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Richard Flanagan sorts suffering from virtue

REVIEWS

Barry Gittins and Jen Vuk

The Narrow Road to the Deep North by Richard Flanagan, Random House Australia, September 2013

JEN:

Winning the prestigious Man Booker prize has given Richard Flanagan's 2013 novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* precious new shelf life.

If we needed an excuse to get our hands on the book, then let the Booker be it. I've long considered Flanagan an alchemist - giving everyday words an unmistakable verve and turning a phrase until it takes flight. But he's also a proud Tasmanian storyteller who now has the world's ear. And we're all the better for it.

It's 1943 and in the dense jungle of a Japanese POW camp on the infamous Thai-Burma railway, Australian surgeon Dorrigo Evans - modelled loosely on Edward 'Weary' Dunlop - struggles to save the men under his command from starvation, disease and daily beatings.

Like most interesting literary heroes, Evans is flawed. Not only does he resignedly stand by while one of his own is beaten to a pulp. Before the war he entered an adulterous affair with his uncle's young wife, and the encounter left him weak and yearning. Still, it's not only the Japanese captors who throw themselves into the 'immediate practical worries of tomorrow's railway building'. In fact, the line between prisoner and captor is as muddled as the landscape.

We soon learn that Evans's counterpoint - the menacing commanding Japanese officer Nakamura - is as tethered to the 'reassuring, comforting ideas of duty and the Emperor and the Japanese nations', as the prisoners are to their metaphorical chains.

But *The Narrow Road* is so much more than a history or cultural lesson. It is based on the experiences of Flanagan's POW father, who somehow survived the horrors (and who died aged 98 on the day the book was completed). This is a work of poetry patiently gleaned from long-suppressed memories.

Like the 17th century Japanese haiku poet Basho, who lends the novel its title - and underlying themes of atrocity and beauty - Flanagan strives for a glimpse of 'eternity in the transient world'.

Perhaps that is why, for all the darkness, *The Narrow Road* is also a novel of hope and redemption. It's a 'blinding light' that accompanies Dorrigo Evans's first-ever memory of 'toddling back and forth, in and out of its transcendent welcome, into the arms of women… Like entering the sea and returning to the beach. Over and over.'

Even during the abject punishment of the almost saintly Darky Gardiner, Evans's thoughts wander to the notion of mateship and sacrifice. 'Suffering is not a virtue, nor does it make virtue, nor does of it virtue necessarily flow… Virtue is virtue and, like suffering, it is inexplicable, irreducible, unintelligible.'

To that, perhaps, we can also add inexorable. Yet while suffering is rooted in the physical world, virtue lies just beyond it; somewhere in the infallible darkness where an unmistakable light burns.

BARRY:

That's also a good word, Jen, for the conflicted Dorrigo Evans' acceptance of life. Like the young boys lining up for the 'kick to kick' that Flanagan captures so vividly, his

impromptu, gallows-humoured burial parties, or his summer-loving swimmers all strung out in a row to pursue the next wave, *The Narrow Road* stalks anticipated inevitabilities. In dealing, effectively, with big, weighty themes, Flanagan reveals a partly tamed mystery. This talented author brings to bear the 'known unknownness' of life, if you will. This comes through the furtive, sweaty, obsessive *elan* of affairs, and the exhilaration of consummation; the emptiness of societal roles, aspirations and expectations; the pointlessness of cruelty, warfare and tribalism.

Along his laurel-laden way, Flanagan has also picked up a nomination for the 'literary review bad sex in fiction award' (to be announced on 3 December). Even there, he's in decidedly prominent company, alongside the likes of Haruki Murakami, Wilbur Smith, *et al.*

It's a salient recognition, too, re the alternate 'Weary D' figure - and, yes, Flanagan draws from the real and the imagined. Beyond the eyewitness accounts of atrocities from sources such as Dunlop's war diaries, beyond the exotica of James Clavell's *King Rat*, and doubtless drawn from his father's flesh and blood recall, Flanagan captures the central premise of the bushido-driven Japanese captors and their hapless Allied prisoners - in the absence of an interventionist God, human beings are called upon to hold ourselves to account.

The excuse was welcome, Jen; Flanagan captures something of the human spirit; transcending past evils, poetic rationalisations, truths, guilts, or our 'public selves'.

Perhaps this happy knack is what drives his writing - and our reading.

Upon his Man Booker win, Flanagan said that 'novels are life, or they are nothing'. If - as I suspect - that's truly so, in how they transport, guide and challenge us, then *The Narrow Road* is best received as a life-affirming, soul-enlarging force.

Jen Vuk is a freelance writer and editor whose work has appeared in Fairfax Media, The Herald Sun and The Australian. Barry Gittins is a communication and research consultant for the Salvation Army who has written for Inside History, Crosslight, The Transit Lounge, Changing Attitude Australia and The Rubicon.

The ABC is not a business

AUSTRALIA

Binoy Kampmark



It is a topic of grim amusement. Public broadcasters are always deemed the opponents of government, or the supporters of a faction reviled by popular opinion. Prime Minister Tony Abbott has insisted that the ABC is 'unpatriotic'. Popular opinion is fickle. The broadcasters, given the enshrined balance in their charters, remain.

Because the public purse is open to the public broadcaster, there is always a temptation to use budgetary accountability, and transparency, as a neat cover for cleansing corporatisation. Throwing the public broadcaster to the corporate wolves is tempting for those who see little difference between the objectives of Murdoch and the ABC. Both want audiences and both need money.

While the ABC and SBS need to exist within some corporate structure, they do not inhabit the same philosophical territory as Sky News or Channel 7. The ABC, for instance, has a charter, obliging it to 'take account of the broadcasting services provided by commercial and community sectors'. It is meant to be different. There is no advertising, and content is a priority.

This confusion of aims tends to leak into ministerial portfolios, notably those where the logic of company budgets displaces the necessity of public awareness. Communications minister Malcolm Turnbull, who does not suffer fools gladly, was given to using the corporate cook book in addressing his audience in Adelaide on Thursday. His slash and burn technique risks hollowing out the content that is the essence of the ABC and SBS. Turnbull made official what was already suspected. The fantasy of the 'budget emergency' has become a real wedding to a trimming of public broadcasting costs, suggesting that a fundamentalism of numbers somehow translates into an improvement in services. (Turnbull uses the term 'budget repair strategy'). Some \$308 million will be cut over the course of five years. The ABC is bound to suffer more because of its commitment not to take advertising. Its \$254 million cut is likely to lead to the loss of 500 jobs.

SBS, having already gone to the dark side of commercial advertising, will no doubt cut more actual broadcasting time in favour of advertising. They are slated for a \$25.2 million cut.

The reference point of Turnbull's strategy is the Lewis efficiency report, which sought an 'ideal cost-base'. He insists that the ABC need not cut programs - to do so would be 'cowardly'. Bravely, they need merely shoot the employees - in the employment sense. As with any such investigations, there are superficially sound points to the reforming strategy. Transparency is encouraged. An independent financial officer reporting to the board is suggested. There is talk about adopting 'modern corporate practices'.

There is also a good deal of smoke and dusting. We are told that Abbott's promise not to cut the ABC budget was never going to exclude a review of operational finances. It is not a cut, as long as it slashes what Turnbull deems irrelevant. Balanced budgets do not deliver educated audiences.

He therefore sees costing matters in rarefied terms, rather similarly to the way former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher saw an economy. The balanced budget begins at home, before the till of the small business operator, with ledgers and accounts. Get rid of the poor cooks, the shoddy cleaners, the 'back door' operations, which give the impression that the ABC and SBS are running workers' collectives.

Use such weasel words as modernisation - a process which the ABC has been doing rather well in terms of its digital delivery - and increase the tasks per human unit.

(Important to note here: the human unit is reduced per amount of work produced.)

Corporations do that, but a public corporation, which does not insist on rewarding the shareholder with dividends, is something else.

Such problems are based on false assessments. The idea of ratings mashed up with a public broadcasting body is a meeting of hostile creatures, but the current government insists they have a role to play. As *Eureka Street* suggested last year, 'the ABC might do well to withdraw from participation in audience ratings surveys in favour of juries committed to fostering diversity'. If popularity was a test, we would all be undertaking studies in MBA courses and watching the latest commercial flick.

Turnbull is absolutely right to insist that the ABC should not be a familial worker collective dedicated to one side of the critic's fence. The public interest is broad, embracing the compliant and the contrarian. But in the same breath, he also reminds us that there is statutory independence in the ABC, only to then lean on that very independence by brandishing an emptying purse fed by corporate credos. He disingenuously acknowledges the problems a public broadcaster has. Will you be relevant if Sophocles is broadcast in the original Greek? But the other question needs to be asked: if not the public broadcaster, then who?

