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Contents

Abbott's foreign policy flops

INTERNATIONAL

Tony Kevin

When Tony Abbott came to power a year ago, he promised a foreign policy of 'more Jakarta, less Geneva'. It was shorthand for greater emphasis on important bilateral relationships, less Rudd-ian emphasis on United Nations-centred grandstanding.

The reality has been almost the reverse: 'more NATO, less Jakarta'. This is essentially a foreign policy driven by militaristic multilateralism, tapping at the doors of the Western alliance power centres - Washington, London, Brussels (NATO headquarters) and Tokyo.

Australia now behaves as if it were a supplicant for NATO membership. Like the fragile post-Soviet East Europeans, we seem desperate to be allowed into that inner circle. We want to earn our colours with Aussie boots on the ground in Iraq, Syria and even Ukraine!

Since Richard Casey was External Affairs Minister in the 1950s, the three pillars of Australian foreign policy have been: a genuine reaching out to our Asian neighbours, adherence to UN-based multilateral values and institutions, and a firm but self-respecting defence partnership with the United States. All those pillars look pretty shaken now.

This is a foreign policy based on aggressiveness: knee-jerk reactions to short-term crises with no evidence of depth, vision or overall strategy; a hierarchical approach of obsequiousness to presumed (NATO) betters and condescension to presumed (southeast Asian) inferiors. We are back to the era of 'Asia is somewhere you fly over on the way to Europe'.

There has been serious misbalancing in relations with Indonesia, China, Japan and India. We are told that relations with Indonesia are back to normal after a period of necessary firmness in turning back the boats. This is nonsense.

Indonesians now view Australia with wariness and suspicion, after Australia's arrogant behaviour both on-water and in relation to spying. Nobody in Jakarta believes that our Navy boats mistakenly trespassed in Indonesian waters in returning asylum-seeker boats and dumping orange lifeboats crammed with seasick returnees on their beaches. These were taken as deliberate signals that Fortress Australia will do whatever it takes to repel intruders.

Meanwhile, the apologies for eavesdropping on the former Indonesian president's family came late, grudging and heavily qualified. With newly elected president Jokowi there is correct exercise of protocol but no warmth. Much ground painfully built over 50 years has been lost.

China looks on Australia now as basically a country keen to join US and Japanese military efforts to contain their strategic rise. The harshly handled rejection of Huawei's telecom bid as a security risk; the effectively permanent expansion of a US military presence in Darwin; the overblown state welcome to the controversially hawkish Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the height of Chinese-Japanese border tensions; the flirtation now with the idea of buying Japanese-made submarines; the decision to sell uranium to India (China's rival and non-adherent to the non-proliferation treaty) - all send a message to China of a much less friendly Australia.

Abbott has gone out of his way to insult and point fingers at Russia under Vladimir Putin. His involvement in the complex Ukraine civil war has been clumsy, one-sided and MH17-centred. This is not serious foreign policy, though it has played well in the Murdoch press.

The Prime Minister spoke of sending 500 armed Australian soldiers and police into Ukraine 'to defend the MH17 crash site'. While the Dutch and Malaysians were slow to digest the tragedy and move forward diplomatically in efforts to recover human remains and flight recorders from the conflict zone, Abbott's impatient rhetoric pushed the boundaries of courteous international discourse.

The first UN Security Council resolution on the MH17 tragedy was well handled, but I attribute most of the credit to the excellent staff work of the highly professional Australian UN Mission in drafting resolution language and canvassing widespread support. Ironically, the Security Council seat that Abbott in opposition had ridiculed as a useless Rudd vanity gave him his best theatre for diplomacy so far.

But multilateralism ends there for Abbott. Australia is jeopardising good multilateral practice both in climate change and refugee diplomacy. We are angering the UN High Commissioner for Refugees by abandoning the spirit and letter of the UN Refugee Convention.

We, who were once world leaders in climate change diplomacy, are running away from global cooperation in decarbonisation and renewable energy. Like Canada, Australia now proceeds from short-term economic self-interest in mining and selling coal and other dirty hydrocarbons, and to hell with global warming and rising sea levels threatening poor nations. We're all right, Jack.

On the US alliance and its enemies, it is back to the kneejerk militarised diplomacy of 2001-2003. As John Howard was horrified by the 9/11attacks, so is Abbott horrified by Islamic State beheadings and eager to get our troops back into action in Iraq. He is impatient with parliamentary process and has successfully wrong-footed Labor into ticking the box without even the formality of parliamentary consideration.

And - to end on a note of near-farce - he couldn't resist putting a clumsy oar into the Scotland independence referendum, in words most offensive and inappropriate from a nation that owes so much to the Scottish contribution to our once-proudly independent stance on the world stage.

Tony Kevin is a former Australian ambassador to Poland.

Image of PM Abbott with State Secretary John Kerry Ukrainian by the US Department of State via Wikimedia Commons.

Picking on Muslims is getting dull

RELIGION

Ruby Hamad


THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN
COLOUR BLIND BALLET
THE LIFE OF PYNE
WOMBS FOR RENT
FORMER ARMY CHIEF SOUNDS WARNING
We'll fight Islam 100 years
Political fix was in for Hird, Bombers
FROM THIS
TO THIS

It should be a given that a young child brandishing a severed human head is something that no reasonable person would condone. And yet such is the animosity toward Islam that when one such image was splashed on the front page of *The Australian* - the son of an Australian 'jihadist' posing with the decapitated head of a Syrian soldier - Muslims were expected to vocalise their horror lest they be taken to approve of it.

As Muslim academic and feminist Susan Carland tweeted at the time, 'If you honestly need me to TELL you that I don't agree with a father getting his young son to hold up a severed head…I kind of want to cry.'

The relentless persecution of minorities, public beheadings of journalists and crucifixions that are a now a daily occurrence in Syria and Iraq are all atrocities that most Muslims find no less terrifying and distressing than the wider community. It is a testament to how 'different' Muslims are considered that some Australians still think many, if not all, Muslims living here are not only unbothered by such atrocities, but actually support them as a legitimate expression of Islam.

This is the reality for Muslims in the age of the war against terror. Condemning terrorism is exhausting. No matter how loudly or often Muslims distance themselves from the actions of groups such as the so-called Islamic State (IS), it is never enough.

That the world's 1.8 billion or so Muslims are expected to rally against every bad deed committed by a stranger who happens to nominally share their faith speaks to the deep distrust with which Muslims are regarded.

It is demoralising to know that people in my own country assume, or at least suspect, that I approve of these atrocities. Whether I like it or not, my religious background and my name tie me to these 'jihadists.' Their actions reflect on me; I feel the permanent weight of expectation to publicly apologise for their actions.

And I do so, knowing full well that to some, nothing I say will make up for the fact that I was born into the Islamic faith. Or, more specifically, I was born into one of the many Islamic faiths.

That a non-practising Alawite Muslim such as myself feels pressured to repeatedly condemn rogue Sunni groups like IS demonstrates both how much the west fears 'otherness', and the extent to which western society is unwilling to confront its own prejudice.

There are more than 15 denominations and sects in Islam, all with varying interpretations of the faith, all with differences both subtle and vast. Alawites are considered heretics by many Sunnis, and indeed have been the victims of persecutions and attempted genocides dating back centuries.

Though some (and I stress some) Alawites have achieved unprecedented prominence due to the rise of the Assad family in Syria's ruling Ba'ath party, Alawites are a secretive sect and have always historically existed on the fringes of Islam.

Although much of the Sunni majority regard them as being outside the fold of Islam, Alawites are Muslims in that they regard Mohammed as the messenger of God and the Quran as the last holy book.

I mention all this only to highlight the ludicrousness of assuming that Alawites secretly approve of Islamic State actions and goals, not least because they too would be annihilated under its 'caliphate.'

That is not to say that Sunnis themselves generally approve of the Islamic State. Of course they don't - given that many victims have been Sunnis who refuse to recognise delusions of an 'Islamic State.'

That IS and other terror groups are a perversion of Sunni Islam is evidenced in the fact that so many of its adherents know little of the religion itself. As Mehdi Hasan notes in *New Republic,* the books of choice for 'the swivel-eyed young men who take sadistic pleasure in bombings and beheadings' are *Islam For Dummies* and *The Koran for Dummies.*

All of which serves to highlight that the readiness with which some westerners take the most violent and extreme groups as legitimate expressions of Islam betrays the racism that underpins perceptions of Muslims.

Islam may indeed be a religion and 'not a race' as the popular mantra of the Islamophobe has it, but it's a religion that has never been sanctioned by the west. While extremists of other stripes, whether they be Christian or even Buddhists, are regarded as aberrations, no such allowances exist for Muslims. A Muslim doing a bad thing must be doing so because of Islam, not despite it, even when their victims are other Muslims.

Despite evidence to the contrary, the western world has long regarded Mohammed as a barbarian and the Quran a fundamentally more violent book than the Bible. Every beheading, every massacre and every terrorist attack is consequently taken to reflect

Islam as a whole.

Rather than assessing terrorism in the context of the political and social environment in which it occurs, it becomes a flag of convenience for the distrust that lies dormant, waiting for the chance to surface. When the most extreme forms of terrorism are used to legitimise the ostracism of ordinary Muslims of all stripes, then nothing will satisfy the persistent demands for condemnation.

They merely serve as a reminder that to some, Muslims will never fit in.

Ruby Hamad is a Sydney writer and associate editor of progressive feminist website The Scavenger. She blogs at rubyhamad.wordpress.com and tweets as @rubyhamad.

Encounter at the gate

CREATIVE

Brian Matthews

I'm standing at the front gate, about to go for a run when he swings round the corner. He has a heavy looking bag over one shoulder into which are tightly folded perhaps forty or fifty copies of the local paper. It arrives every Thursday, but this is the first time I've encountered the deliverer.

'Just drop it in the box,' I say. 'I'm off for a run.'

'Name's Roy,' he says, extending a sinewy hand.

'Brian,' I say, slightly taken aback but shaking hands anyway.

Roy flicks a paper from his bag, rolls it once and puts it into the box next to the gate.

'Sensible box you've got there. Some of 'em are so small they'd hardly take a letter let alone a bloody newspaper. Personally I prefer those bits of 90mm PVC pipe for papers. Not much use for rain water - they split - but fine for rolled up papers or magazines. Mind you, *news*paper's a bit of a misnomer for this bastard.'

He takes another paper from his bag and waves it in an arc. 'Full of real estate advertisements. Not much content there. So you're a runner?'

