was, in a confection of black drapery. Jesuit Publications had mirrored pillars downstairs. You could check yourself from every angle. Geraldine checked herself. I heard the shriek from upstairs. Thought she'd fallen. Maybe a missile had been thrown into the front door (we'd had some odd incidents).

A string of expletives followed. *Eureka Street's* Jon Greenaway rushed to pick Geraldine up. Was she all right? No, was he blind? She most certainly was not all right. 'I've come all the way to work, in the tram, in my black petticoat. I forgot to put on my skirt. Everyone in the tram will have seen me. They must think I'm demented.'

Jon bowed and offered to lock the front door. Then, as sharp-witted as Geraldine (they sparred often, and riotously) he offered to strip, so she would have a partner in discomfort. I think Geraldine snarled, but perhaps she was so overcome by an amalgam of shame and hysterics that her face kept distorting into different masks.

The entire staff gathered — not in sympathy (this was family after all) but in unalloyed hilarity. Someone remarked that in these Madonna (Guccione) days no one would have noticed anyway. Geraldine was not to be consoled by the dictates of (decadent?) popular culture. Her son Ben was rung and told, in Mother Superior tones, that he would bring the black skirt to Jesuit Publications. On the tram. Now! I think Ben demurred, as any self-respecting teenager might. (Carry mum's skirt? On the tram? Over his shoulder, or what?)

The rest of the day is lost in laughter. None of us remembers how Geraldine got home, or in what state. But we remember that day even better than we remember the day we won a small fortune betting (jointly) on Saintly in the Melbourne Cup.

Forgive us, Geraldine, for not taking your embarrassment seriously. But we knew a lady when we saw one, and she didn't need a skirt. And we loved her exactly as she was — human, mercurial, vibrantly alive — and great of heart.

Moderate Muslim's wisdom for Nigerian extremists

EUREKA STREET TV

Peter Kirkwood

In recent weeks people around the world have reacted with horror to the kidnapping of teenage girls from their boarding school, and the killings perpetrated by the extremist Islamist group, Boko Haram, in Nigeria.

Boko Haram was founded in 2002 in the northern Islamic states of Nigeria. Its name in the local Hausa language means 'Western education is forbidden'. This summarises the hard-line aims of the group to oust Western influence and establish an Islamic state ruled by a narrow interpretation of Shariah or Islamic law.

But this is not the mainstream view of Nigerian Muslims, and most Nigerians of all religious backgrounds have also reacted with horror to the atrocities committed by Boko Haram.

The man featured in this interview exemplifies the moderate Muslim approach in Nigeria, and he explains what is wrong with a narrow extremist interpretation of Shariah, and how it might be countered.

Dr Luqman Zakariyah is Nigerian by birth, but now lectures in Islamic law at the [International Islamic University of Malaysia](#). He got his first degree in Shariah in Saudi Arabia, gained his PhD in the UK, and prior to teaching in Malaysia was a fellow at the Harvard Law School in the USA. So he is eminently qualified to speak on this topic.

This interview was recorded for Eureka Street TV at the end of 2013 before Boko Haram gained global notoriety. It was conducted after Zakariyah delivered a public lecture in Sydney sponsored by the [Broken Bay Institute](#). The lecture was entitled 'Shariah and Human Justice'.

He said punishment and retaliation are just a small part of Shariah, and should be tempered by a sense of compassion, forgiveness and fairness; that context and a knowledge of local circumstances and customs should be taken into account in any legal judgements; the dangers of ignorance; and the importance of Islamic legal practitioners having a broad experience of life and a thorough education in Shariah.

Budget more slow-burn than big bang

AUSTRALIA

Jackie Brady

For poor and disadvantaged people the impact of this Budget will burn like a slow fuse. There is no big bang that means that people's lives will be drastically different tomorrow, but the tinkering measures will continue to hurt people over time.

What the Budget signals is not an end to the 'age of entitlement', as there are still plenty of beneficiaries of government expenditure or foregone revenue; but an end to an age in which people can be confident that the Australian Government will provide the safety net they need when times get tough.