Turnbull can't have it both ways, insisting on editorial freedom and selection, while slashing the monetary basis of the operation. To save a budget's false financing outlook by bedding the corporate mammon is not a solution if one is dealing with a public corporation with a remit for programming beyond the Murdoch dirt file. But Turnbull, judging from the latest chapter, would wish it was so.

Dr Binoy Kampmark lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne.

Grieving women rock immutable Islam

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Rock the Casbah (M). Director: Laïla Marrakchi. Starring: Morjana Alaoui, Nadine Labaki, Lubna Azabal, Hiam Abbass, Omar Sharif, Raouia. 99 minutes

At the heart of *Rock the Casbah* is a death. Well, two deaths, actually, but more on that later.

We are welcomed to the sun-kissed palatial home in Tangier, Morocco, of influential businessman Moulay (Sharif), by the patriarch himself. He has recently died, and his avuncular, rascally specter acts as our host and narrator, as we witness the traditional three days of mourning that are about to unfold.

The funeral reunites three adult sisters - Sofia (Alaoui), Miriam (Labaki) and Kenza (Azabal) - their mother Aicha (Abbass) and various other family members, friends and attendants, notably housekeeper Yacout (Raouia).

Against this backdrop the film, with warmth and humour (the tagline describes it as 'A comedy about a tragedy'), unfolds the circumstances of these women's present lives, their relationships with each other, and a few dark secrets that vein the more or less happy tapestry of their family history.

The title is of course a reference to the 1982 Clash song of the same name, an irreverent takedown of fundamentalist Islamic opposition to contemporary western music. The casbah is an ancient fortification seen in many historically Islamic cities (including Tangier), and in both the Clash song and Marrakchi's film it can be taken as emblematic of immutable fundamentalist tradition.

Each of the women of *Rock the Casbah*, especially the three sisters who are its heroes, is 'rocking the casbah' (or grappling with tradition) in her own way.

Doggedly independent Sofia has returned from America, where she has worked as an actor but struggled to break free of being typecast as a terrorist. She arrives with her young son in tow, though her husband is notably absent.

Miriam is recovering from painful breast augmentation surgery, presumably undertaken to please her own well-off but distant husband.

Kenza meanwhile has devoted herself to Islam, much to the scorn of her more 'progressive' sisters. They see her as foolish to embrace a religion that might innately disempower her, although there is power inherent in her conscientious decision to conform with rather than flee from her cultural heritage.

The film draws a distinction between the sisters' very modern, very human struggles,

and the fortifications of culture and tradition that shade them.

It does so succinctly in one notable scene. The three recently reunited sisters are immersed in whispered conversation, during the second day of mourning at the house. In the next room, older men in ceremonial garb chant a mourning ritual.

Suddenly, the sisters get the giggles. For a moment they are collectively warmed by the embers of a shared joke, only to be angrily shushed by one of the men. The ember is quashed by the fist of propriety.

But grief can't be stage managed, and Moulay, the object of all this mourning, was their father after all. It seems only natural that the process should be guided by normal human interaction, even within a ritualised framework.

The arguments and conversations the women share over the course of the three days gradually uncover revelations regarding their father's past indiscretions as well as the circumstances surrounding the suicide some years before of a fourth sister, who in life had been an inspiration particularly to Sofia.

These revelations - of truths that had previously been buried and left to dankly fester - test but ultimately strengthen familial bonds.

Rock the Casbah is beautifully written, acted and filmed, and manages to be both touching and gently subversive. Aside from one clunky moment during its final scene, it rarely puts a foot wrong in its very human examination of a fractured family galvanised around their remembrance of a flawed but nonetheless beloved father.

Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of Eureka Street.

Pope Francis celebrates a homeless man's 50th

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton



Last week Bishop Konrad Krajewski, the Papal almoner, installed showers for people who are homeless, in St Peter's Square. The move followed his meeting a homeless man, discovering it was his fiftieth birthday and inviting him to dinner in a local restaurant, only for the man to decline on the grounds he smelled.

The gesture was seen to have Pope Francis' finger prints all over it. It also illuminates the differences of perspective many have noted between the Pope and other church leaders, such as Cardinals Pell and Burke and Archbishop Chaput.

People have variously named the opposing approaches as liberal and conservative, pastoral and doctrinal, democratic and authoritarian. These labels have their uses but also their limitations. They are evaluative rather than explanatory: rigid conservative is contrasted with flexible liberal, or principled doctrinal with wishy washy, compromising pastoral. The terms better describe the self-positioning of their users than the positions of their targets.

They also suggest that the roots of difference lie in theory or in personality. I believe they lie rather in the different imaginative worlds that Pope Francis and those who differ from him inhabit. When Pope Francis looks at the human world he focuses on human beings as concrete and human, not as abstract nor as members of particular religious or other groups. God loves and respects each human being, and so invites Catholics to go out to all people and to welcome them because they share a common humanity and are each precious to God.

Because he sees human beings concretely, Pope Francis is affronted when he sees them treated without respect for their dignity, and asks why this happens. He finds the answer in the greed and the imbalance of power and wealth that distort society. So he consistently attacks the idolatry of economic theories that enable people to make the impoverishment of the poor an unfortunate but unavoidable economic fact rather than the result of human decisions.

Pope Francis calls on Catholics to go outside the comfortably Catholic world to be with people with whom they share a common humanity. In this they follow Jesus who sought to win people. He did not judge people but engaged with them, and through the encounter opened to them the freedom and joy of the Gospel. The building of showers for homeless people in St Peter's Square embodies perfectly this project.

The changes that the Pope wishes to make to governance flow out of this imaginative vision. He wants the governance of the Catholic Church to encourage and fit people to find the centre of faith by going to the margins of church and society. In practice this means appointing people with this vision to lead churches and making the central organs of government enabling rather than controlling.

Although Cardinal Pell, Cardinal Burke and Archbishop Chaput differ among themselves, their imaginative world and rhetoric are very similar. They focus on human beings as Catholic, not simply as human. This is natural because as Bishops they have been responsible for Catholics.

They then ask what factors prevent so many Catholics from appreciating the richness of Catholic faith and life. They trace the failure to harmful ideological currents that are dominant in society, become enshrined in policy and legislation and infect Catholics. These currents are often described as secularism.

They wish Catholics to have a right understanding of faith, a disciplined practice and a rich devotional life. The focus is on forming Catholics who will be united in confronting secularism and other ideologies. Their going out into the world will be inherently combative.

For them church governance needs to be reformed in order to protect the truth, to ensure discipline and unity in faith and practice, so that the Catholics are cohesive and disciplined, sure of what they stand for and faithful in living out their faith.

I have stressed the differences in these approaches to the Catholic Church and its present tasks. But what the Pope and these Bishops have in common is greater. Both wish to preserve and hand on Catholic faith as it has come down to them. In that respect they could be called conservative. They differ about the processes and language through which it is best commended.

Both are critical of central aspects of contemporary society and its ideologies. For Pope Francis these have primarily to do with the misuse of power and wealth; for the others, with disregard for the value of life and of faithful relationships.

Each is concerned both with the Catholic world and the secular world. Each is committed to going out into the secular world: one in a confrontational way and the other in a welcoming way.

Both want effective structures of governance, one to encourage Christians to go out, the other to strengthen a distinctively Catholic coherence in life and practice. Both might see St Peter's Square as a symbol. For one the focal point will be the Pope preaching in the Basilica with all the power of his office; for the other it will be the Catholics volunteering to serve homeless people through the showers at the edge of the square.

Both these approaches are Catholic. Each poses questions to the other. In my judgment that of Pope Francis uniquely offers hope for the future.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.

Pope Francis image by Shutterstock.

Bearing up

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.

Doing good and being happy

AUSTRALIA

Shira Sebban

I recently surprised myself by turning down a rare opportunity to attain what I had long considered my dream job. Having compromised my career for motherhood for many years, I had often compared myself to those I consider high achievers, judging myself as coming up short.

Yet here I was saying no. For weeks I had toyed with the proposal, feeling flattered. At last I felt needed by someone other than family and community. I could contribute to society at large. After all, my children were now older and surely able to cope. Doubts lingered, however. The job would be all consuming. Was this really what I wanted? Then the realisation hit me. I rather liked my life. True, I had to juggle work and family and never got the balance quite right. But I suddenly saw how much I cherish the time I have to write, and the precious hours I spend with my children, who are growing up so fast, not to mention the importance I place on my voluntary work. I was not prepared to sacrifice any of them for another job, which I now recognised was no longer even my dream vocation.