He speaks in a deep, modulated voice that seems to run on like a quiet stream. Just when you think you might answer, the flow smoothly resumes, and he is an adept prince of the *non sequitur*. I manage to explain to him that I'd been running to keep fit for about thirty years, but these days what I did was more of a jog. 'My marathon days are

long gone,' I add with uneasy self-deprecation.

'I'm a walker,' he says. I realise he means *officially* a walker, employed by the company that distributes the local papers.

'I walk round all the courts, roads, boulevards, closes, circuits, avenues, lanes and parades - nothing as bloody mundane as a "street" round here. The pay's pretty ordinary, but you keep fit and it's quite interesting at times. Fr'instance, there's this bloke I met the other day. I'd just left a paper in his box when he called out to me. I thought he was going to complain about something, but he was polite and pleasant. "Don't leave any papers here if you don't mind," he said, "because I can't read." I thought for a minute he was having a lend of me. He was well dressed, well spoken. Funny how you automatically equate illiteracy with being down and out.'

I can't help myself. 'Well, what was the problem?'

The man, Roy explains, had a stroke, but his otherwise full recovery had been marred by the discovery that letters, print, writing, inscription of all kinds, were an unrecognisable jumble. The doctors said this would gradually improve, but it didn't.

'Weird, isn't it?' Roy says. 'He can't drive because the signs are meaningless. And of course, the world of reading is closed off to him: printed books, magazines, newspapers, and even little throw-aways like this one.' He reaches into his bag and brandishes yet another of his wares.

'You'll be wanting to get running,' he says. 'Ever take a short cut through the cemetery?'

I nod.

'Y'know,' he says, looking vaguely across the road at ti trees being plucked and rocked by the wind - I brace myself for another right-angle turn in the conversation - 'I reckon it wouldn't hurt some of these politicians to be forced to walk among the graves a bit, especially the ones who've spent their whole lives in politics and never been within a mile of a bullet fired in anger and who send the young blokes off to bloody Iraq or Afghanistan or some other hell hole to take our minds off what's going on at home. That cemetery is full of the "fallen", as they call them. Well, they didn't fall, mate, they were cut down.'

It's as if he feels embarrassed by his own sudden passion.

'Anyway, got to get on.' He hoists the bag higher on his shoulder.

I have to ask. 'Have you been within a mile of an angry bullet?'

'Vietnam,' he says. 'Number came up. Three gongs. Bad dreams. Lots of dead mates. Don't forget to collect your paper from the box. You'll probably find your dream home in it.'

Brian Matthews is honorary professor of English at Flinders University and an award winning columnist and biographer.

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Ending feminised poverty

AUSTRALIA

Kate Galloway

I was heartened to hear news this week of the launch of the second action plan in the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. It is important that opposition to violence against women becomes part of daily discourse. It is clear though that this strategy needs to take its place alongside a vast array of other reforms to achieve its potential for transformative change and justice for women.

Despite historical gains for women in terms of formal equality - the right to vote, to own property and to be educated - the lack of progress towards women's substantive equality is bound tightly to deeply ingrained assumptions about gender. This is so even in an apparently broadly liberal society like Australia - although I personally find Australian attitudes to gender are largely very conservative. Social constructs play out daily in our personal relationships and our public personae. The effect of these assumptions is profound for our society: they underlie violence against women and are implicated in the feminisation of poverty.

I know women approaching retirement age facing subsistence living in the midst of our affluent society. Foregoing education in the 1960s because of cost and the expectation to marry, they devoted themselves to raising children, doing voluntary work and supporting their husbands' career advancement. Through widowhood or divorce, they have ended up living alone. The paid work they have since undertaken has been largely unskilled in retail or service industries. Employers had offered only casual work, varying greatly in hours from week to week and affecting their financial independence.

Some have had new relationships, but have suffered financially as a result. This is often described as 'sexually transmitted debt'. These women now rely on pensions and

supported housing. They remain active in their communities, but are excluded from the labour market. These women represent an example of the feminisation of poverty.

Overall, Australian women earn an average of 18.2 per cent less than men. Consequently, women also have lower retirement savings. In 2009, the Australian Human Rights Commission reported on women's accumulation of poverty: 'Instead of accumulating wealth through the retirement income system as intended, due to experiences of inequality over the lifecycle, women are more likely to be accumulating poverty.'

Women's unpaid caring responsibilities compound this problem as women frequently interrupt their working lives to care for children, the sick and the elderly. Even where a couple strives for equality, women receive a smaller share of available household finances than their male partners and they tend to spend it on household and children's needs. Additionally, over two million women are financially abused by their spouse. Women have less purchasing power per dollar than men - simply because they are women.

Some may suggest that it is 'natural' or inevitable that this occurs and this is at the heart of the intractable problem of injustice. I do not see why my older women friends should be burdened with accumulated poverty simply because they are women. They carry a material burden because their unpaid work was considered to be performed 'for love', undeserving of financial security. They did not have opportunities for education or career advancement because they were women. Some have lost their financial security because of the domination of men carrying out their own construction of gender.

Importantly however, these structural issues - wage gap, superannuation gap, childcare, unpaid caring, inequitable income distribution - have not gone away. These older women are not the last or the only generation to experience feminised poverty. Experiencing life this way renders women second-class citizens, denying them their right to self-determination.

To give substance to women's right to self-determination, we must afford all women real opportunities to engage fully in economic and civic life free from the expectations imposed on their gender but free also to express themselves as women.

This means re-thinking our key institutions to provide equitably for diverse life paths, and to value women. The former has an economic flavor and the latter a social one. The two intersect at the level of policy. Progressive institutional reform requires setting a clear direction confirming the value of women in all social and institutional contexts: the workplace, the home, the parliament, courts and executive, in education, sport, media and culture.

Our society pays a price for feminised poverty. Proposals by government or industry that affect welfare, tax, wages and entitlements or childcare therefore need to be tested against the policy outcome of justice for women in both economic and social terms. Only then will the spectrum of issues start to converge to support strategies addressing the other disastrous problem of violence against women.

Justice for women requires ambitious and comprehensive reform with broad buy-in from all quarters. How are you going to contribute to change?

Kate Galloway lectures in law at James Cook University. She researches and writes about property law, feminist legal theory and legal education. Kate blogs and tweets.

Stock image of old woman via Shutterstock.

Disconnected landscapes

REVIEWS

Anthony Morris

Night Moves. Rated M. Release date: 11 September 2014. Director: Kelly Reichardt. Running time 112 minutes.

Even a decade on from 9/11, terrorism and the motives of the people behind it remain a subject hard to examine rationally in the West. With *Night Moves*, director Kelly Reichardt (*Wendy & Lucy*, *Meek's Cutoff*) gets around at least some of those hurdles by focusing on a cell of eco-terrorists, whose concern for - if not their 'defence' of - the environment is somewhat closer to the mainstream than the beliefs of many extremist groups.

As with her previous films, Reichardt is interested here in people moving through and reacting to their landscape. The drama in those films came from her characters not having the tools to survive in an uncaring world, whether as early American settlers or down-on-their-luck drifters. In *Night Moves,* the drama comes from the way their reaction to their environment cuts them off from the world around them.

Josh (Jesse Eisenberg) works on an eco-friendly farm outside Portland on the US west coast, but his activism extends far beyond film nights and sustainable crops. Together with the more overtly right-on Dena (Dakota Fanning) they buy a powerboat and deliver it to Harmon (Peter Sarsgaard), who provides both fake IDs and the fertiliser bombs they need for their mission: blowing up a local dam.

Much of their scheme - buying the boat, trying to get more fertilizer, making sure that no-one stumbles across their plans as they set up the bomb - plays out like a low-key 70s thriller. But it is increasingly clear that the real drama here isn't the destruction they wreak (their efforts are dismissed as theatre' by one authority figure) but the cost they personally pay for their actions.

Josh is the most self-contained of the trio, but what early on seems like steely determination is slowly revealed to be something more fragile, while Dena's more open support for the cause becomes a negative in the eyes of the others once the consequences of their actions becomes real.

Reichardt tells the story in a distant, somewhat emotionless fashion, her long static takes suggesting a world where characters have to impose their own meaning on things, and then pay the price for their choices.

All three leads are excellent, but Eisenberg's performance is the heart of this film. He turns his trademark energy inwards to play a man locked down inside himself, his nervousness revealed only in the occasional darting look. Initially hiding his true nature and beliefs from his friends and co-workers seems like a vital part of his mission. But gradually his refusal to connect with others turns toxic. His evil acts may have come from

a good place, but in doing evil that good place is lost to him forever.

Anthony Morris is the current DVD editor of The Big Issue*. He writes about film and television for various publications, including Geelong street paper* Forte *and* Empire *magazine, as well as The Vine and The Wheeler Centre website.*

Suicide taboos and healing memories

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

On Wedneday this week we mark World Suicide Prevention Day. Its focus is rightly on noticing and caring for people who are at risk of taking their lives. But the day also recalls the great pain suffered by many people when their relative or friend takes their own life.

The centre of their experience lies in the way that suicide excludes people from any participation in this decisive act of people's lives, and also prevents them from understanding it. Suicide is always shrouded in silence, and arouses dread at entering the silence. So it imposes further silence. It is a dark mystery, surrounded by a stigma that makes people reluctant to talk about it, ill at ease in speaking to those affected by it, and creates further acts of exclusion. Once people who took their own lives could not be buried in consecrated ground, and were even symbolically executed to show society's abhorrence of the deed. These taboos and exclusions further excluded and silenced relatives and friends of people who had taken their life.

This exclusion intensifies natural feelings of guilt. 'If only my child, parent or friend were still alive' turns easily into 'if only I had noticed, found the right word or silence, refrained from the harsh word, and so on.' Or 'if only they had thought of me'. Then 'if only' easily turns into accusation or resentment. People and their memories are further locked into silence.

A little book launched today, *The Cost of Silence,* published by Support After Suicide presents the writing of men who lost a relative to suicide. What they write is a testimony to the black hole that suicide digs in the lives of those close to it, and to the power of

accompaniment and conversation to dissipate it.

Most striking in their accounts is the power and complexity of memory and the need to attend to it. Their descriptions are concrete and detailed, particularly when describing their relatives when alive. 'She was a whizz at shopping, and stormed the shops in Chapel Street for bargains'. 'Dad had been at the beach for the weekend helping his brother finish his pergola'. 'We all sat down to watch the footy, and he sat with us'. Each dead relative is remembered in their connections to other people and to their world.