Having a job is the best income support measure, not only for the economic benefits but for the social benefits as well. But the Budget's measure that focuses on time-limited welfare payments for young people under 30 years of age signals a significant shift in this Government's thoughts about where such responsibility rests. Young people in Australia under the age of 30 will now only have access to either Youth Allowance or Newstart Allowance for six months of the year.

While this Budget does provide funding for wage subsidies, these are reserved for older Australians. There is a glaring absence of any real programs designed to promote youth employment, and programs designed to assist older teens to transition to education, training or employment will be scrapped at the end of the year.

Who will provide for such young people when government funded income and/or other support measures are no longer available? Is it family, friends, acquaintances, the charity or the not-for-profit down the road? The answer may depend on individual circumstances, but there is no doubt that boundaries will be tested regarding who is responsible for what in this civil society which the government so readily promotes.

Targeting of young people currently in receipt of the Disability Support Pension and re-assessing their eligibility for it under new work activity measures is also concerning. Research that CSSA undertook a few years ago revealed that efforts to promote employment of people with a disability was marginal. The absence of manual-type work was also impacting negatively on a person's capacity to secure a job if they had a disability.

It would be good to see the Government working proactively to balance that side of the equation before changing policies to shift people into a workforce not ready and/or unwilling to accept them.

A significant gap in this Budget is around homelessness and affordable housing. While it does confirm an already flagged 12-month extension of homelessness

funding, the Government's decision to do away with the fifth round of funding under the National Rental Affordability Scheme signals a big shift ahead. It is encouraging that the Government wants to review its commitment to the scheme in consultation with key stakeholders.

Alongside the Government's investment in roads, ports and airports it makes logical sense for the Government to commit to a critical investment in housing which also has great potential to create jobs and address housing affordability. Housing affordability will be an issue for many people affected by cuts to their welfare income.

\$240 million will be cut from the Department of Social Services over the next four years on programs that assist poor and disadvantaged people. This is being tied with a 'red tape reduction'/'efficiency, production and effectiveness' bow, but it will mean that people will miss out on services at critical times in their lives, such as emergency relief funding and access to financial counselling services.

There is also a freeze being placed on indexation funding for programs delivered within the social services portfolio for two years. This is effectively a further cut in funding. Not only will people lose access to services, but some people employed in the sector will lose their job.

Mercifully, many programs within the suite of existing Family Support Programs will remain with projected funding levels — I believe it has been the strength of the current Minister for Social Services and his repeated support for this program area that has saved it from many of the more savage measures in the Federal Budget.

The Medicare co-payment proposal is another measure which is set to test the principal of universal access to a first class medical system. It has the potential to be most disadvantageous to poorer individuals and families where finding \$7 to visit the doctor may test the budget when one is living on a minimal income.

Certain groups and concession cardholders will receive ten visits for free before such a payment is required, but still it would be good to see an ongoing review of this measure to ensure that this threshold is tested and we know that no-one is left behind. The same test should apply to the proposed changes to the PBS scheme.

The changes to pensions and allowances, in relation to eligibility and to indexation rates, and the halting of threshold levels for payments such as Family Tax Benefit A will impact on weekly household budgets. Given the structural changes to these payments, the income loss over time will increase over forward years.

You don't need to be an economist to assess that collectively these measures will impact negatively on the income levels of people who are poor and disadvantaged. The discussion now must be who will pick up the pieces left behind

by Government in developing a system with obvious gaps.

A Budget to enshrine inequality

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

Governments have always included in their budgets a 'we're serious' clause. It doesn't address the real problems of the economy, saves relatively little money, but it is a symbol of the government's fierce determination to fix the economy.

It has normally been directed at the vices of the underclass. Once it took the form of increasing the tax on booze and cigarettes, the working man's weaknesses. Nowadays governments slash spending on the disadvantaged.

And so it is in the latest Budget. This change from demonising things to demonising people deserves reflection.