That realisation has been a major step in my finding happiness. But not necessarily the emotional state of happiness, which Hugh Mackay in his 2013 book *The Good Life*, dismisses as 'the most elusive and unpredictable of emotions', but rather happiness in its original sense, meaning to flourish.

While Mackay doesn't like using the word 'happiness', lest it be confused with its modern, more selfish meaning of how you may feel at a particular moment, I don't see any problem in striving to discover 'the happy life', becoming fully and meaningfully engaged in whatever is on offer.

Like many of us, I have often thought that what really matters is what makes us happy. We're all going to die some day and few will long be remembered. So why not make the most of life? Indeed, didn't the Americans think so highly of the pursuit of happiness that they enshrined it as an inalienable right in the Declaration of Independence?

Rather than seeking external factors such as pleasure, wealth, or honour, Mackay, however, argues that we should aim to live 'the good life', by which he means being motivated largely by compassion, treating others according to the Golden Rule of how we would like to be treated ourselves.

'We ought to pursue goodness for its own sake… No one can promise you that a life lived for others will bring you a deep sense of satisfaction, but it's certain that nothing else will.'

In contrast, people of faith seem able to find an opportunity for growth, spirituality and meaning in every good deed they do and each bit of wisdom they acquire, apparently experiencing true happiness along the way. No wonder the 2011 Gallup survey found that the very religious are amongst the happiest in the US!

In other words, doing good can make you happy and when you're happy, you do more good. So happiness is actually a moral obligation.

As a child, my family urged me to find an interest in life to sustain me. Indeed, my grandfather lived as if on an insatiable intellectual quest, telling me, 'life is full of exciting curiosities, joy and deep feeling for the world's mysteries'. My family's view of life involved plenty of struggle towards a noble cause - a view former Commonwealth Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks has identified as a form of happiness: 'the happiness that

comes from challenge, … a life that has its setbacks … there is fulfilment, passion … and moments of exhilaration'.

Today my children are taught a broader idea of happiness. Influenced by positive psychology, their teachers get them to identify their 'signature strengths', which they are to use to lead engaged and meaningful lives. This reflects the ancient wisdom: 'Raise a child according to their way' (*Proverbs 22:6*). In other words, you need to concentrate on what works for you.

My children are also taught gratitude. As the ancients explained, 'Who is rich? The one who appreciates what he has' (*Ethics of the Fathers 4:1*).

Developing positive relationships is another area of focus. After all, we are social creatures who need connection through family, friendship and community. Surely such 'social happiness' is crucial to a society's survival. I certainly intend to continue focusing on relationships, finding meaning and purpose through work and community, and hopefully savouring many emotionally happy moments along the way.

Shira Sebban is a Sydney writer and editor who is vice-president of the Board of her children's school.

Why the rich are getting richer

ECONOMICS

David James



One of the problems in economics, an academic discipline that consists of little else but problems, mostly intractable, is that the models used to describe human activity tend to be static.

There is little attempt to alter the models as the system changes. History is ignored. Instead, there is an attempt to establish supposedly timeless rules, to mimic the physical sciences.

One example of the folly of this approach is the emergence of the absurd casino that has taken over the global monetary system, the so-called derivatives market (gamble 'derived' from conventional transactions). This has never been seen before, and it undermines traditional economic theories.

The global stock of derivatives, according to the Bank for International Settlements, is about \$700 trillion, an unthinkable large (albeit notional) amount. It is so large that traditional economic theories about money supply, and its relation to factors like inflation and growth, have been undermined. It has become difficult to define what money actually is. That is why the US monetary authorities jettisoned M1, the most commonly used measure of money supply. It meant that one of the most popular economic theories, monetarism, was rendered useless because it is no longer possible to be confident about what money supply is.

Another example of the shortcomings of conventional economic theories is identified by economist Alan Nasser. He does something that is unusual for economists. He observes history, noting that as industry has matured, the fundamental rules of economics have changed.

The argument is that in the nineteenth century, during the early phases of industrialisation, growth was dependent on the level of investment and the formation of capital (China is still in that phase). Up until about 1920s, that net investment was necessary to keep economies growing.

But as companies became more efficient and innovative, their requirement for surplus net investment eased. Once the basic infrastructure of industrialisation was established the need for additional funding eased. The cost of producing goods also declined because of technical innovation. Capital formation became less significant because businesses became more innovative, a process that has continued ever since.

But economics has stayed firmly fixed in the nineteenth century, focusing on capital formation and its relationship to output. Nasser questions this assumption, which continues to underpin most economic policies in the developed world: 'We are to believe that the surplus that is currently channelled into financial speculation in derivatives and foreign exchange markets, or sitting idle in the coffers of giant private enterprises, should be diverted back to productive investment, which in turn would make possible economic restoration.'

What Nasser calls the 'atrophy of net investment' means that in the late stages of capitalism, capital is in excess and investing it in productive capacity will not generate sufficient profits (he is talking mainly about goods, the argument seems less compelling with services, which have not been subject to the same level of innovation).

He cites the economist Keynes, from *Economic Possibilities For Our Grandchildren*, who imagined the discarding of a social system premised on giving money a special status, which creates a financial elite. Keynes wrote: 'When the accumulation of wealth is no longer of high social importance, there will be great changes in the code of morals. We shall be able to rid ourselves of many of the pseudo-moral principles which have hagridden us for two hundred years.'

It is a challenging idea. Nasser claims that government investment and consumption, and not what the capital markets do, are the only viable means of catalysing growth. This is exactly the opposite of what has happened since the global financial crisis. Governments in developed economies have savagely cut their investment, and consumption has been anaemic. Meanwhile, the financial sector has continued to grow and create extreme wealth. In America, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the top 1 per cent of the population is a reflection of financiers' success. In Australia, finance is now the largest industry sector.

Why have the controllers of capital thrived when, if Nasser is correct, the importance of private capital in late stage capitalism has declined? The reason is that the finance sector has become skilled at the art of making money out of money. Investing capital in productive capacity is not a good option because the returns are not there. That is why American corporations are sitting on mountains of cash.

But finding ways to manipulate the financial system to create more money from money - such as the derivatives casino - can pay off handsomely. Sure, it may look like a Ponzi scheme, it is a Ponzi scheme, but on its own terms at least it is profitable. Far from the democratic re-ordering of society and the weakening of the money class that Keynes imagined, what has happened is the opposite: an increasing polarisation of wealth and the entrenchment of a financial elite.

This polarisation is less extreme in Australia, where we still have a middle class. But we have our own capital-driven Ponzi scheme - the residential property market. This, too, has become an exercise in making money out of money. In the 1970s, only a third of Australian banks' loans were on real estate. Now, well over half of the banks' lending is on real estate, especially residential mortgages, which are basically investments in unproductive land. Meanwhile the banks are less reliant on business loans, which are an investment in productive capacity. These loans attract a significantly higher interest rate than mortgages and most require property as collateral.

The implication is that the financial sector is becoming progressively disconnected from the reality of economics in late stage capitalism. And the mainstream economics profession is aiding this detachment from the real by pursuing timeless scientific principles that do not exist.

The consequences of allowing such a parallel universe to develop became clear enough

during the global financial crisis. But the basic lesson, that the money class should not be allowed to set its own rules, has not been learned.

David James is a business journalist with a PhD in English literature. He edits Personal Super Investor.

Money examination image by Shutterstock.

Abbott ready to put G20 behind him

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin



My prognosis that the heat would be on Tony Abbott at the G20 was largely borne out. It was a tough meeting for him, and whatever remains of personal warmth or trust between the Australian PM and US President Barack Obama will have been diminished by its outcomes.

Abbott's best public moment was his closing media conference. He gave an impassioned defence of the meeting's achievement in agreeing on a concrete, statistically verifiable plan to raise global growth by 2.1 per cent over the next few years. This strategy was essentially negotiated by Treasurer Joe Hockey and senior national officials, who also drafted a communiqué, in the months preceding the meeting. There was, apparently, nothing very controversial in this 'Brisbane Plan' and it was welcomed by G20 leaders and international financial agency heads.

This G20 was not a boring talkfest, however. On two important matters - climate change and Ebola - the dynamic of the meeting got out of the Chair's control and produced outcomes clearly not to his liking. Abbott's counter-strategy - quite successful in retrospect - was to set media hounds running to the side-drama of Vladimir Putin. As Anglosphere leaders and journalists goaded and stalked the impassive Putin over Ukraine, Abbott - having stoked this fire assiduously over past months - stood back smiling, saying it was the Chair's task as host to treat all participants with equal respect during the meeting, and that he had had his say on Ukraine at APEC a few days earlier. All this distracted the media from the real story: how Abbott had lost control of the meeting.