The memories of confronting the suicide of their relative are also vivid, but are sometimes disconnected. A backpacker's van parked near the toilet-block at the beach is remembered, as are boots crunching on the gravel. Relatives remember what they are doing: 'I'm making pizzas on the night when I receive the call'. Some remember details clearly: 'I saw the open coffin, the lit candles burning on either side, hear Enya playing in the background, and her still form lying there'. Others turn to metaphor to describe the effect on them. 'The horror blossomed in my head like an opening flower'.

All the memories are double edged. One of the writers speaks finely of 'my memory's double entendre'. They remind people of the person whom they loved, but also of their death and the silence at its heart. 'A spectacular view across the bay, sun high in the sky and the water beautiful blue…but you were not there, you can't be there, you won't be there.'

The wrenching cry at the heart of all these memories wrestles with silence, 'Why did you do it? You know that we loved you.' Expressing the fear that a death may not have been sought in a moment of overwhelming misery, but have been long planned, another writer begs, 'Give me a sign that this is not how you left us.' Memory leads people to the heart of the silence and taboo that freeze memory.

Memories characteristically take people into a different world: from before to after, from connection with the everyday world to isolation. This is articulated in metaphor. 'My world is travelling/in a parallel universe to theirs.' It also shapes the way in which things are seen: 'We got your death certificate last week. It looks the same as your birth certificate only it reads like a bookend.'

Later on everyday memories can come to bless even when edged with grief: 'Every time Carlton wins I still think of him after the final siren and how he would love to be singing the theme song.'

The variety and complexity of memories and the silence and the stigma with which they are intertwined make working through the suicide of a close relative correspondingly complex. It has sometimes been described as the healing of memory. This metaphor is helpful in suggesting that this will be a long and therapeutic process, and that memories need to be taken seriously, not suppressed.

But the variety and layering of memory suggests a much more complex process than healing. It calls for more elaborated metaphors to describe it. Memories need to be uncovered, like bones, and owned in all their bloodiness and dirt. They need to be handled tenderly and washed clean of the silence that taints them. They need to be treasured, wrapped carefully in good words, brought to life, and the gift that the person was shared proudly with friends. This is a messy, unorderly business that requires a safe place to attend to it. The writing in this collection is a testimony to the power of this

process and to the pain involved in it

If there is a simple message of this book, it is that nothing causes pain like love, that nothing can heal pain except love, and that both love and healing need words.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street*.*

Image cropped from the cover of The Cost of Silence*.*

A word with dad

CREATIVE

Brian Doyle

'Could I have a word with you?' This was what our dad would say when he was annoyed or seething, and his children all learned early to interpret those seven words, always spoken quietly and calmly, as incipient doom and looming penalty, which generally meant being sent to your room.

Funny how being in your room was refuge and relaxation except when you were *confined* to it, at which point suddenly it was a beautifully painted prison cell from which you stared longingly into the backyard, where your brothers would be capering and making vulgar gestures and mooning you and savouring every moment of your period of incarceration, in much the same fashion as sparrows taunt a housebound cat; though the cat takes careful notes as to faces, and stores up his resentment on small interior shelves designed just for this purpose.

You would be walking briskly through the house, having just committed brotherly battery, and sensibly wishing to get as far from the scene of the incident as possible, and there would be our tall silent dad, sitting in his brown chair by the brown radio, and just as you thought you were clear, and loosed into the hallway to choose among several excellent escape options, you would hear him say *could I have a word with you?,* and even though he said it so quietly that you would think no one more than a few inches away from him would catch it, you would be thoroughly wrong about that, for his words rang in the air with a clarion shout, and you instantly froze in place, and all brothers within hundreds of yards also froze, thinking for a second that those words had come for them and they were totally and completely screwed. But no, those seven words were for you and you alone, my lad, and you turned slowly and sat down on the brown couch, and dad leaned in gently and said something quietly, and you went to your room for a

thousand years.

He hit me once, our dad, and I deserved it, having driven drunk in the only car we had. But even then it was a short sharp sudden slap, to wake me up to the depth of his anger and fear, and to the danger in which I had put myself and our family, and dozens of innocents on the road. And he hit our oldest brother once, and by all accounts our oldest brother eminently deserved it. I do not think he ever before or after those incidents struck another of his several children, or roared at us, or even spoke sharply, that I can recall.

Somehow, even with all those children, and with the usual brawl and bawl among his sons, and what surely must have been many a snide remark from his daughter, he never lost his temper, or even, that we remember, his equanimity. Just as amazing, he never seemed to miss a crime or misdemeanour, but somehow knew of it instantly, and was there in his brown chair waiting to quietly say *could I have a word with you?* as soon as your guilty face hove into view.

I have roared at my children; I have shouted at them with such vehemence that the veins bulged in my neck and the dog cowered in the corner. I have had the urge to strike a son, but by merciful miracle did not. I have barked at them, and snarled at them, and made cutting and snide remarks to them, and belittled their choices and their opinions, and for all of this I feel a constant silent private simmering shame: that I have not been quite as good a father as I so desperately wanted to be, and might be even yet, given more effort and humility on my part.

But I often am glad to realise that I know I have not been the best father I could be because my own father was; and, to his credit and my joy, still is.

Brian Doyle is the editor of Portland Magazine *at the University of Portland. His most recent book is* The Thorny Grace of It*, a collection of spiritual essays published by Loyola Press.*

Stock image of father and son via Shutterstock.

'Let them eat birthday cake!'

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda, The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.

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Turning off the lights on Australian research

AUSTRALIA

Tseen Khoo

Successive governments have positioned Australia poorly in the areas of research and innovation. With the sector depleted by significant cuts and having no champions from within the sitting government, the outlook is bleak, and the morale of those in the area is low.

The Gillard government had proposed 'efficiency dividends' on universities that have significant consequences for research infrastructure. The Abbott government maintained these cuts and is now implementing significant others, including those which have forced CSIRO to close whole sites, let hundreds of staff go, and shut down entire areas of research. Coupled with this is Education Minister Christopher Pyne's threat that he'll slash research funding should his deregulation of university fees not get through.

Treating research as an expendable element has a greater effect than a few scientists losing their jobs. It runs down the country's research batteries. Only when these are regularly well-charged can you count on them to enact change and progress.

This 'charging' of the batteries does not only consist of funding, but also a consistent baseline requirement for a strong and confident research culture that can support good research. Good research does not happen in a vacuum or spring from nowhere. It relies on consistent, often unglamorous, gains made by smart, experienced workers who are generous and energetic with their intellect and resources.

The improvement of a society's quality of life, and its ability to compete internationally as a political and economic power, depends heavily on its capacity for research, innovation, and fresh thinking. How do you equip your community with better ways to live, work and connect without research? Where do answers to society's persistent problems come from, if not from piloting solutions derived from research?

There is a persistent myth that Australia 'punches above its weight' in research, mainly in terms of cited work. Even if this were true, it does not mean that Australia compares favourably to other developed countries when it comes to having the capacity for producing leading international research.

Research institutions, including universities, are offering diminishing resources and opportunities for researchers to be employed in larger, field-changing projects. Fixed-term appointments on shrinking 'soft money' do not lend themselves to keeping

experienced, excellent staff on board in the sector. They will leave, and take their insight and creativity with them. As Paul Jensen and Elizabeth Webster have observed, '[In Australia,] we reward short-termism and incrementalism.'

While it is true that research investment in Australia has increased at a rate of 3 per cent each year in the last decade, this level of investment is consistently below the OECD average. It is a huge margin behind emerging research nations in Asia such as South Korea and China, or established Asian research hubs such as Singapore, where the amount of funding invested in research activity is extremely high.

The current government may have mothballed the Asian Century White Paper, but it cannot ignore what drove the Paper's (somewhat gauche) exhortations for engagement and collaboration with Asia. In all projections for research over the next decade or two, traditionally very strong research nations such as the US and UK, along with Australia, are falling behind - if not out - of the global research race. To stay in the race, let alone aspire to leading it, Australia needs to prioritise and fund research and research development.

Defunding research institutions at this time is a regressive, counter-productive move. A stop-start approach to funding leads to severe set-backs in staffing and a failure to develop buoyant, energetic research sectors. Research cuts bite into infrastructure and institutional funding blocks, and it affects large communities of research workers and their families. Researchers in Australia are being given less and less to work with, yet persist as far as they can in creating and producing excellent results with diminishing resources.

The research sector in Australia is increasingly one marked by casualisation and disappearing career paths. The depressed nature of working in this environment means that the very people who we'd want to solve our society's most crucial, pressing issues are the ones who will be looking elsewhere to establish their careers. Without a well-charged national research battery of properly resourced and quality researchers, there's only so far we can go, only so much we can do.

This steady draining of research resources from an already-underfunded sector can only lead to a nation that loses its ability to solve its own problems and has less to contribute to the world. Are we there yet?

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The challenge of a five-year Royal Commission

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has been granted its sought two-year extension. It will run for five years. That is appropriate. I predicted on the night Julia Gillard announced the commission that it would take five years to do its work.

I am still worried about this extended federal royal commission - and that is not because I am a Catholic priest afraid of what the commission might discover in the bowels of my Church. I have long been an advocate for State assistance to the Church in this area, concerned that the Church could not do it alone. All church members, and not just the victims who continue to suffer, need light, transparency and accountability if the opaque injustices of the past are to be rectified.

With the Commission's case study last month into the Melbourne Response, much of the media focus was on Cardinal Pell, as it was during the case study on the John Ellis case. For some time, many Australians, myself included, had wondered how Cardinal Pell was not in a position when an auxiliary bishop in Melbourne between 1987 and 1996 to know much, if anything, about the extent of child sexual abuse by his clergy and to do much, if anything, to address the issue.

On 21 August 2014, Cardinal Pell told the Royal Commission that, prior to his becoming Archbishop in August 1996, he 'had no knowledge of any criminal behaviour that was not being dealt with' and that he was 'not even sure to what extent (he) would have been privy to matters that might have been criminal but were being dealt with by the Vicar General'. He told the Commission, 'I wasn't in the direct line of authority before I was Archbishop. I was an Auxiliary Bishop with no responsibility in this area.' In his written

statement to the commission, he said, 'When I took office (as Archbishop in 1996), it was my view that the arrangements in the Archdiocese for responding to and assisting victims of child sexual abuse were insufficient to ensure a compassionate, effective and consistent response. I thought there needed to be clearly documented procedures for dealing with complaints.'