The decision to make an example of welfare recipients in the Budget was clearly taken before the appointment of the Audit Commission. The enquiry into welfare had been announced as a way of reducing unsustainable expenditure. Yet the growth in expenditure on welfare has in fact been relatively modest compared with other areas of government. The decision had to do with politics and ideology, not with economic need.

The impact on disadvantaged young people will be particularly harsh, particularly on those who have no safe home. Their income support will be unreliable, their access to appropriate education more difficult, and health care more costly. The cuts to education and health will also affect the services provided by the states

The practice of further disadvantaging the already disadvantaged reflects growing inequality between the more affluent and the disadvantaged members of society. Although a common response to discussions of inequality is to decry the 'politics of envy', the effects of growing inequality are real and corrosive in society.

Government ministers and the heads of the public service are relatively affluent. They mix with and consult others who are notably affluent. Neither affluence nor consorting, of course, is a moral fault. But the style in which we live and the people with whom we live and speak shape our imagination, the way we instinctively see the world. And what matters to those with whom we mix and what they take for granted will also matter more to us. We come to share their view of the world.

In an unequal society in which politicians and senior bureaucrats are relatively affluent they are likely to share with their conversation partners a working vision whose effect will be to entrench and deepen privilege. They will accept the gods of economic growth, competition and the market as inescapable, if not totally benign, and define the public good in terms of economic growth without asking whom it benefits.

They will also instinctively accept the division of society into winners and losers, and so believe that losers are responsible for their own weakness, and are morally at fault. This makes it natural to dismiss financial support for the disadvantaged as part of a decent society, and so to redefine it as a reward for jumping through a number of humiliating hoops. It also makes it harder to see that disadvantage often means you can't jump. Shared affluence leads to a failure of the imagination.

Inequality also makes it more likely that disadvantaged people will be used for target practice. When economic liberalism rules it is easy to make those who cannot compete scapegoats to deflect public anger from the deficiencies of the government. Shared affluence means that this can be done with an untroubled conscience. So if the government becomes unpopular we may expect attacks on asylum seekers, the unemployed, youth with disabilities Indigenous Australians and all the usual suspects.

Inequality of wealth and power tend to perpetuate themselves and to become more deeply rooted in society. The narrowing of the political imagination is reinforced by practices like cash for access, in which the economically powerful and the politically powerful are brought together to further their individual interests. The voice of the poor or of the common good will not be heard in that land.

So inequality makes it easy for governments to identify the common good with the interests of the affluent and so to serve their interests. In the Budget the financial restrictions placed on regulatory agencies and the abolition of many statutory bodies will certainly make it easier for wealthy developers to circumvent regulations and to enrich themselves without respect for the environment or social needs of the nation.

Australia will survive this Budget. But it will survive as a more divided nation with less sense of mutual responsibility. And the enshrinement of inequality will further exacerbate the disillusion with democracy characteristic of so many Western nations. Democracy rests on the acknowledgment of the unique and equal value of each citizen. The culture of inequality corrodes that belief.

Bush week in my tin kingdom

CREATIVE

Kit Kelen

in my tin kingdom

1

hours are always undecided
they tug each way and I obey
rule of thumb and
kingdom is of instances
points of vantage it's half sky
pale with revolution
rattle of paws and that's heaven climbing
gives me the glint inside
as wattle to the sunrise raw
coin of the realm twice bitten
trials are what made us led us to here
summer was listless shine come off the shed
best for lemons to brighten

2

everything rounds — vines tug clouds down thirsty
ambition of spider joins sides of the track
snout at ground never seen but you'll note mornings
we hear the ironbark drinking — thief of soil it is
bringer of lightning afloat
as if a tree of tin

3

it's bush week
here come the other paws of track
smell rat where it stopped

at thunder's beck bring washing in
make kindling sure
weather is coming in my tin kingdom
a needle points the way

4

suffer the meek who come into my trap
and suffer ones whom I despatch
make tinsel of the tripping light
blind mice won't scuttle now
they're in the walls or proverb drowned
Lord make their sleep sound

5

hills of it home rolling the radar lies under the spell
my will be done things take forever
how weeds rise
it's by believing so festoon
the lotus like gilt frippery
set paddling pond
air flimsiest for embassy
all of heaven's in