The real and historic drama at this G20 revolved around climate change policy, and the protagonists here were Abbott versus most leading participants. The denialist Abbott failed to keep climate change policy discussion out of the G20 meeting.

He had had no warning of the major Obama-Xi carbon emissions reduction target agreement a few days earlier. Then he was wrongfooted by Obama's brilliant and moving

appeal to Australian youth at Queensland University on Saturday to resist the outdated thinking of their elders and the vested coal interests. Cameron supported that message the next day. The heatwave helped. Abbott and Canada's Harper were on their own. Obama announced a generous US pledge of \$300 billion to a UN Green Climate Fund to help developing countries to avoid going down the carbon road. On the next day, Japan's Abe pledged \$150 billion. Both leaders thus responded promptly to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon's appeal for early generous pledges.

There were bitter behind-the-scenes battles between Australian officials and other delegations on how strong the communique language on climate change should be. Australia lost. The original draft was greatly strengthened. The final communique appealed to G20 members to make strong early commitments to new decarbonisation targets well ahead of next year's Paris Climate summit, and to make early pledges to the Green Climate Fund. At the media conference, a clearly disgruntled Abbott said Australia will address such matters at the appropriate time.

The other drama was Ebola. Again as with climate change, there was a drafting committee confrontation which Australia lost as to how strongly the communique should appeal to countries to give generously to the world battle against Ebola.

There is no doubt that the US was a major protagonist in these policy confrontations with Australia. As Obama happily told his post-meeting press conference, this G20 had made real progress towards 'its three main policy goals': in trade reform, in climate change and Ebola. So where did the Australian mantra 'this G20 is all about jobs and growth' go?

Abbott's forgettable moments included his introductory remarks about his achievements in ending the carbon tax, stopping the boats, and building roads; and regretting his difficulties in getting the Parliament to pass a \$7 patient's contribution to doctors' visits. The stony, stunned faces of other leaders as they listened to this odd discourse said it all. Bill Shorten's later critique of it as 'weird and inappropriate' was justified.

I was also struck by the inappropriate scheduling of a tripartite US/Japan/ Australia leaders' side meeting to discuss defence cooperation in Asia. If the theme was to be cooperation in containing China - as had been tipped to media that it would be - the timing and venue were highly inappropriate, so soon after the Obama/Xi climate policy breakthrough and even an announced improvement in China/Japan security relations, and the day before Xi was to address the Australian Parliament .

I assume Australia had suggested this meeting. In the end, to give it some public justification, they played the Putin card again, producing a joint statement on Ukraine. Abbott in Sunday's G20 energy discussion reportedly made a defiant defence of the continuing need for coal for years ahead, and he repeated this in his final press conference.

I would say this was an interesting G20 with undercurrents and side-currents of real drama. It succeeded by its own dynamic and under the convention that every such meeting must be successful because it would reflect badly on all august participants if it were not. But clearly Abbott did not get his own policy way at this meeting, and it showed (e.g., in Hockey's strained reaction to persistent questions on climate change on the ABC's *Insiders* on Sunday). Now, Abbott will put the best face on it.

Brisbane was thanked for its hospitality, and Abbott was thanked for being a good and effective Chair. Maybe the contrived anti-Putin sideshow will save him from the worst negative public assessment of his own achievement at this G20. But I am sure he was glad when it came to an end.



Tony Kevin is a former ambassador to Poland.

A faithful woman visits me weekly

CREATIVE

Ian C. Smith



Pre-ordained (for Debra) A teenager living alone, I fantasised about heroic deeds, improbable futures, among them, floating with no beginning or end, no idea of the cost of seriousness, one in which I was a novelist with a dog, although I had never typed a word. I wonder which movie implanted this idea? Chapters form a tidy pile in my log cabin. In the gathering silence I drink, or build a firewood stack swinging a shining axe. A faithful woman visits me weekly supplying food, whisky, news, loving sex. All this on a pine-scented mountain. I trim my stark white beard, shampoo, sweep, spray, squeegee and swipe, update a list of internet cul-de-sacs stymieing crucial poetry submissions. The hour you drive up our steep hill I open our front gates like a greeting. You park close to this inspirational house, unload food for me, books, whisky for you, as the cats provide your weekly ankle rub. We work better this way, playing cards, you watching out for me, near or afar as I float between aces and ideas, what is truth, and might have been, the wood stove's heat thawing frayed hearts. A pair of wrens peck our glass, watching. My thoughts curve inwards as we lose our days. I am so glad you were able to replace the shining axe I carelessly broke.

Rue has a bitter scent Picture a Metro station's harsh stage lights. She turns and walks away without a fight or looking back at me, statue-still. I feel my heart rush, our taut happiness vanishing down the gusty tunnel's throat. I don't throw away a cigarette that afternoon, nor wear a trench coat with a snap-brim hat, this isn't an entertainment by Graham Greene, just me acting egotistically, my outburst not quite a public scene. Throughout the ramifying silence since, the calmness of books jostled by rowdy flashbacks known only to me in my melancholic urge to chase the shadows of tangled moments, I yearn to re-enact that foolish strife. In the pre-dawn hours we need a helpline to talk us back up the long slide of years to the silly songs, to those rumbling

stations of the past where we put things right, correct our bitter wrongs, see faces we never saw again and don't deserve to see. **Black Overcoat** When I fail to produce a return ticket to the past my people look askant or slyly at each other. I know my archness, puns, jokester's life views, cause their wariness of being duped. I forget to think of kindness, their wellbeing. Can't remember sounds like a guilty plea. The black overcoat of amnesia does nothing to ward off isolation's chill, however deserved. I lurch up from lunatic dreams looking slantwise to find objects in damned absurd places. If I weren't diligently writing things down yesterday would turn to ash, no nearer than the sad, enchanted days of a boy, his precious tattered books, the whispering girls sneaked past his stone-faced landlady, the long shadows down her hallway. Even before the drama of hospital diagnosis reading what I had written seemed more real than the details of what took place. A Sussex churchyard, at Thomas Gray's grave, his elegy about ordinary lives famous, my ripple of remembrance is without context. Writing it fixed that pilgrimage in my mind. My ravaged memory is now ordinary. Enough of the past surfaces to remind me that though my days must wind to an end I have felt the rain on my face we each crave. Above a green valley I hear the wind's song rushing past on my glider joy flight, a memory like a scene in a film. I shrug reverie, hunt down fugitive glasses, write about my mind's windmills.



Ian C. Smith, who lives in Victoria's Gippsland Lakes region, has had his work appear in Australian Poetry Journal, Poetry Salzburg Review, Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, Rabbit Journal, Regime, The Weekend Australian, and Westerly. His seventh book is wonder sadness madness joy (Ginninderra Port Adelaide, 2014). Female companion image by Shutterstock.

Don't let Vlad's side show distract from the G20's purpose

AUSTRALIA

Michael Mullins



The Murdoch press was reporting on Friday that Australian warships had been dispatched to 'intercept' the Russian flotilla 'steaming towards the G20 summit in Brisbane', suggesting there could be open hostilities between the two countries.

The *Daily Telegraph* ran with the headline 'Vlad's naval subterfuge', as if it was part of a Russian plot to undermine what the *Telegraph* termed 'our' G20.

Such theatrics are as much about Australian media reporting of the ships as they are about the passage of the ships themselves. Could it even be that the press was conspiring with the Abbott Government to undermine the G20 in the wake of the climate change action momentum that was established during the week at APEC? Whatever it was about, it's clear that more serious heads needed to prevail for the G20 to maintain its relevance and Australia its credentials to host important events that do not concern sport.

The Australian Government was indeed blindsided by the groundbreaking and ambitious emissions target agreement between the US and China at APEC. The US said it would cut emissions by 26-28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2025. China pledged to peak emissions around 2030, though it will be aiming to achieve this sooner. Long-term targets present a particular problem for the Abbott Government because deeper emissions cuts would be very expensive under its Direct Action policy.

Obviously the Government feared what opposition leader Bill Shorten was pointing to when he made the optimistic suggestion that the Brisbane G20 'could become famous for the fusing of the economic, environmental and security imperatives for climate action'. Shorten imagined that, in the lead-up to next year's Paris conference, we could be talking about what the 'Brisbane Declaration' had to say on climate change.