So he had quickly come to know there was a very major problem, when before he was oblivious and seemingly lacking in curiosity. He went on to state: 'I was very conscious, around the time that I became the Archbishop of Melbourne, that there was a growing awareness of the issue of child sexual abuse, and of the fact that such offences had been committed by clergy and Church personnel. There was understandable attention being paid to the issue in the media and in public debate.'

This evidence highlights two problems. First, there was the institutional problem of clericalism that infected the Catholic Church at least until 1996. A bishop as competent as (now) Cardinal Pell was able to be oblivious to the problem and to lack curiosity about how it was being handled in his archdiocese even though he occupied for nine critical years what most of us would see as the position of 2IC - second in charge. He was after all not just any auxiliary bishop.

As an auxiliary bishop, he was already a member of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and thrice appointed Vatican Visitor to various overseas seminaries. It is not too worldly to observe that he was always known to be going places up the Catholic hierarchy, and he has. He was seen by the Roman authorities as one of our best. He was the Vatican's Australian 'go to' bishop.

Second, there was the broader societal problem that in those days such oblivion was not restricted to high ranking, ever promoted clerics. As a community we did not know enough about the issue, and we did not do enough to respond. It was not just the Catholic bishops. The Royal Commission with time to conclude its task in a timely manner should be able to help the Church and the whole Australian community in its commitment to truth, justice, compassion, and healing.

This brings me to my longstanding fear about a national inquiry of this sort in our Australian federation. Justice McClellan and his fellow commissioners have to do more to bring the states and territories to the table and to get real buy-in by all governments. The mainstream media have been very neglectful of this part of McClellan's challenge.

This last week, we have seen the disastrous consequences with another royal commission which failed to take account of the role of state governments. The Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program produced a report which is a dog's breakfast. The mainstream media has been oblivious to the report's glaring shortcomings, focusing more on the party politics of the blame game.

That royal commission concluded that the Commonwealth when administering the program should not have relied on the states to implement their own occupational health and safety laws, their own employment training requirements or their own building regulations.

The Commissioner, Mr Ian Hanger QC, reported, 'To rely on the State and Territory regimes to police their respective workplace health and safety laws seems to me to have been misguided, as those regimes are largely reactive. That is, when an incident happens the workplace health and safety regulators or electrical safety regulators investigate, report and, if appropriate, take enforcement action. What was, in my view, required of

the Australian Government with the HIP (Home Insulation Program) was the provision of some preventative measures to attempt to mitigate some of the obvious workplace health and safety risks endemic to the HIP.'

And yet, the Commission went on to suggest that the Commonwealth should have considered having the states, rather than the Commonwealth, implement the whole program.

The regrettable deaths of the four young men working on the Home Insulation Program were the result of problems in administration at the Commonwealth *and* State levels and in delayed, poor communication between Commonwealth *and* State officials, especially in Queensland where three of the four men worked and died.

In reaching his bizarre conclusions, the royal commissioner received little help from government. He observed: 'With very few exceptions, the public servant witnesses chose not to make any submissions. Quite extraordinarily, in my view, the Commonwealth chose not to make submissions when given the opportunity to do so. It made some desultory submissions in reply to the submissions of the pre-existing insulation business owners and the State of Queensland.' A royal commission set up to investigate only the Commonwealth Government, especially when receiving inadequate co-operation from the Commonwealth Government, was bound to provide an inadequate and flawed report.

When investigating child abuse, the Commonwealth royal commission needs to be very attentive to, and scrutinising of, state governments, especially their police forces and their child welfare departments. They are the key agencies which intersect with institutions where child abuse has occurred or is likely to occur. Justice McClellan will not be able to provide a national blueprint for the future protection of children unless there is real and forced buy-in by the states.

The omens are not good. When the most appalling instances of child sexual abuse by a South Australian public servant came to light last month, the South Australian government moved immediately to set up its own royal commission. The South Australian commission is to report on many matters including:

The assessment, by relevant authorities, of persons who work and volunteer with children in the custody and/or under the guardianship of the Minister;

Management, training, supervision and ongoing oversight of persons who work and volunteer with children in the custody and/or under the guardianship of the Minister;

The reporting of, investigation of and handling of complaints about care concerns, abuse or neglect of children cared for in the custody and/or under the guardianship of the Minister.

These are the very matters within Justice McClellan's federal remit - agreed to by all governments, including South Australia (see the terms of reference). There was not the national political will to insist that the corrupted South Australian agency be subjected to the same national spotlight as has been, and quite rightly, Cardinal Pell.

McClellan now has the time and the money to do a comprehensive report. State police forces and state child welfare agencies must be put under the national spotlight, and

state governments need to make detailed submissions as to how they can improve their agencies for the protection of children. Otherwise McClellan risks becoming another Hanger.

Frank Brennan SJ AO, professor of law at the Australian Catholic University, is currently in the USA as the Gasson Professor at Boston College.
Image credit AAP/Joe Castro via ABC News.

Winter faces falter

CREATIVE

Lyn McCredden

Your face

for Robin Grove

I see your faceacross busy rooms,or in a street of strangers.Your facefamiliar and wry,eyebrows leapingwith the furious farce of it all,your tears of wicked enjoyment.

Sometimes I hearyour laugh,generous and knowing,your irreverence and awein quick-step;your lightning transformationsinto joy, from resignation.You've been gone a year now.The world is dulland unillumed.

You moved lightlywith your dancer's stepand your gentle, gracious handsthat knew Mozart and Bach,soil under your nails,old-fashioned hymns,and a child's rounded head.Your heart was woven with the wordsof Shakespeare and Donne and Eliot,words you gave awayto so manyhungry to hear,words freightedwith your humble gratitude,your precise cautions, measuredby your inimitable, dancing self.

Facing South

Up in the Arts tower,below the south lawn'ssmooth hilland subterranean carpark,the class is facing further south into winter light.They are doing Donne on death -*Per fretum feberis* -digging, desultory, for resonancehalf-remembered, or learnedrote in Lit One.Before the poet's obsessionswhite winter faces falter,too alive to feel the gripof hard earth,the gnarl and dragof unimaginable history.Faces too fresh, trickedpale in the cold light,already scan for the hour's end,the next allotmentof learning before lunch.And who is shetutoring in ignorance,to reignitethose old Renaissance whisperings?What can the young doagainst such wizened knowledge? "They thought like that, then,there was more dying, you know, when they were pretty young.The plague, wars, bad sanitation."The hour dwindles, uncaring, to its close.Outside, light shiftsin soft waves, movingover the emptied room,not expecting, as it goes,sympathy or even acknowledgement.Vacancy braces itself,10.15 to 11.45,next class, same topic,same burrowing blind lifestoring up its grains of cultureharvested against stupidityand the long winter nights.

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Fatal cost of shutting borders

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

Two significant news items about asylum seekers came in the past week. Hamid Kehazaei died in Brisbane from an infection acquired on Manus Island detention centre, and the Red Cross had to lay off five hundred workers after losing its contract to provide support to asylum seekers living in the community. The incidents attracted only passing notice. They simply restated and reasserted existing policies and values.

Mr Kehazei's death emphasised what was already clear from reports and leaks about conditions in the Manus Island detention centre. It is a dangerous place that affects people's physical and mental health.

The transfer of support of asylum seekers from the Red Cross to Centrelink and other agencies means that vulnerable people will lose the relationships they had built with dedicated and experienced workers. They had been able to trust an organisation with a humane ethos and wisdom in meeting their needs. That is now gone. Its loss will add to the misery of already fragile human beings.

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison explained that the new system would give better value for money. From the perspective of Australian policy, both Mr Kehazei's death and the loss of the Red Cross contract do indeed give value for money. The misery and loss suffered by people who have applied for protection in Australia are an essential part of preventing other people from coming by sea.

No new ground is broken in these events. Nor will arguments change our readers' attitudes to them. Still, it is important for journals like ours to record them for the judgment of future generations. But it is worth reflecting on the Minister's phrase, 'better

value for money'. For him the value at issue was simply economic efficiency.

When we are dealing with people, however, values other than economic efficiency may also come to mind. Respect for our shared humanity, for example, helping people in need, building good relationships, acting with decency and encouraging human flourishing. Some people, perhaps temerariously, would describe these as Australian values. They might even prefer to have their tombstones inscribed with the words: 'He always treated friends and strangers with respect', than with: 'He always got value for his money'.

If people who come to us seeking protection are forced to leave Australia by choice or by death, might it not be to our credit as a nation if they could say that they found here respect and decency as well as economic efficiency?

 *Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of* Eureka Street*.*

Image via Shutterstock.

<!--*Follow him on Twitter.*-->

Australia's delayed GFC

ECONOMICS

David James

The winter surge in Australia's residential property market has many independent observers - as opposed to real estate spruikers and the banks - increasingly worried. Australia is at risk of experiencing a delayed global financial crisis (GFC) effect, which would result in great stresses being put on the financial system.

The property market is growing at an annualised rate of 15 per cent, which, in an environment in which interest rates in developed countries are running at close to zero, is a suspiciously high return. Sydney is especially hot, with prices 40 per cent above their pre-GFC peak and 20 per cent above their November 2010 peak.

The main trigger is low interest rates. They are at once a symptom of what is wrong in the global financial system and a catalyst for what will soon be wrong. After the GFC, the only way for the United States and Europe to stave off complete catastrophe was to flood the system with money, effectively reducing the cost of capital in the economy to near zero. Interest rates around the developed world fell.

Australia's experience was different, however. Unlike most developed economies, especially the US, property prices did not fall sharply. As a result, there was not the same kind of pressure on local banks, which for the most part sailed through unscathed. There were many reasons for this. Former Treasurer Peter Costello's ability to run prudent federal budgets, which left Australia with exceptionally low government debt, was one. The China-driven investment boom in resources was another. The Rudd government's cash splash in 2008 was a skilful piece of timing, staving off recession. And the property market was greatly assisted by negative gearing and Australians' love of

property.

Interest rates are only now falling in Australia in what can be described as a 'delayed GFC effect'. The cash rate is at a record low of 2.5 per cent and investors are starting to take riskier bets in property, desperate to get better returns than are offered by term deposits.

Many are sounding warnings. David Murray, former head of the Commonwealth Bank and head of the Financial System Inquiry, has said the banks should be shoring up their capital base to be ready for a correction in asset prices 'inflated by unprecedented global monetary stimulus.'