6

everything green wants up
a drought and you
position the head right under the tap
ancient propellers over the land
guess who cast them?
this is the month of Sundays

7

where rain was all leaning low
a curse of course

a bushman's blow

8

swamps run themselves my enemies scatter

antechinus are a ledger loss

the wallabies of sunshine come

red necked for something sweet

in timber ruins

valley step lightly blow your own house down

9

tin thistles we mow whistling up

note kangaroo in the moon

kingfishing whipbirds fronds through the boards

and the bunion glows

clean clouds show the blue chip trucks in their twilight

flies in windows aches with you

10

and a stretch

spring is such

my kingdom 'tis of tin I sing

a web like wings caught sun a shimmer

we'll take a tune from the road

11

with chorus of falling tin hat and trench tremble

far far twinkle we salute sometimes a single star shows

12

eat me and drink me see how mean I grow for a need how low

I take a bow proscenium narrows tin cup on the street

to hollow applause village of me in raintapping tin

13

in creekspeak frondfall

insects see themselves writ large
everyone here born yesterday
still knowing where to go

14

a bird won't learn already has a fair idea
clouds my proud colour cannot be helped
pang of the place is chime with the scythe
shy twice of conquest
sat among the roots of the creek each to its tangle
not knowing where the eye goes, why

15

best not seeing through the trees
last gold of the kingdom west with the hours
past yellow grey day fades
everything goes a sort of dull silver and I go in
shadows fall to their work
of making all secret again

Border control shake-up takes us into dangerous waters

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison today announced a major shake-up in Australian border security administration. Operation Sovereign Borders is effectively to become merged into a powerful new permanent 'super-agency'.

In the course of the coming year, present OSB functions will have been absorbed into an even more powerful and permanent Australian Border Force (I'll use an as-yet unofficial acronym, ABF). This ABF will by July 2015 have assumed all the functions and powers of the Australian Immigration and Border Protection Department, the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, the Australian Quarantine Service, and Operation Sovereign Borders.

It will apparently sit outside both the public service and ADF chains of commands and laws and protocols of conduct. It will report to a 'commissioner' who will report to the Minister for Immigration. It will have its own ranks, promotion and command structure, and its own training college. It will operate according to a 'border protection above all else' ideology that was [spelt out frankly](#) by Morrison in *The Australian* today.

This new intelligence-based super-agency 'will have responsibility for staff at air and sea borders as well as those involved in investigations, compliance and enforcement'. It will manage immigration detention and removals. It will include airport and maritime officers, investigators and those responsible for tracking down illegal goods. An ABF college 'will also be established to deliver the professional, technical and operational training that border force officers will need in the border environment of the future'.

Already, *The Australian's* correspondence columns are filled with letters applauding Morrison's initiative: here at last is the strong leadership Australia was looking for. There are almost no contrary voices.

But Morrison is taking Australia into very dangerous waters, by setting up a powerful new paramilitary force with its own ideology, training and rank structure, answerable only to an immigration minister, and apparently with no legal or constitutional checks and balances outside itself.

The ADF is bound by civil and military law, the Geneva Conventions, international maritime law, and its own protocols of honourable conduct. The public service is bound by civil and administrative law, by what is left of the Westminster conventions, by parliamentary and external audit processes. What will constrain the ABF? We know from OSB's conduct that it is prepared to break Australian and international laws, ride roughshod over diplomatic relationships, shrug off major human rights violations, and indemnify its staff against legal sanctions.

Morrison wrote:

Like national defence, protecting Australia's borders should be core business for any national government ... The reforms are focused on employing an intelligence-led, mobile, technology-enabled force, operating under a Strategic Border Command, ensuring our assets and resources are deployed to greatest effect.

Morrison intimated that the ABF's functions may expand over time, as the need arises.

There is a disturbing precedent here. Hitler, irritated by the constraints imposed under German civil law and by the Wehrmacht's own old-fashioned military codes and conventions of honourable conduct, saw the value of a new security service answerable only to him as leader: the Schutzstaffel (literally Protection Squadron or Defence Corps, more familiarly known as the SS).