Whatever the legacy of the Brisbane G20, the mostly behind the scenes conversation

among leaders, and the sharing of conviction that can eventually lead to formal resolutions and action, was all important. That is what would have preceded the resolution on carbon emissions targets at APEC, and it is what many groups mindful of the condition of life for future generations, were quietly hoping for. One of these groups was the religious leaders from Australia who signed an [open letter](#) to leaders of the Brisbane G20. They regard the earth as sacred, and insist that it is our human responsibility to protect it. They say that this requires leaders to commit to a rapid transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy, and they point out that 'It is entirely possible to create thriving economies that are also sustainable'. This points to what is perhaps the new phase of climate denial - attempting to assert that investment in renewable energy is not also good for the economy, and indeed better for the economy than keeping with fossil fuels. China seems to have accepted this, while Australia has gone backwards. If the G20 was to be properly successful, it was likely that Abbott would lose face. But it is important that advocates for climate change action did not see such an outcome in itself as a triumph. Instead of gloating, they must themselves maintain a humble posture and attempt to shepherd the Government towards the reality and opportunity that China and the US embraced at APEC.



Michael Mullins is editor of Eureka Street.

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Putting Putin's record into perspective

INTERNATIONAL

Justin Glyn



Amid talk of whether Vladimir Putin would leave the G20 early and numerous reports of frosty encounters between him and other summit leaders, Western media coverage has generally operated from the sometimes forcefully expressed underlying assumption that the West is dealing with an erratic and dangerous dictator whose rule damages the once-great country he leads. Since uninterrogated assumptions are never helpful, it may be worth seeing if there is another perspective available.

I will not argue that Putin is a democrat. An abiding image from my visit to Russia in 2008 was that of armed and uniformed people on the street. So, not Scandinavia. His background - like that of George Bush the elder - was in intelligence and Russian democracy. It remains imperfect, with extraordinary concentration of wealth, legally mandated internal surveillance of its citizens, pliable courts and very little civic opposition. (Then again, the Snowden revelations, the use of torture and drone strikes by Western nations, the homogeneity of our parties and the power of our own richest should give us pause.)

Nevertheless, there are good reasons - beyond media control - why the Russian president enjoys poll ratings of which an Abbott or an Obama could only dream. To understand them, a brief retrospective is in order.

The fall of the Soviet Union saw state assets distributed to party bosses and friends of Boris Yeltsin, himself a weak and unstable, albeit authoritarian leader (when sober). Unemployment and crime skyrocketed, and pensions and wages fell through the floor (when they were paid at all).

I remember being shocked when I heard Russian and Ukrainian friends referring to the Brezhnev era as *schastliviye vyek* (a happy age) - because people had a job and food to eat. Gorbachev, beloved of many in the West, is regarded by just as many Russians with loathing, as the man who opened the path to Yeltsin and the wholesale destruction of the state.

It would be foolish to pretend that the West did not take advantage of the weakness of the former Soviet states in the 1990s. Russia was looted of its assets, many of which found their way abroad and military terms were forced on it in ways it could not resist. The traditional Russian fear of encirclement by foreign powers (born of invasions from the Tartars to the Nazis) was stoked as NATO, far from disbanding with the end of the Warsaw Pact, expanded ineluctably to its borders.

In 2002, the USA denounced the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty - a cornerstone of late-Cold War nuclear balance - and expanded missile bases into former Warsaw Pact countries. NATO's Kosovo war saw unilateral dismemberment of a UN member, followed swiftly by the installation of a US base, in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions.

Putin has reversed at least some of this. While portrayed abroad as reckless and responsible for much damage to his economy, he has actually ensured that Russia has some of the lowest foreign debt and highest capital reserves in the world.

Industry - though creaky by Western standards - has been rebuilt, and pensions and wages are paid. The International Space Station is supplied by Russian rockets. Russia has the second-highest annual immigration rate in the world (after the US). The military has been reformed, and Russian tourism has boomed, with 27 million arrivals in 2013. While some of his methods are questionable (including the jailing of opponents), Russians are not mere dupes for claiming that the ex-spy has made their country great again.

It is also true that Russia's foreign policy supports governments with less than stellar human rights records. Those in Syria and Iran spring to mind. Then again, the US and Australia's resolute backing for Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and the military government in Egypt don't attract nearly the same opprobrium in the West. But Russia is not only playing *realpolitik*.

As the former US State Department official Paul Saunders [notes](#), there is a philosophical divide between Russian and US foreign policy. While the West declares for 'democracy promotion', often driven by neo-conservative impulses of shaping a better world in US colours, Russia supports stability - even if that means preserving unsavoury characters in the process.

There are, of course, arguments to be had on both sides, but it is difficult to see the Russian view as irrational (especially in light of developments in Iraq and Libya after their 'liberation'). Even Russia's intervention in Ukraine can be seen through this lens: not only was the preservation of Russian naval bases and the rights of Russian speakers in the light of the Maidan coup/revolution popular at home as a vindication of Russian rights, it also served the status quo. And, in the light of the Kosovo precedent, on what basis could the West object to acts of self-determination by the locals?

In sum, while Putin may be a Russian nationalist with an authoritarian bent, a bit more self-reflection and a bit less demonisation by the West may be in order.

Justin Glyn SJ is a Jesuit presently studying for the priesthood. He has previously practised law in South Africa and New Zealand and has a Ph.D in administrative and international law.

Restorative justice for child sexual abuse victims

RELIGION

Vic O'Callaghan



On Monday 27 October, the Hon Justice Peter McClellan AM, Chair, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, gave a talk at the Blue Knot Day for adults surviving child abuse. In his speech he used a well-worn phrase most adults will have heard, 'children should be seen but not heard.'

The Commissioner went on to point out that this attitude has prevailed for decades and has been a critical contributor to the conditions under which abusers could manipulate and silence children in order to abuse them.

The Commissioner also highlighted current efforts by most institutions, to modify their practices in order that future abuse can be recognised early and brought to the attention of those charged with the protection of children.

In fact, ask most office holders charged with the responsibility of child protection and they will readily outline efforts and safeguards to prevent future incidences of abuse.

It is interesting that the language of protection is now front and centre when it comes to the care and protection of children. This is admirable and in the culture of what has transpired, it is an achievement creating some quiet satisfaction. But could this sense of pride be masking something deeper and more troubling?

Might total focus on stringent practice and policy design be creating a hole where all that is heard is the drone to 'moved on'? I listen and still hear whispering whimpers. There is something missing from the current lexicon. Where are the stories of people gathering to help mend and heal themselves and the victims of this horrific episode in our history?

I was brought to these questions after reading an account of how a family engaged with one of their own, who is the victim of severe sexual abuse. In this case, four siblings and their families gathered with their younger brother in what is called a restorative conference - conducted by Real Justice Australia - in order to come to a deeper understanding of how each of them had been affected by an incident that had occurred over thirty years ago.

What struck me about this account were the following paragraphs:

As he spoke, I did not hear the voice of a forty five year old man, I heard the cadences and soprano of the prepubescent boy who had experienced an unimaginable assault that had left him totally bewildered, isolated, confused and condemned to an unheralded life of spiralling pain.

His was the story told by an eleven year old who had not be able to speak to us, his family, to tell us what had happened to him when he was raped by a Catholic priest in the sacristy of our local parish church, moments before he was to serve at Mass.

My experience of that family conference was profound. Years later I struggle to understand its power.

My brother was not speaking to an empathetic counsellor or psychologist, those practitioner hands of care, peace and direction. He was not retelling events to an investigator or interested professional, they respectfully document but cannot touch the level of knowing that is in the DNA of belonging.

But what made this challenging encounter so powerful as it allowed us to face into some of our deepest fears and darkest pain?

Perhaps it was all about who we were. As he spoke, my brother was speaking to a totally authentic audience, us, his blood, his earliest memory web. We were the people with whom he had mirrored smiling and lost his balance to walk. We were the formative ones who had given, and still give, currency to the sinews and bones that hold his silhouette against the sun.

The circle itself was a supremely challenging and a pure encounter with the truth where together we faced the deep reality of his pain. Our words clanged against the armour of institutional denial. We were charged with compassion and anger and shame in equal measure as the haunting decades of suffering and denial slowly emerged from the mist. Yet through this single experience, there grew an awareness of grace that asked not only for recognition but quiet and humble reception.

Pope Francis has described the Church as a field hospital, but are church members capable of receiving and tending the wounded? I think it needs to be recognised that if it were not for the civil courts, no canon lawyer would be putting into place the laws and regulations that are being enacted today. There is a very large elephant squashing people out of churches around the world. I submit this creature will only walk out into the sun when we wrap families around their wounded ones?