The Australian Prudential Lending Authority (APRA) has released data showing an increase in risky loans, including interest only loans. Investment loans are now 37.9 per cent of the total as investors seek alternatives. Credit agency Moody's has warned about growing risk, noting that the banks' credit growth has greatly outpaced the systems' growth. Jeremy Lawson, chief global economist at Standard Life, reckons the Australian housing market is 30 per cent over valued. Australia has the third-most overvalued housing market on a price-to-income basis, after Belgium and Canada, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Foreign investors, also keen to find better returns, are exacerbating the situation. Foreign buyers are reported to be purchasing about two-fifths of all newly developed homes in Melbourne and Sydney. There are anecdotal reports of intense activity from Chinese investors, some of whom are bypassing the foreign ownership rules.

Self-managed super funds, which control $560 billion, may also be having an effect. SMSFs can leverage their funds up to five times, and if they start concentrating heavily on the property market that will only increase the competition. At the moment, the amounts are comparatively small, although it is growing fast.

The generational cost of soaring property prices has been widely discussed. Most young, first home buyers are priced out of the market. Even the Reserve Bank is advising that renting makes as much sense as buying.

Yet what is only now starting to come into focus is the extent to which the whole economy is in hock to house prices. It is not just households that are groaning under the weight of such high mortgage debt.

As Murray - who should know, having run one of the Big Four Banks - implies, a sharp fall in the housing market will put intense pressure on our major lending institutions. This would have a deeply depressing effect on all parts of the economy. Australia's 'delayed GFC effect' may not be just the current low level of interest rates. We may also experience property falls and, in consequence, banking problems.

Certainly the potential is there for a sharp sell-off with such a high proportion of property owners being investors rather than occupiers. If investors think they have made a bad choice, they are much more likely to sell than occupiers, who tend to have an attachment to the dwelling.

The regulators, as ever, are taking a hands-off approach; in other words, not regulating at all in the area that matters. Some intervention now could prove extremely prudent, such as the policy of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, which has changed banks' maturity profiles to provide greater protection against liquidity risk in the medium-to

longer term. Or the government could do the politically unthinkable and make the negative gearing tax break less attractive. But the probability is that there will be no action, and Australia's economy will sail into perilous waters.

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Telling good Kurds from bad

INTERNATIONAL

Binoy Kampmark

When in comes to moral conflicts and dilemmas, the issue of support is often called upon. As John Stuart Mill claimed, 'Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.' There is, however, a more fundamental riposte to this: evil comes from an overenthusiastic desire to do good, to right the dispute with imperfect knowledge and awareness.

It is the greatest of historical lessons that is never learned: sponsor at your risk. Un-civil wars do not yield reliable agents or factions. Money and finance for conflict is the necessary expediency to win battles and the conflict. Guns and mortars have no soul, agency or ideological outlook. They are used whenever they are obtained, against whoever the enemy of the moment is.

The Middle East is rife with such arrangements and Western powers should know. US and European powers supplied Saddam Hussein's brutal regime through the 1980s as it fought the Iran of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Saddam got too big for his boots, and suffered two defeats - over his invasion of Kuwait, and in the 2003 invasion of his country by the clumsily termed 'Coalition of the Willing'.

Through the 1980s and persisting into the 1990s, the Islamic fighters in Afghanistan received backing from Washington. The now maligned Taliban received backing from Washington via traditional Saudi and Pakistani assets. The motivation there was keeping some form of centralised authority to protect gas and oil interests.

The game of backing and supporting misunderstood - and dangerous - groups persists. This is reflected in the near-schizophrenic frame of US alliances in the Middle East. On

paper, it backs the state of Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia are backing the Islamic State forces in Syria and Iraq. This problem became absurd in exposures made in the light of 9/11 Commission Report which condemned the intimate ties between Washington and Riyadh. The Saudis have proven not so much prickly as duplicitous in their dealing with the noisy advocates from the free world.

The Islamic State is treated with a degree of mixed, if ambivalent support when it comes to their battle against the Assad regime in Syria. European powers and the United States draw the false distinction that there are good Islamic militants and bad ones, with the bad ones supposedly against the Western military program. It matters that they are our nasties, not theirs. But matters are different when it comes to their policies and advances made in Northern Iraq.

The same thing can be said of the Kurds, who are now riding the train of history with prospects for success. Just as Islamic State fighters will find themselves afforded different regimes of treatment depending on whether they fight in Iraq or Syria, the same can be said for the Kurdish fighters battling the regime in Ankara. In northern Iraq, they have become the poster boy (and girl) fighters for the drive against the IS.

Even Kurdish community leaders have expressed concern that Western powers select the appropriate horse. Ali Erdoglu, one such community representative based in Sydney, has made that specific point. Jacky Sutton from the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies at the Australian National University, is less concerned. The moral bleach is well and truly applied to Kurdish resistance against IS which 'has threatened genocide of some communities and has certainly made it very clear that this is a brutal nasty war being waged against civilians.

She chooses to see the Peshmerga, guerrilla forces formed in the 1920s, as knights in liberation armour protecting Kurdish villages. The same can be said about the Coalition government, and the Labor opposition, who see this crisis as different to 2003 for its ' humanitarian' implications, with the Kurds being emissaries of salvation.

Nowhere is there mention of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has made the battle against the Islamic State their fight. Their history is an important one. They are seen as the gravest of terrorist organisations in Turkey. This brings the alliance system into conflict as well, given that Turkey is an important NATO alliance partner. Again, we have that most artificial of distinctions: can we find a good Kurd, or a bad one, and supply accordingly?

While the Peshmerga are seen as the forces to support, the moral vessels of the moment, the PKK and its affiliates, such as the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), are not merely holding the fort but making gains. They are also finding rich recruiting grounds from refugee camps inhabited by Kurdish refugees who have fled Turkey's military. This conflict, in other words, does not merely involve the aggrieved fighting the brutal tactics of IS, or seeking freedom from the corrupt authorities in Baghdad. It involves a direct rebuke to Turkey.

For such reasons, a debate about arming, and reinforcing the Kurds, is not an open and shut case, which is what the Abbott government suggests. Australian armed forces have provided the means of supply for humanitarian supplies, and promises to become one for supplying weapons. But this patchwork solution is a dangerous one. For one, it may well see the rupturing of Iraq. How fitting, then, that the destructive invasion of 2003 should culminate in the partition of the very country whose dictator was removed to protect it,

and Western interests.

Dr Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne.

Image of PKK soldiers near the Iraq-Kurdistan border taken by James Gordon in January 2013. Obtained via flickr under Creative Commons licence.

Wombs for rent

AUSTRALIA

Ellena Savage

There is a celebrity rumour I like to indulge. A woman named Tina Seals filed a lawsuit against Beyoncé and Jay Z for custody of their two year-old baby, Blue Ivy Carter. Seals claims to have been the surrogate mother of Blue Ivy. Surrogacy is illegal in New York, except where it is altruistic, so if the alleged surrogate received payment for her services, whatever contract she signed would be rendered null, or so I am led to believe by the ultra-worthy celebrity gossip sites I frequent.

I used to think the rumours about Beyoncé using a surrogate mother for her baby were interesting because they pointed to a culture where it is utterly taboo to talk about surrogacy, but it is completely acceptable to expect that a celebrity mother will look as unchanged by childbirth as Beyoncé does. She lost 30 kg after the pregnancy! She has successfully reversed the effects of childbirth and breastfeeding!

I am beginning to think that rumour points more to an insidious culture of motherhood that locks women into narratives about their femininity, a condition which is either confirmed or denied based on their ability to conceive and parent children.

The complicated and sensitive issues around surrogacy have arisen in the past weeks, highlighting the states' inconsistent laws surrounding the issue. Baby Gammy, biologically fathered by a registered child sex offender, born with Down Syndrome, was left by his parents in Thailand with his surrogate mother because of his illness. This led to the discovery that the paedophile father used the channel of overseas surrogacy to assume custody of children.

In another case, the father of children born of a Thai surrogate (and using her eggs) has been charged with molesting them, sparking another difficult custody case. Will the

children be repatriated to Thailand, despite barely knowing that they are Thai? Under these circumstances, the Thai military are now considering banning surrogacy from its borders.

When Bill Heffernan said that Julia Gillard was unfit for leadership because she was 'deliberately barren', he didn't really err. He just named our preoccupation with motherhood. Mark Latham said it too, in another configuration: 'Anyone who chooses a life without children, as Gillard has, cannot have much love in them,' and David Farley described Gillard as an 'old non-productive cow.' Easy for fathers to say, because it is mothers who bear the primary responsibility for infants' earliest needs. But I heard women around me echo that sentiment, too: 'there's something cold about her.'

The thought crossed my mind that while there is a consensus in favour of women's reproductive rights, we don't entirely mean it; we still don't trust a barren woman. Women may be able to choose *when* to have a baby, but not really *whether* to have one. Truly exercising that choice comes at a great social cost. Collectively, we knew that a mother could not become the first female Prime Minister of Australia, because we understand how motherhood interferes with careers like becoming the Prime Minister. And because so many women do make those sacrifices, willingly and unreservedly, resentment is levelled against those who don't.

While many women in Australia have a much greater degree of control over their fertility than their mothers and grandmothers did, their legal and social ability to plan their families still exists in a culture which reveres motherhood and sees childless women as depraved. One remedy available to the privileged childless (legally or illegally, depending on which state they live) is to outsource the womb.

But this form of surrogacy can never be ethical: renting the bodies of poor women to fulfill dreams of a nuclear family can never be an egalitarian transaction. Where there's a cash exchange, it's certain that the surrogate is doing it for the cash. Poor women *need* money. Rich families don't need their very own babies. There is of course altruistic surrogacy, a practice I'm sure long precedes IVF, which reflects the communal nature of family. Paid surrogacy simply places a market value on the idea of possessing distinct and private nuclear families. And it participates in the cult of motherhood.

You'd think that this valorisation of motherhood would increase the material status of mothers in Australia. Yet there's no wage for domestic labour, an argument which seems to have disappeared altogether in our post-feminist daydream. Mothers still face discrimination in the workplace, and many mothers are dependent on their partners for the economic livelihoods of their families, whether or not those circumstances are ideal.

Yes, the drive to procreate is powerful. But is it so powerful and important that it should override the integrity of women in developing countries? Is it so powerful that it should continue to be the defining quality of women?

Ellena Savage edits arts at The Lifted Brow, politics and culture at Spook Magazine, and is a postgraduate student of creative writing at Monash University. She tweets as @RarrSavage

Image via Shutterstock.