The SS had its own training colleges, uniforms, ranks and career structure. It grew from a small paramilitary unit set up by the Nazi party in 1920 to defend its rallies and terrorise political opponents, into a powerful force that served as the FÃ¼hrer's bodyguard, and a force that, fielding almost a million men (both on the front lines and as political police), exerted as much political influence as the Wehrmacht, Germany's regular armed forces.

The SS selected and trained its members according to adherence to Nazi ideology. A main ideology of the SS was to fight against 'sub-humans' and other threats to national security both at home and abroad.

Over time, many SS organisations became de facto government agencies. Legal jurisdiction over the SS and its members was taken away from the civilian courts and given to courts run by the SS itself. These actions effectively put the SS above the law.

Some will think my metaphor far-fetched. But the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, and I see a lot to be vigilant about in this new agency. At the very least, the lack of checks and balances needs to be scrutinised.

What is left of the ADF's functions and *raison d'être*? Effectively, by giving border security to this new super-agency, what is left of the ADF's core functions? Like the Wehrmacht in Nazi Germany, will it over time be marginalised, shunted aside as a mere implementing agency? Will those with aspirations to a defence-oriented career gravitate to this sexy new super-agency rather than to the boring old ADF?

The public ground has been well laid for this over many years. Inflammatory ministerial rhetoric, influential entertainment television programs like *Border Security: The Front Line*, children's literature like *Tomorrow When the War Began*, have subtly conditioned some Australians to think of ourselves as a nation under all kinds of dark threats from beyond our borders. We have steadily become a

more militarised country in ethos, even as we physically become fatter and softer.

Border security paranoia is becoming a national mental disease. Be warned, ADF. Be warned, Australia.

The theology of Chris Lilley

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

The jury is out on whether Chris Lilley's new ABC1 comedy *Jonah from Tonga* gives a free kick to racism and other forms of discriminatory behaviour.

TV critic Giles Hardie [says](#) it is 'fantastic that people are accusing this show of being racist, because that is exactly the way to start the relevant and important conversation'. But Polynesian writer Morgan Godfery [argues](#) that Lilley empowers racism. '[He] reinscribe[s] the very stereotypes [he's] acting out ... Whenever people dress in racial drag, they channel that history of racism.'

Critic David Knox [borrows](#) a theological concept when he suggests *Jonah* and Lilley's previous work should be judged on the basis of redemption. 'Showing an abusive character (particularly to an impressionable young audience) must service a point, which should also include the lesson-learning that the abuse is hardly acceptable to a reasonable-thinking person.'

Knox believes redemption in Lilley's characters does take place, but it's a case of too little too late. He cites the character Ja'mie becoming 'momentarily same-sex attracted after her tirade of "lesbian" insults'. But, Knox says, 'the risk is that before you reach that point the wider audience is potentially so offended that it does not stick around for that lesson'.

However the effort to avoid offence can also be seen as an attempt to deny reality in a way that creates a set of politically correct stereotypes that may themselves be discriminatory.

Irish writer Colm Tóibín [speaks](#) in his recent lecture 'The censor in each of us' of the perceived need to deny the existence of behaviour that offends social aspiration. We choose 'images that are comforting and comfortable, images that cover the national or social or religious wound, or attempt to heal it'. Hence our politically correct depictions of racial harmony. Until the 1960s, we were comforted by images of 'white Australia'.

Tóibín describes hostile demonstrations of political correctness outside Dublin's Abbey Theatre early last century. Inside were performances of plays that depicted Irish peasant women as 'earthy and sexually alive'. The protesters saw them as frustrating attempts to make Irish women 'seem more pure, more fully Victorian than their English counterparts'.

The prejudices in Lilley's *Jonah* are depictions of the wounds of Australian society, not the attempt of a far-right ideologue to promote a stratified nation based on race. Before the redemption can take place, we need to own our woundedness and moral imperfection. That is the theology of Chris Lilley.