Yes, this is a field hospital, can you hear the siren, or like a dog whistle, is it audible only to a few?



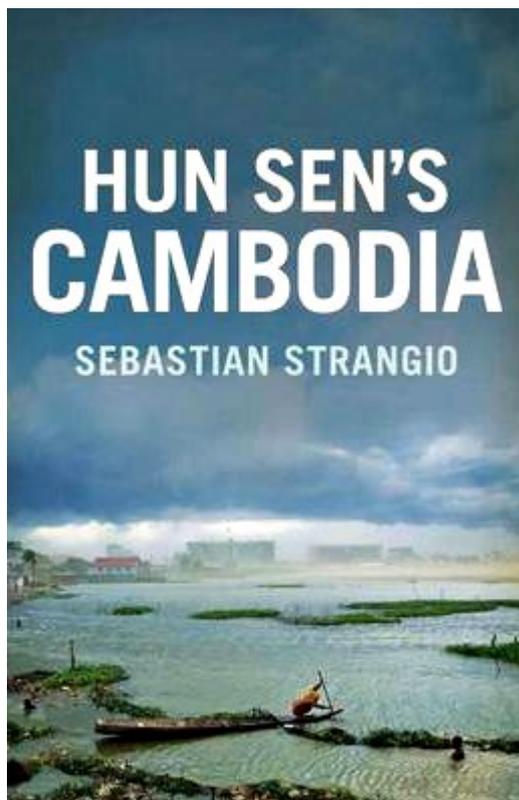
Vic O'Callaghan is a trainer in Restorative Practices. With his wife Liz, he works in schools and communities throughout Australia.

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

Hun Sen's Cambodia a mirage on the Mekong

AUSTRALIA

Tony Kevin



I had long since completed my posting to Cambodia as Australian Ambassador 1994-97, the decisive years of the post-UNTAC struggle for power between Cambodian People's Party (CPP) leader Hun Sen, royalist party leader Prince Ranariddh, dissident democratic leader Sam Rainsy, and King Sihanouk.

Today just two of those players are left standing: Cambodian People's Party (CPP) leader Hun Sen and Sam Rainsy, leader of a newly invigorated and resurgent opposition coalition, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP). Ranariddh retired from politics in 2008, and his Funcinpec party is no more: its most impressive leaders like Mu Sochua moved to Sam Rainsy's party and now its successor CNRP. The much-loved and hugely talented King passed on in 2012. His successor King Sihamoni is strictly apolitical.

Rainsy and his deputy CNRP leader Kem Sokha (an experienced democratic politician who founded the Human Rights Party in 2007) skilfully pursue an agenda of social reform and Cambodian nationalism, and have built a young constituency of human rights idealists and have-nots with much to gain and little to lose in challenging the CPP ascendancy. Hun Sen's CPP - which had grown ever stronger in the elections of 1998, 2003 and 2008 as it cemented its control of local government in the regions - had its first shock reverse in 2013. Its share of seats in the National Assembly was slashed from 90 to 68. The CNRP won the remaining 55 seats and is now within clear striking distance of taking power at the ballot box in 2018. A shocked CPP is finding its old levers of power and patronage working less and less well in this rapidly changing and urbanising society and economy.

In July 1997, when the mounting hostility between Hun Sen and Ranariddh erupted in open war, a small group of Western and ASEAN ambassadors had agreed (at some risk to our careers) to advise our governments not to take sides. We knew that Hun Sen had the power and leadership skills to win on the ground. For our governments to prop up Ranariddh (now negotiating secretly with armed remnants of the Khmer Rouge) would have risked reigniting the 1978-91 civil war and destroying everything that the UN peace settlement had achieved in 1991-93.

Our advice was heeded in capitals. Over the next 16 years, Hun Sen skilfully consolidated

political and economic power: destroying, intimidating or buying off adversaries, mostly peacefully, to a point where Cambodia seemed well on the road to becoming a one-party dictatorship under Hun Sen. Until 2013.

Now, it seems, the growth of politically more savvy urban middle and working class voters has created an electoral basis for a political opposition led by Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha, to take power peacefully in 2018.

This in itself, if it happens, will raise a host of new questions. How would Rainsy manage relations with Vietnam, having built his career in large part on rhetoric to demonise Vietnam? And how would he take effective control at home? Cambodian politics is built on hierarchical relationships of money and protection. Cambodian politicians remember and reward their friends and punish their enemies. Hun Sen has built powerful entrenched hierarchies around himself, in the army, police and bureaucracy. How would Rainsy deal with them and they with him? There is no strong tradition of separation of powers: party and state are intermeshed around Hun Sen.

A democratic change of government in 2018, if it should come, could be as disruptive as Thaksin's accession to power was in Thailand in 2001. It is an open question whether Cambodia could remain as peaceful as it is now.

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So is today's Cambodia a success story, an utter disaster, or something in between? Former *Phnom Penh Post* journalist Sebastian Strangio's impressive new book [Hun Sen's Cambodia](#) (Yale University Press, 2014) is the product of meticulous first-hand in-country research, using a wealth of published sources and interviews, since he first went to work in Cambodia in 2008.

He sets out the balance sheet of what has been gained and lost in the 17 years of peace under Hun Sen since 1997.

Have these years seen a 'miracle on the Mekong' - or a mirage of democracy and progress? Strangio concludes on the latter side. He compellingly assembles evidence, some of it desperately sad to read, in support of this judgement. The terrible state of Cambodian public health, with the heartbreakingly high, medically unnecessary, mother-and-baby mortality for women who cannot afford private medicine or lack access to city charitable hospitals. The corrupted state of education, where desperately poor teachers are forced to take bribes to pass mediocre students into scarce higher education places at the expense of better qualified students. The abuse of human rights in the hill country and forestlands especially, as powerful syndicates move in clear-felling forests, depriving traditional tribes of their homes and livelihoods; the forced removal of homeless urban squatters to make way for obscenely rich gated communities; the suppression of worker rights to more decent wages and conditions; the heavily managed and constrained trials of very few Khmer Rouge leaders. It's a damning indictment of misgovernance that Strangio offers in chapter after chapter of incisive writing.

Yet, as Strangio acknowledges, Phnom Penh is a lively, bustling, often happy city of energetic and industrious people. The urban economic growth statistics are amazing. From 1998 to 2007 GDP grew by nearly 10 per cent per annum. The World Bank reported that in 2004 one in two Cambodians lived in poverty: by 2011 the figure had dropped to one in five. In two decades, per capita income almost quadrupled from \$240 in 1993 to a projected \$1000 in 2013.

The press, radio and TV are nowadays largely compliant but there is a thriving internet culture, so far free. The young, who demographically dominate, have little interest in the crimes of the past. Hun Sen and his trusted advisers are ageing. Strangio suggests they may be losing their sure touch on this rapidly changing country. Hun Sen's power will endure longest in the traditional rice growing rural areas. But nowhere in Cambodia is more than a day's bus ride from Phnom Penh, and through strong family links, new ideas are flowing freely from the capital city to the regions. The CPP has reason to fear the 2018 elections. It must now democratise or perish.

Cambodian foreign policy is not just about fencing with the US and the UN: it is, very

centrally, about nearby Thailand, Vietnam and China. In true Sihanouk tradition, Hun Sen has brilliantly balanced the strategically weak Cambodian state among these three powerful neighbours. History will give him credit for this, and I wonder if his successor leaders will show the same deft hand.

So how will history judge Hun Sen's expected 20 years in power since 1998? I would venture: as an authoritarian but effective national developmental leader, in the ASEAN tradition of Lee Kuan Yew Soeharto and Mahathir. Certainly, his state now operates with a high degree of cronyism and corruption, and a sad dependency on the international community for essential health, education and welfare obligations. But it is only rarely deliberately cruel to its citizens.

And was there ever any viable alternative in 1997? Historians and political observers will go on debating this question, and Strangio's fine book will be an essential resource in this debate.



Tony Kevin is a former diplomat. Sebastian Strangio's Hun Sen's Cambodia is available now from online vendors.

Pope's G20 hospital pass to Abbott

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

The news that Pope Francis has written a letter to Tony Abbott makes one pause. In the terms now used to describe the exchanges between leaders, was the letter a shirtfront, a head-butt, a big hug, or a yellow card?

The letter, of course, was none of these things. It was written to Abbott as chair of the G20 Summit and was directed through him to the national representatives taking part. It is usual for Popes to write such letters: a recent example was one to the Secretary of the UN about the situation in Northern Iraq. They set out the views of the Vatican on significant issues.