Breaking the till

CREATIVE

Isabella Fels

Chapel Street is my forbidden apple. My dad certainly jokes that I keep the whole squirming place just alive. I can't help it. I'm drawn into just about every shop. I have a real shopping addiction and this has been so since the age of twenty.

Shopping is my life. A lot of the time I certainly shop till I drop. I often feel like I'm going to pop the huge balloon or huge canister of goodies on offer to me.

As I pass each shop, I feel I have to be arm wrestled or chained or blasted not to go in. On one occasion I was certainly given my marching orders not to keep going in, as I went for the umpteenth time in my tracksuit pants. I was told after having gone in three times in two days, pondering over a fake gold watch that I was 'getting pretty regular'.

However at the other end of the spectrum, I can certainly feel the burning look of many shop assistants beckoning me to come in as I pass by.

Yes, I know they are desperate in Chapel Street, with landlords charging exorbitant rent for all the shops. This means they have to hike up all their prices. I once paid hundreds of dollars for a bright orange horror when I was at my heaviest weight. It made me look like a huge pumpkin. On another occasion I bought a pale pink coat that left me looking worse than all the pink ladies in *Grease*. To top it all off I bought a skirt for over a hundred dollars that my mother said looked like a petticoat.

I have certainly made many expensive mistakes in Chapel Street when the shop assistants have been aware and are on the take. This includes every fake piece of jewellery or designer clothing label that I can find. However my true label is that I am a

shopaholic. The shopping addiction has been described by one psychiatrist as abnormal and connected to my OCD and schizophrenia. He has basically put it down to me not knowing the difference between a want and a need and having very poor judgement and impulse control.

In the past my mother and my father have had to intervene to stop me letting loose like a dog down Chapel street. They have both rescued me from keeping totally unsuitable clothes by showing a letter to the shops by my psychiatrist, stating that I have an 'obsessional preoccupation' with spending money and please can the items be refunded. The authority of this letter made most of the shops willing to cooperate.

However with the passage of time I now realise that I cannot afford to hang on to the security of this letter. I have to show complete responsibility for all my actions and suffer the consequences of skipping on meals due to buying that skimpy dress.

As I go down Chapel Street, I feel like I am running a million miles an hour trying to look a million dollars. However I also feel it is my fate as I go down there loving every minute of it. In many ways I can feel myself cruising. Yet I have to think of myself as hitting rock bottom once I run out of money and then all the fun suddenly stops.

One therapist described my money situation as having champagne taste on a beer income. I go way beyond my means and then feel terrible when I have to sponge off others for food and drinks and cannot spare a few dollars for those less fortunate.

However I still love and adore the high life in Chapel Street. I feel so high as I go along there. Yet once I get low on money I want to lay low and go slowly like a tortoise or a horse with blinkers on down Chapel Street. I don't want to jump like a grasshopper into every shop.

Even though it is hard for me to restrain myself I have to train myself to resist all Chapel Streets garden of delights. I have to think of a dark, hell-like prison that I'll experience and which keeps me banging my head against a brick wall every time I shop.

I have to keep saying these things to myself and it sure becomes like torture that the only way of curing my shopping addiction is by not going into shops. If I do happen to stumble into a shop which is much more likely I have to get myself to stagger out as dignified as I can before I get my fill and break the till!

Isabella Fels is a Melbourne poet and writer. She has been published in various publications including Positive Words*,* Mental Illness Voice*,* The Big Issue *and* The Record *.*

Image of Chapel Street, Prahran by Matt Connolley via Wikimedia Commons under Creative Commons licence.

Timely liberation

REVIEWS

Anthony Morris

Boyhood Rated M. Release date: 4 September 2014. Director: Richard Linklater. Running time 165 minutes.

Richard Linklater is not a director who is big on plot. His first film, *Slacker*, drifted from oddball to oddball wandering the streets of Austin, Texas; his breakthrough film *Dazed and Confused* looked at one night in the lives of a group of graduating high school students in the 1970s; and his 'Before' trilogy (*Before Sunrise*, *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight*) has been a trilogy of snapshots of a relationship taken at nine year intervals.

So if anyone could successfully put together a film that was shot over 12 years following a five-year old boy as he grows into an 18-year old man, he'd be pretty close to the top of the list.

Linklater brought his cast together to film for a week each year, using a script that was largely improvised. Aside from Ellar Coltrane as Mason, the only other regulars across the years were Patricia Arquette (as Mason's mother), Ethan Hawke (as his father) and Richard Linklater's daughter Lorelei as Mason's sister Samantha, who steals the show early on with some astoundingly bratty but hilarious behaviour. Unsurprisingly considering the challenges of filming this way - while there are numerous supporting characters, they largely tend to appear only for a segment or two - there isn't a lot of ongoing drama.

The story begins with Mason and his sister living with their mother in suburban Texas, his parents having already separated. While both parents are free spirits to some extent, it's clear that Dad wasn't cut out to be a dad. As the years pass there are occasional stepfathers who tend to go bad (drinking is not a good sign), we see Mason go through some of the traditional milestones while others are implied, and while not everything always turns out for the best, this isn't a film where the stakes are high in any traditional sense.

Instead, this gains its power from the sheer passage of time on the screen during its 165 minutes. Again, there are no big dramatic upheavals during the period this covers (Harry Potter becomes a thing; Dad is not a George W Bush fan) but the weight of years gradually presses down on everyone here.

For Mason, it is a liberation. He grows up before our eyes, the dreamy kid of five becoming a decent, thoughtful, stable adult that at the film's end is set free to go his own way in life.

For his parents, the years work a different magic. His father settles down and becomes a solid citizen, giving up his dreams but making his peace with the man he has become. His mother has a rougher ride, and while she is often a background figure holding the family together, she has a scene towards the end where she reveals the price she paid

and how little she gained. It is heartrending.

Time builds us up then tears us down. The beauty of *Boyhood* is that it shows us the magic in the changes we all go through, the little differences that stack up into a life.

Anthony Morris is the current DVD editor of The Big Issue*. He writes about film and television for various publications, including Geelong street paper* Forte *and* Empire *magazine, as well as The Vine and The Wheeler Centre website.*

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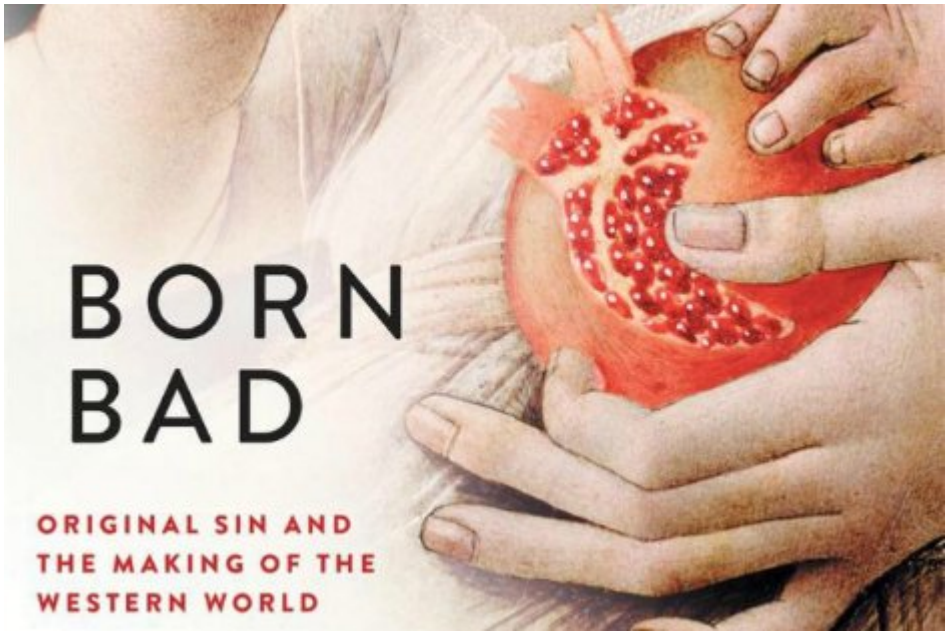
Thanks for nothing, Adam and Eve

INTERNATIONAL

Andrew Hamilton



In recent centuries the relationship between Christian theology and the prevailing political and intellectual culture has alternated on both sides between dismissal, avoidance and accommodation.

Occasionally, as in St Augustine's monumental *City of God,* it has been conducted as takeover. Augustine offered a magisterial account of Roman culture and its presuppositions, claiming that its contradictions and aspirations could be reconciled only on the basis of Christian faith.

James Boyce's fascinating recent history of original sin and its impact on contemporary Western culture, *Born Bad,* starts with Augustine. He claims that contemporary attitudes to politics, human origins, economics and human psychology can be understood only if we recognise the hidden presuppositions imported from the theology of original sin. He argues that, as the doctrine of original sin lost purchase in the churches, it tightened its grip on secular culture.

The core of original sin is that there is something broken, perverse and destructive in all human beings, tracing back to the sin of Adam and Eve, from which we need to be rescued. We cannot save ourselves through our own free choices and actions but rely entirely on God's action in Christ. The doctrine was developed in a polarised conflict that focused on the unwanted logical consequences of opposed positions. So the stock questions raises were whether non-baptised babies would go to hell, and whether God predestined some people to damnation.

With the focus in the Enlightenment on human possibility and on the capacity of human beings to shape their destiny, Western Christians became increasingly optimistic about the human condition. Original sin was seen as less radical in its effects and unyielding to human change. But secular theorists worked out of the understanding that human beings were inherently flawed and selfish.

Adam Smith appealed to the invisible hand of the market, not to celebrate it, but as a form of harm mitigation. The founding fathers of the United States Constitution saw their task as limiting the power both of flawed citizens and of flawed government. Freud postulated conflictual and destructive forces at work in human beings, offering no guarantee that therapy would set them free. Dawkin's selfish gene and the memes that civilise it are not derived from his research, but from presuppositions about human flaws from which we need to be set free.

One of Boyce's more challenging conclusions is that these theories, proposed by people who consciously tried to emancipate people from religious ideas, often unwittingly enshrined them. More than that, the theories won acceptance because they chimed in with tenaciously held popular convictions about the perversity of human nature.

This is a fascinating revisionist account of modernity, whose conclusions seem to have come as a surprise to its author who set out expecting to do a job on original sin, and ended up fascinated by it. The book is clear, elegantly written, beautifully paced and encourages rich reflection. I found myself musing on why, not how, original sin came to be so central in Western Christianity.