Kidnapped Nigerian girls put the lie to Western freedom

INTERNATIONAL

Catherine Marshall

Lulu Mitshabu tells us to close our eyes. 'Imagine your brothers, sisters, your mothers, your nieces, your nephews, your children, everybody that makes you smile, the good time you're having,' she says.

'Open your eyes. The time that you took closing your eyes and thinking of your people, imagine now everybody you thought of disappeared from the face of this earth just in that minute. That's my life in the DRC.'

There is stunned silence. It's lunchtime in Sydney and we are sitting in the shadow of the beautiful Harbour Bridge, a symbol of wealth, progress and equal access for all. In Lulu's homeland, the ironically-named Democratic Republic of Congo, it is not yet dawn; soon the cockerels will begin crowing and the women will rise to start their work for the day, stoking fires, collecting water, tending crops, dodging the men — soldiers and militia and civilians — who will almost certainly threaten to rape and abuse them.

Northwest of there, in Nigeria, parents of around 300 girls abducted in the past month by Islamist group Boko Haram will have in all likelihood spent the night sleepless, wondering in the agonisingly slow pre-dawn hours how it is that evil is allowed to reign in a world as powerful and learned as ours.

It's a stark contrast and one that can no longer be used as an excuse by westerners who turn a blind eye to the evils that millions of people — girls and women in particular — endure in countries far removed from our own. It is also a reminder of our willingness to be led by the media when deciding which events and atrocities to solemnise, rather than speaking out about all issues — and brainstorming responses to them — even when they're not trending on social media or being glamorised by celebrities.

Weeks after the schoolgirls' mass abduction (which was preceded by the even more horrific, and far less well-publicised massacre of Nigerian schoolboys by Boko Haram), the incident has become an overnight cause cœlèbre, with people like Michelle Obama, Ellen DeGeneres and Angelina Jolie calling for their release.

But there's a danger that this Johnny-come-lately style of advocacy does more harm than good to the cause of subjugated women: by elevating media-determined 'worthy' causes (which will be dropped as soon as the next fad comes around), slapping ourselves on the wrist for our initial tardiness and then patting ourselves on the back for demanding that Boko Haram #bringbackourgirls, we diminish the horrors great and small that are endured on a daily basis by women whose stories we'll never get to hear.

Instead, we should be taking Lulu's advice and harnessing our privilege to speak

out at every opportunity for those women who have yet to achieve the equality that we in the West take for granted.

It would be foolish to believe that female liberation can occur in a vacuum: as long as there are girls and women being brutalised in the DRC, schoolgirls being sold into slavery in Nigeria's border regions, girls around the world being subjected to female genital mutilation and women being suppressed by religious ideology, then the acquisition of our own freedoms — flawed as they are — is a hollow victory indeed.

As Lulu says, '[The Nigerian abduction] is an issue we need to address as global citizens. We need to be part of the solution, not the problem. The Nigerian president [said] it's not just happening in Nigeria but everywhere. Why are we not stopping it? It's been going on for such a long time. We need to stand up and demand justice.'

How do we do this? How do we ensure that generations of Australian women — many of whom have no idea that the rights they enjoy were not always guaranteed but were hard-won by their foremothers — don't allow such atrocities to occur on their watch? Most importantly, says Lulu, we must nurture a deep awareness among ourselves of the discrepancies that still exist in the world.

'In our family court in the DRC, it's clearly stated that men are the head of the family, and women must obey. Women have no right to land, no right to property, you need your husband's permission to go away, and girls get married at 15 years of age,' she explains.

'Just picture this: 80 per cent of the population in the Congo lives below the poverty line. And women suffer more than men because they don't own anything. So when I compare the life of women here in Australia to the life of women in the Congo, it's such a breeze.'

It's precisely this relatively breezy existence that empowers Australian women to advocate for their sisters on the other side of the globe through NGOs, by lobbying governments and peace-building organisations, fundraising, or coming up with their own unique solutions.

And they are guaranteed to succeed because it's been proven that when women are consulted and involved in peace-building, says Lulu, 'things work. When women are not involved things just fall through.'