This letter begins by summarising uncontroversially the G20 Agenda. Any distinctive papal emphases may lie in the adjectives. The meeting aims not only at providing employment, but 'dignified and stable employment for all'. It demands a 'fair and adequate' system of taxation. The focus is not on narrowly economic goals but on the good of human beings.

The letter then emphasises that 'many lives are at stake behind these political and technical discussions'. People suffer from malnutrition, from rising unemployment, especially among the young, from increasing social exclusion leading to crime and terrorism, and from continued assaults on the natural environment.

The Pope hopes that the meeting will lead to consensus, and that its results will be measured, not only by global indices but also by 'real improvement in the living conditions of poorer families and the reduction of all forms of unacceptable inequality'. This focus on the human implications of the G20 deliberations leads Pope Francis to urge a broader definition of the responsibilities of the nations involved. These are set in framework of the UN Development Agenda 'which ought to include the vital issues of decent work for all and climate change'.

The letter also sets the Summit in the context of military conflicts, and of calls for the G20 to help forge an agreement, under the United Nations, to halt aggression in the Middle East. It should also work to eliminate the causes of terrorism which include 'poverty, underdevelopment and exclusion', and to meet the needs of victims of the conflicts, especially of refugees.

This leads the Pope to consider the need of the international community, and so of the G20 nations, 'to protect individuals and peoples from extreme attacks on human rights and a total disregard for humanitarian law'. In one of the most striking features of the letter, this response to terrorism is coupled with the need to protect people from other forms of aggression, most notably 'abuses in the financial system such as those transactions that led to the 2008 crisis, and more generally, to speculation lacking political or juridical constraints and the mentality that maximization of profits is the final criterion of all economic activity'. To equate terrorism and greed in the markets is a strong call.

Many of the topics raised in the letter are subjects of controversy in Australia. They include refugees, inequality, climate change, regulation of the financial sector and the need to focus on the needs of the poor. But Pope Francis does not prescribe policies to deal with them. So there is no implied rebuke for Mr Abbott or other members of the G20. But they are challenged to set their discussion within a broader framework that puts

people first. And their citizens are invited to judge their leaders and their policies by the extent to which they do put people first.

The participants in the G20 will be unlikely to see the Pope's letter as a shirtfront. They will probably treat it rather as a hospital pass - one best left for the brave to grasp. That is suggested by the narrow focus of the meeting on things that can be achieved and by the omission of large issues like climate change. The trouble with swerving away from hospital passes, though, is that the watchers may see you as cowardly. Particularly if they see people like Obama and Xi Jinping putting their bodies in and galloping down the field to score.



Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.

There's no such thing as a free blessing

AUSTRALIA

Catherine Marshall

I hadn't expected to be charged for the blessing. It was November 2013, the Hindu lunar month of Kartika Purnima, and the annual Pushkar Camel Fair had just begun. I'd hitched a lift to Pushkar from Jaipur with my friend, Hemant, passing along the way caravans of camels loping through the Rajasthani desert towards a setting sun. This was a postcard that told of incense and oases and marigolds and romance.

If I'd arrived by plane, or by hot air balloon - a method of transport that landed two tourists in prison, quite literally, when their balloon veered off course and into the grounds of a high security jail during this year's festival - I would have been enchanted by the scene below: camels marching upon the city like armies of ants; the city rising from a camel-coloured, camel-teeming landscape; the landscape cradling at its centre a jade-coloured pool, the sacred Pushkar Lake; the lake bobbing with Hindu devotees - less numerous than camels but themselves inestimable in number - who had come here during Kartika Purnima to wash away their sins.

But I entered the city at street level, where romance can soon wear thin. Mounds of rubbish rose from the streets, providing sustenance for the emaciated cows and stray dogs and fat pigs nosing greedily through them. Shopkeepers chased ragged children, and the children in turn chased tourists, offering guided walks in exchange for rupees. Gypsies promised dances and henna tattoos for exorbitant fees and thieving langur monkeys bided their time on shop awnings.

Out on the fairground, stables and kitchens and shops were being erected from corrugated iron. Sleek thoroughbred horses were settling into their make-shift quarters and the animals for which this fair is named - India's ubiquitous camel - were arriving *en masse*, on foot ahead of orange-turbaned masters, by truck from states too far off to permit a journey by foot.

I stood behind an ancient, rusted truck bearing two camels. It had come to a halt beside one of the many mounds of soil piled hereabouts by itinerant Pushkari labourers; the improvised platforms would ease disembarkation for the flimsy-limbed animals. The camels were tethered in place by ropes attached to their nose pegs. One camel's nose peg had become subsumed within the bloody mass that now existed where the rope and peg had gnawed through his skin. I wondered how long his painful journey in a wheezing truck over potholed roads had lasted - twelve hours, eighteen? - and who would want to buy him now, with his face a bloodstained mess.

Elsewhere, camel carts jogged around the fairgrounds, cameleers sitting up front with whips in hand, tourists reclining on frilly-blanketed cart beds, ragtag boys hanging off the sides and springing to the ground when gates needed opening or new customers cajoled. These young boys had left school to help support their families, one cameleer told me; they worked inhumane hours for the camel owner, and earned less than a pittance for their efforts.

In the afternoon I made my way from the fairgrounds into the Pushkar citadel. Narrow streets surged with people going hither and thither, with shopkeepers shouting out for customers, with touts pressing marigolds into tourists' hands. I accepted one of these golden flowers from a white-robed man and followed his instructions: find your blessing down at the lake, he said.

I moved along with the crowd until, quite suddenly, the city relinquished its suffocating grasp and made way for Pushkar Lake. A stranger told me to remove my shoes and

directed me to a Brahmin sitting at the bottom of a ghat beside the greasy, rubbish-flecked waters. He held a silver plate filled with red puja powder for Lord Brahma, yellow petals for Lord Vishnu, rice for Lord Shiva, sugar for Lord Ganesha.

'This is a blessing for your life, and it is free,' he said, smearing a red dot on my forehead and asking for my husband's long life.

I emptied the contents of the plate into the lake as instructed, and swept a handful of water over my head. The Brahmin lifted my wrist and wrapped fine strings about it.

'You have received a blessing now and you can decide what donation you wish to give, so that the Brahmins can keep this place nice and pray for your family,' he said, knotting the bracelet emphatically.

'Europeans pay in Euros, Americans in US dollars, Indians in rupees. You can pay €200, €500, €1,000. How much would you like to pay?'

I looked at the Brahmin and felt a cackle rising in my throat.

'You said this blessing was free,' I said.

'The blessing is free, but you must pay for the maintenance of this place,' he insisted, sweeping his arm up towards the ghats and the temples surrounding it.

I wondered briefly what the consequence would be of defying the Brahmin's demand. I was a guest in Pushkar, and so should respect this man's customs. But I had been tricked into receiving a blessing I didn't want for a fee I hadn't agreed to pay from a man who wore gold rings on his fingers and a portliness that suggested prosperity.

Our eyes locked, and what I saw was the bleeding camel and the illiterate, hungry children and the women I'd met in India whose husbands' long life had been considered worthy of prayer by holy men but not their own. I rose, thanked the Brahmin and climbed the steps to the top of the ghat. I knew where my money would be better spent.



Catherine Marshall is a Sydney based journalist and travel writer.

Photo credit: Catherine Marshall.

Male spirituality in Kiwi portrait of mental illness

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Dark Horse (PG). Director: James Napier Robertson. Starring: Cliff Curtis, James Rolleston. 110 minutes

New Zealand filmmaker Robertson's latest feature has been described as a cross between modern antipodean classics *Once Were Warriors* and *Shine*. This is apt: like *Warriors*, *Dark Horse* considers masculinity, violence and spirituality in the lives of urban Maoris. Like *Shine*, it offers a moving portrait of a character whose mental illness appears to be the dark reflection of esoteric, obsessive genius.

You could draw a straight line, too, from 'inspiring teacher' stories such as *Dead Poets Society*. Where Robin Williams' John Keating used poetry to free the young blue bloods in his care from the strictures of their conservative upbringings, *Dark Horse's* Genesis (Curtis) - a former chess champion institutionalised for years for schizophrenia - uses chess to deter local youths from lives of crime.

Genesis aims to take his young charges to the national chess championships in Auckland. As such there's a dash of the classic sports drama to *Dark Horse*, too; think *Rocky* and its ilk, where the focus and discipline required in the pursuit of sporting excellence stimulates hope and offers an exit point from adversity; and where achievement borne of hard work is allegorical to redemption.