The popularity of the phrase 'original sin' can be attributed to Augustine in the 5th century. It proved seminal because it provided a single answer to five major questions asked by Christians at the time: Where does evil come from? Why do all human beings need the grace of Christ for salvation? How can belief in a just God be compatible with the lack of access so many people have to Christ? Why are human beings so stuffed up? Why are infants baptised? All these questions can be answered with the phrase, original sin. But the one phrase will conceal a variety of approaches to each question. Original sin functions less as a single concept than as a mobile whose shape varies with the weight put on each answer.

The interesting question then is how this diversity is held together, and does not tear the mobile from the ceiling. I believe it is controlled by a tension that lies at the core of lived Christian faith: the need to hold together the intensity of God's love for each human being shown in his joining humanity, the human pain and evil shown in Christ's tortured and dehumanising death, and God's decisive victory of love over hatred, through the raising to life of Christ.

This tension can be lost by minimising any of these elements, either through adopting a sunny view of human beings in which the Islamic State, prisons, exploitation and starvation are thought exceptional, or though picturing God's love for each person as less passionate than that of a good human being, or through regarding God's victory as a matter of being ahead by a few points at half time. It is especially lost if the logic of power is privileged over the logic of love when speaking of God's relationship with human beings.

This happened in some of the limit positions that have come to be identified with original sin. To defend the priority of God's grace in salvation by accepting that God predestines people to damnation and allows infants to be damned gives priority to power over love.

No good, loving human being would do such a thing.

How to hold these things together, of course, is a challenge to Christians. But without belief in a God who loves and a God who is victorious over evil, we are still left to account for the Islamic State, prisons, exploitation and starvation. It is not surprising that serious non-religious thinkers regarded such things as more emblematic of human reality than instances of goodness.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street*.*

Image cropped from the cover of Born Bad, published by Black Inc.

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Making Indigenous Literacy Day obsolete

AUSTRALIA

Luke Pearson

Indigenous Literacy Day is an opportunity for governments and organisations to promote the work they are doing to improve Indigenous literacy rates. It is in that sense about raising the profile of Indigenous literacy programs around the country and, crucially, a fundraising exercise to support them.

There is nothing wrong with that. It is how many a 'national day' works. I'm usually happy to support such endeavours with a few Facebook 'Likes' or retweets, the occasional pro bono speech or workshop, or even an impromptu fundraising event.

As a former primary teacher, I have seen the importance of literacy programs for our young people, and the joy and power that comes from learning to read, especially for older students who thought they would never get to read.

I have also arrived at the unmistakable conclusion that schools, on the whole, are failing Indigenous students, families and communities, and just as often as not, blaming them for it. If schools were given adequate support, resourcing, staffing and training to better cater for the needs and interests of Indigenous students and families, there would hardly be any need to mark Indigenous Literacy Day.

While I support many of the existing literacy programs, I think it is also important to look for the voices of families, students and practitioners, amidst the buzz and fervour generated on such occasions. Without dismissing the wonderful work being done by numerous organisations, a simple question still needs to be asked: Isn't it the government's fundamental responsibility to provide quality to education to all, regardless

of race, culture, language or location?

If we were to believe the Federal government rhetoric, the issue is simply that Indigenous kids are not attending school - because their parents don't make them go. Attendance is considered a top priority under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy that replaced more than 150 programs in July.

This is a painfully superficial and one-sided retelling of the whole picture of what is going on in Indigenous education at a national level. It is a retelling which conveniently places all of the blame firmly onto Aboriginal students and parents, and positions government in the role of saviour, rather than the more accurate description of having been responsible for decades of ill-informed policies and practices.

Attendance is of course crucial but it does little to explain the lower results of many students who do regularly attend school, or the many other possible reasons for not attending school. There are factors that come under the direct responsibility of schools and government departments, such as anti-racism strategies, effective teacher training, culturally appropriate pedagogy, bilingual education, and family and community engagement.

Accounting for these factors not only gives a clearer indication of the whole picture, but it also acknowledges responsibility of governments. Ongoing, not just historic, failures must be acknowledged.

Taking an approach that recognises what has led to the ongoing disparities in Indigenous literacy allows Indigenous people to maintain a sense of dignity. It emphasises that improving Indigenous literacy rates is not an issue of charity but of justice.

The Federal government was very quick to point to dysfunction and abuse among Aboriginal communities when it wanted to rush through the emergency legislation needed for the Northern Territory intervention. Politicians seem to think that all will be fixed if 'adults go to work' (though there are not enough jobs) and 'kids must go to school' (though the literacy results of far too many remain poor). Indigenous Australians have one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the world right now, which suggests that 'just go to school' is not enough as a solution.

Generations of broken promises and failed government policies will not be solved with superficial strategies.

Luke Pearson is a Gamilaroi man from NSW. He has worked in all levels of education from primary school to university, but currently works as a social commentator, consultant, educator, writer and public speaker. He is best known as the creator of @IndigenousX, a widely respected, curated Twitter account.

Image by Rusty Stewart via flickr under Creative Commons licence.

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Dangerous impulses around women in power

EUREKA STREET TV

Peter Kirkwood

The woman featured in this interview on *Eureka Street TV* hardly needs an introduction. Geraldine Doogue is one of Australia's most respected and well known journalists. Over a career spanning four decades she's had a strong presence in all traditional media, in print, radio and TV, with leading roles in both public and commercial media outlets.

She has just published a book entitled *The Climb: Conversations with Australian Women in Power* and this interview focuses on her exploration in the book of contemporary women's leadership in this country.

At the outset I should acknowledge a personal connection with Geraldine. She and I have worked closely on a number of big projects on and off since 1986, and over that period she has become a highly valued friend, collaborator and mentor.

One of those projects which I'd rank as a highlight of my career was the TV documentary, *Tomorrow's Islam*which aired on ABC TV's *Compass* strand in 2003. It presented the views of key progressive Muslim thinkers and leaders around the world about the problems besetting that great world faith.

Geraldine and I then collaborated on a book based on the extensive research and interviews done for the documentary and this was published by ABC Books in 2005. This was the first experience for both of us in the daunting but rewarding process of long-form writing and publishing.

Geraldine was born and grew up in Perth, Western Australia. After a devout Catholic upbringing, convent education, and gaining an Arts degree her first plan was to train as a teacher.

But in the early 1970s, on an impulse she applied for a cadetship in journalism with the West Australian newspaper. This was the start of a distinguished career as a journalist and broadcaster that included stints at the Australian newspaper, Radio 2UE, Channel 10 and ABC TV and Radio. She currently hosts Radio National's *Saturday Extra* and ABC TV's *Compass*.

She has won two Penguin Awards for excellence in broadcasting from the Television Society of Australia and a United Nations Media Peace Prize. In 2000 she was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study social and cultural reporting overseas. In 2003 she was made an Office of the Order of Australia for service to the community and media.

In the first part of this interview she reflects on the leadership of Julia Gillard and how she was treated as our first female prime minister, she gives an overview of her book, and explains the role of the nuns who taught her in forming her views on leadership.

In the second part she explains why she included a chapter featuring the views of prominent men on women's leadership, she reflects on the importance of ambition and achieving work/life balance, and she concludes by giving her analysis of what is, and what should be the role of women in leadership in the Catholic Church.

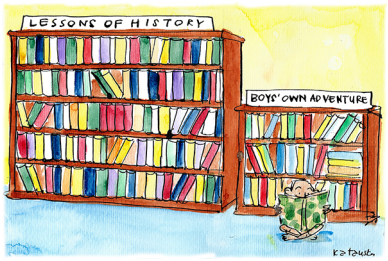
This interview is in two parts - Part 1 (11 mins) above, and Part 2 (7 mins) below:

Peter Kirkwood is a freelance writer and video consultant with a master's degree from the Sydney College of Divinity.

Boys' Own Interventure

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas




Fiona Katauskas' work has also appeared in ABC's *The Drum*, *New Matilda, The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Australian*, *The Financial Review* and Scribe's Best Australian political cartoon anthologies.

His palm was her country

CREATIVE

Anne Elvey

Mute Morning
i.m. Carol Hogan

I woke in a strange dream of a priest
who pitied the child born to the mother
no longer a nun. From the pew behind
I was the I that spoke up to power.

When I woke, the light was soft, grey
with a promise of rain. But on the ear
the camellia-with its early winter splashes
of deep pink-squawked the squawk

of a wattlebird, answered from the next
yard. I wrote you a card, knowing I would
not see you again in this, the only transience
we have. Dressed and breakfasted, I walked

for forty minutes to the beach-and back-
where the sea and sky bled into each other
a wash of blue and grey, a tone I recalled
from the stained glass florets of a Mary

window. I posted the card on the way,
not knowing you had already died.

Black and white

Black smudges beneath the eyes of the white
dog fall, like tear-wet mascara. His walker's
eyes are kohled. She is an Egyptian deity
with the look of Greater Frankston. I, too,
have it-the appearance that invites offers
of Dead Sea masks in the middle aisle
of the Bayside Shopping Centre. Last week

she picked handfuls of moult from his belly.
Clumps of white fur composed a still life
on the path with possum scats and leaf-fall,
as I hurried for the city train. Magpies in their
livery were sorting their song sheets for the
morning chorus. Overhead, beak dipping
into the insulator, a mynah breakfasted.

The look

He saw the god in the bent-winged chick
that he carried and fed

with fruit and grain. The cage
he had not built for her

hung from the sky,
was without a door. Open

his palm was her country. She was quiet
there. Her feathered skin

and pulsing breast,
taken together, said

bird. Though flightless, she was made for
flight. Her bright beads

met his eyes with
a knowledge air gives to wings.

To the bookmaker god

With your ticket and stub you make a book
of my heart. When my hand reads the ridges

on the pacer's spine, the bindings whisper in tongues.
The roan of my favourite season whickers like a fold

in a leaf. With the rustle of silk, the winter sun
will canter the aisles, burnish the wood.

Later, after the spring carnival, I'll re-shelve
the rhetoric of love, write for nothing else.

I'll check the Dewey for harness and bit, catalogue
turf with green, and find your Cup in the stacks.

Anne Elvey is author of Kin *(Five Islands, 2014) and three poetry chapbooks. She is managing editor of* Plumwood Mountain: An Australian Journal of Ecopoetry and Ecopoetics *and holds honorary appointments at Monash University and University of Divinity, Melbourne. She lives in Seaford, Victoria. http://anneelvey.wordpress.com*

Image via Shutterstock.

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How to measure HIV stigma

INTERNATIONAL

Daniel Reeders

Over the past few years, the rhetorical response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic has become progressively stronger. At the AIDS 2014 conference held in Melbourne in July, UNAIDS director Michel Sidibé announced the strategic goal of 'Ending HIV by 2030'. The overflowing plenary session heard bold new targets for testing and treatment, as well as stigma reduction. Global targets can be used to benchmark countries - but measuring a reduction in stigma is harder than it sounds.

At a subsequent session, the cavernous chamber was almost empty as a sparse crowd listened to an expert panel on 'evidence based stigma reduction'. As one of my colleagues asked, 'what's the international standard unit for one stigma?'

Dr Taweesap Siraprapasiri spoke that night about a systematic effort in Thailand to measure stigma towards people living with HIV. This involves developing panels of eight to twelve standard questions that can be dropped into nationwide telephone surveys or interviews with healthcare practitioners. They ask about attitudes like whether people with HIV should feel ashamed, and practices such as clinicians typically wearing double gloves when caring for people with HIV. Around half the participants (48 per cent) answered yes to both questions during pilot testing in Bangkok.

Are those questions adequate? In my writing about stigma I often describe it as a complex social process. The word 'complex' has an etymology that combines the senses of being folded - having multiple levels - and plaited - weaving different strands together. In stigma, dynamic processes from different levels are interwoven: stigma emerges from the interaction of individual emotions and moral judgments, personal interactions and group identification, cultural stereotypes promoted by media narratives, and political

beliefs about social order and inequality.

An example can be found in new criminal laws recently passed in Uganda in response to moral panics about homosexual sex and deliberate HIV infection. In a country once considered at the forefront of the global HIV/AIDS response, these laws reflect new prejudices beaten up by American evangelical missionaries and the uptake of British-style tabloid print and television news coverage.

Research in different countries suggest that as antiviral treatments make it possible to live without visible signs of HIV infection, attitudes often harden against people with HIV. This paradox may explain the rash of new laws criminalising HIV transmission, drafted in such haste that some would apply to a mother whose baby was born with the virus - even though it is due to systemic failure to provide drugs that prevent transmission.

More than any individual attitudes, it is these media, cultural, religious and political dimensions of stigma that will matter as we work towards 'bold new targets' to bring the HIV epidemic to an end. That's for a very simple reason: in health systems under economic pressure, they dictate patterns in who gets seen as 'deserving' resources for prevention, treatment, care and support.

In her book *The Wisdom of Whores*, epidemiologist Elizabeth Pisani notes that funders and governments have long preferred to focus on women and young people - even in places where HIV is more prevalent among gay men and transgender people, sex workers and people who use drugs.

It was therefore heartening to see a renewed focus on those 'key populations' at this year's AIDS conference. Heartening and sometimes heart-breaking. Michael Ighodaro talked about having to flee Nigeria when anti-gay laws were passed there. Ighodaro was 'outed' in his home country by a Washington Post article that named him as a delegate to the AIDS 2012 conference in Washington DC.

First harassed and then brutally attacked, Ighodaro was denied medical treatment, because he could not obtain a police certificate stating he was the victim of a crime. His experience demonstrates the wide-reaching and interlocking structural effects of stigma, which he encounters as a gay man, a person living with HIV, and now, an asylum seeker.

But people living with HIV also spoke of their success in measuring and addressing stigma. Eddie Banda from Malawi described training peer volunteers to interview fellow people living with HIV about their experiences for the global Stigma Index survey. Armed with the results, they submitted a policy brief that led to the health ministry discontinuing the use of older HIV medications that have disfiguring side effects.

Closer to home, the ENUF campaign by Living Positive Victoria provided a platform for people living with HIV to tell powerful stories of resistance and resilience.

As the global response marches on towards the bold new targets of the day, it may prove to be these local, participatory responses that do most to challenge stigma.

Daniel Reeders is an HIV prevention researcher at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at La Trobe University. He blogs about stigma in public health.

Disclosure: Daniel wrote a campaign brief for the Living Positive Victoria ENUF Stigma

campaign.

Eureka Street has permission from Michael Ighodaro to include his story in this piece.Image via Shutterstock.

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Vol 24 No 17
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New Indonesian president offers hope for West Papua

INTERNATIONAL

Pat Walsh

Since its foundation as a modern state in the 1940s, Indonesia has been plagued by a series of conflicts that have threatened the dream of a united republic, inflicted grievous human rights violations and poisoned perceptions of the place, not least in Australia. In recent years, these have included independence movements in Timor-Leste, Aceh and West Papua and violent communal unrest in central Sulawesi.

West Papua is the last of these major conflicts to be tackled. Though they involved the spilling of much blood and many secondary issues remain, each of the other issues has been resolved with varying degrees of success. Only West Papua, perhaps the most complex and intractable of them all, remains. Attempts at a settlement by previous post-Suharto presidents, particularly Gus Dur and SBY, have failed. It is now the turn of Indonesia's incoming president, Jokowi, to address the issue.

Jokowi is well positioned to act. He is expected to focus more on getting Indonesia's house in order than on world affairs and he has already clearly indicated that this agenda includes West Papua. West Papua was the first place he visited at the start of his election campaign where he underlined a personal connection by taking his wife Iriana with him; her grandfather taught there and she is named after Indonesia's original name for the region. He acknowledges the need to address West Papua's serious development deficit including the cost-of-living disparity between eastern and western Indonesia and has committed to lifting the standards of education, health and the public service that are his trademark concerns and are central to the interests of the poor in West Papua.

Jokowi comes to the issue fresh and free of political baggage and hang-ups. He is not part of the old regime that has caused such grief to West Papuans over the last 50 years.

He has turned dialogue, a modus operandi also advocated by West Papuans, into an effective art form. In one of his presidential debates with Prabowo, an ex-Kopassus commander, he pointedly highlighted his preference for dialogue over military solutions. West Papuans seem to like what's on offer. Roughly 70% of voters across the region's two provinces opted for Jokowi over Prabowo. Experts predict that Jokowi's vice-president, Jusuf Kalla, who is credited with helping settle the conflicts in Aceh and Poso referred to above, is also keen to try his hand in West Papua.

The old guard can be expected to resist Jokowi on West Papua including his belief that foreign media and human rights organisations should be allowed to visit the region. But he will enjoy the support of many Indonesians who share his concern for West Papua. The issue is no longer off-limits in Indonesia. Indonesians are aware of the many challenges to be addressed. Regularly reported in the mainstream media, these include clashes between the military and the OPM, human rights, HIV-AIDS, domestic violence, ethnic fracas and the Freeport mine. Communications, including social media, tourism and travel in and out of the region are routine and non-Papuan civil society is better educated today about the history of Indonesia's annexation, the dubious legal basis of that claim and related West Papuan grievances such as fears of being marginalised in their own land.

Though Jokowi was conspicuously silent on Timor-Leste during the presidential campaign, Indonesia's former 27th province holds, I believe, important lessons for him in relation to West Papua. One obvious lesson is not to place too much store on defections from the OPM. Like Nicholas Jouwe, the co-founder of the OPM who was recently awarded a distinguished service medal by President SBY in Jakarta, some senior Timorese also collaborated at various points in their campaign. Another is that West Papua, like Timor-Leste previously, is not just a developmental challenge. Indonesia spent heavily on development in Timor-Leste but neither this nor the offer of special autonomy in 1999, of the kind since implemented in West Papua, addressed the underlying political and identity grievances of the Timorese. Though much needed, development recipes on their own will not be enough to meet all West Papua's aspirations. Jokowi would also be well advised to listen to the Protestant and Catholic churches in Papua. They represent well over 70% of the population and, as with the church in Timor-Leste, are an influential and credible force.

Settlement of the West Papua issue can only come from Indonesia and the Jokowi presidency offers the best prospects for this in half a century. Creating the conditions in which inclusive dialogue based on mutual respect can occur will tax the political imagination and creativity of all involved. The trust and goodwill Jokowi enjoys, including in West Papua, make for an excellent start to this important enterprise.

Pat Walsh is currently visiting Jakarta. He co-founded Inside Indonesia *magazine.*

Image from bennywenda.org

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Fossil fuels must be demonised

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins

The Federal Government is set to release the report from its Renewable Energy Target (RET) Review Panel chaired by businessman Dick Warburton, with a decision to follow within weeks.

The review recommends a significant scaling back of Australia's renewable energy scheme, with two options. One is closing the scheme to new entrants, and the other is supporting new renewable energy power generation only when electricity demand is increasing.

Even if the report's recommendations do not make it through the Senate, it's likely that it has landed a fatal blow on the renewable energy industry by destroying investor confidence. It's the 'sovereign risk' effect was used as the major argument against the mining super profits tax.

The findings of the report support the prime minister's stated wish to see the fossil fuels industry 'flourish' and environmental approval hurdles minimised. 'It's particularly important that we do not demonise the coal industry', he told an industry gathering in May. The fledgeling renewable energy industry, it seems, is expendable.

The action to kill the renewable energy target is driven by a particular business case that takes no account of the moral imperative that is changing government policy in other countries. The Edmund Rice Centre released a statement on Friday urging Mr Abbott to visit a climate vulnerable Pacific atoll nation to see first hand the effect on the citizens of these poor nations of the greenhouse gas emissions from the likes of Australia's coal industry.

It might move him to reconsider his resolve not to demonise the coal industry, and understand what's behind the growing movement that considers such stigmatisation to be the only ethical course of action. Last Monday, Sydney University announced it had instructed its equities managers to halt investment in the coal and consumable fuels sub-sector of the Australian Stock Exchange. This is seen as a step towards divestment of its

existing interests in companies including Whitehaven.
Divestment from fossil fuel investments is widespread overseas. It's expected that the Vatican will commit itself to this, with Pope Francis planning to release an encyclical in coming months on humanity's role in caring for the Earth.
The international grassroots organisation 350.org, which is urging the Vatican to act, distils its message in the simple logic: 'if it's wrong to wreck the planet, then it's wrong to profit from that wreckage'. Anybody who is able to see the effect of rising seawaters on the lives of Pacific Islanders will at least be motivated to consider the evidence that there is a far better moral and business case for renewable energy than there is for fossil fuels.

 *Michael Mullins is editor of* Eureka Street.

Coal power plant image by Shutterstock.

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