Inspired by a true story, *Dark Horse* takes these familiar cinematic tropes and, impressively, builds from them something that feels both distinctive and utterly authentic. Writer-director Robertson manages to combine a gritty, dark, violent urban setting with a warm, inspiring, humorous story. It's an impressive balancing act that keeps the film from being either too bleak or too saccharine.

Curtis, an accomplished Hollywood actor of Maori descent, underwent a physical transformation for the role, stacking on weight and studiously rehearsing the mannerisms of Genesis' real-life counterpart (who died in 2011). His revelatory performance is nearly matched by Rolleston's turn as Mana, Genesis' nephew, for whom the choice between crime and chess could not be more urgent or fraught.

Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of Eureka Street.

Slain El Salvador Jesuits paid price for their advocacy

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

On November 17, 1989, I was in Thailand at a meeting of Jesuit Refugee Service workers. There I heard of the death of six Jesuits, their cook and her daughter. Jon Sobrino, the Jesuit theologian from El Salvador, was due to visit us in the evening. He came, and we celebrated Mass with him for his friends and colleagues.

I remember that on the front page of a Bangkok newspaper was a photograph of the murder scene. Jon looked at it and said, almost in surprise, 'That is my room... my typewriter...my bible. A Jesuit visitor had come to stay a few days, was offered his room, and died there.

Elba Ramos cooked meals at the Jesuit community. Celia was her sixteen year old daughter. The Jesuits, Ignacio Ellacuría, Ignacio Martín-Barro, Segundo Montes, Juan Ramón Moreno, Joaquín López y López and Amado López, taught at the University and its associated institutes. It was a time of civil war, and the University and Jesuits were identified by the Government with the armed resistance. The crime that led directly to their death was their advocacy of a negotiated settlement to a war that the Government thought it could win unconditionally.

The roots of the civil war lay in the Government's seizure and selling of communal land earlier in the century. It was accompanied by the massacre of the Indigenous population. A few families owned most of the country's wealth and exploited the rural population. The Catholic Church as an institution was associated with the better-off.

The Second Vatican Council committed the Catholic Church to take seriously its mission to preach the Gospel to the poor. Many priests in Latin America began to reflect with their congregations on what the Gospel meant in their situation. They began to ask why they were exploited, and how they could act to shape a more just society. In El Salvador this local organising led to conflict and to a violent response. As part of the Government's counter-insurgency tactics catechists and villagers were murdered. Theologically conservative priests like Jesuit Rutilio Grande and Archbishop Oscar Romero saw what was happening to their people, called it for what it was, and were themselves killed. Before the killings the Jesuits were advised to hide from the death squads. They decided it would be safe to stay at the University because it was surrounded by the army. But the decision to kill them, taken at a high level of government, was entrusted to an elite army squadron. The soldiers made their way into the house, shot all the Jesuits and finally Elba and Celia Ramos. They tried clumsily to make it appear a rebel attack. Fr Ellacuría's brains were scattered on the grass, a gesture of contempt for his ideas and an unwitting tribute to their power.

The murders caused international outrage and focused attention on the atrocities sanctioned by the Government. Enquiry followed enquiry, and the Government of El Salvador came under increasing pressure to seek a negotiated settlement. The Salvadorean defence minister later described the decision to kill the Jesuits as the most stupid thing the Government had done.

Two years later I spent six months in El Salvador reading in the library abutting the house where the Jesuits were killed, and visiting communities of rural people who had returned after fleeing to neighbouring countries from the Salvadorean army. The cost to the Jesuits there was palpable: they had lost six of their friends and their most talented

colleagues, but were determined that they would continue their work. Grieving had to be put on hold.

The whole country seemed to be a memorial to the dead Jesuits. One community was named Segundo Montes. In another I was handed a liturgical Stole to wear with some reverence, and told that Ignacio Martín-Barro used to wear it. Bullet holes were still to be seen in the doors and walls of the Jesuit library.

One of the consequences of any civil war is the explosion of guns in the population. So it was in El Salvador, where most of the guns for both sides came from the United States, some on-sold by corrupt army officers to the rebels. So after the war ended many unemployed young men on both sides, trained only to kill, earned their living by the gun. Freed from a cause and from military discipline they were the seeds of a violent future. My most moving memory of El Salvador was of a week spent in the community of Ita Maura - named after Maryknoll Sisters Ita Ford and Maura Clarke who had been raped and murdered by the military. I was there to celebrate the Eucharist for the Community's tenth anniversary. In preparation I gathered a list of relatives who had been killed in the war so they could be remembered in the Service. A woman, then living alone, had lost seven children. She listed each of them. Some were catechists and so had been targeted by the military. Others had been killed trying to flee, many at the River Lempa. Then she mentioned her youngest son, Juan Luis. Tears came into her eyes as she whispered, 'And I had such hope in him'.

In the garden of the house where the Jesuits died there is a garden with eight rose bushes. The six Jesuits are inseparable in death from Celia and Elba Ramos, Juan Luis and his brothers and all the ordinary Salvadoreans whom they served. In their deaths they helped keep hope alive.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.

Tonti-Filippini's intellectual quest undaunted by physical pain

RELIGION

Zac Alstin



The French Dominican philosopher Antonin Sertillanges wrote of the intellectual life that 'the the man of vocation should put away and deliberately forget his everyday man … the whole complicated entanglement of impediments which block the road to the True and hinder its victorious conquest'.

This noble aim is a struggle for most of us at the best of times, let alone when we are sick, discomforted or in pain. Which is why the work of Professor Nicholas Tonti-Filippini, the prominent and pioneering Australian Bioethicist who died last Friday, was always doubly impressive.

I first met him some years ago when, as a neophyte in the Bioethics world, I attended an annual conference at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Melbourne, where he was Associate Dean and Head of Bioethics. Tonti-Filippini came across as serious, thoughtful and reserved, not uncommon traits in such a complex and controversial field of research.

But over time it became clear that his work in the field was exemplary of Bioethics in general and of Catholic Bioethics in particular. His writing was reliably measured, considered, and objective - qualities that may not sound impressive and should indeed be ubiquitous in an ideal world, but are in fact the product of painstaking and rigorous intellectual work.

The fact that he accomplished such quiet feats despite the continual pain and discomfort of chronic auto-immune disease, renal failure, and ischaemic heart disease, is an achievement not lost on those who understand both the fragility of intellectual work and the debilitating force of physical pain. A 2011 report in *The Age* revealed that he slept upright and wore an oxygen mask at night to control pain. His pain had become so bad that he even considered giving up dialysis.

Tonti-Filippini had much more to *put away and deliberately forget* than most, and he did so more consistently than many. Even when he finally brought personal experience to bear in his contribution to the euthanasia debate, he did so with characteristic objectivity, describing the details of his terminal illness, pain and suffering with impartial care, as though anxious to establish the precise and limited relevance of his personal circumstances to the overall ethical debate.

Whether or not one agreed with his conclusions on a whole range of controversial ethical and bioethical issues, it would be difficult to find a more fair or measured exponent of Catholic intellectual opposition to abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage and the like. In fact, he received his Master's degree from Monash University under the supervision of Professor Peter Singer, the (in)famous utilitarian philosopher and Australian Greens Party founding member who was often associated with his intellectual defences of bestiality, incest, and infanticide.

Yet despite coming from opposite ends of the bioethics spectrum, the two had a mutual respect, with Tonti-Filippini noting that 'Peter has a great sense of humour. He's quite unlike his public image, where he's always looking for an argument'. Singer paid tribute to Tonti-Filippini this week, suggesting that debates in bioethics 'have lost a distinctive voice', adding that 'Nick and I respected each other and our differences were intellectual, never personal'.

Much of Tonti-Filippini's influence on bioethics in Australia took place out of the public spotlight, whether it be through his work as Chair of the National Health and Medical Research Council Working Committee on the care of people in an unresponsive or minimally responsive state, or through the many difficult and complex situations that characterise the work of an ethics consultant and hospital ethicist, of which Tonti-Filippini was Australia's first. Again, regardless of one's ethical or philosophical views, anyone interested in truth, measure, and rigour could be heartened at the knowledge that an intellectual of such fairness and calibre as Tonti-Filippini had been hard at work on such important tasks.

For me, the most significant of Tonti-Filippini's recent work was his 2013 paper titled 'The Catholic Church and paedophilia: Learning from failures'. It showed a man willing to turn his intellectual abilities to an issue that would surely raise very difficult and painful questions for a devout and faithful Catholic.

Yet even in this domain, he applied his typically measured and cautious approach, with insights and observations that are fair, yet in their fairness far more critical of the Church than many in his position might wish to be. His honesty and integrity proved that we can be critical of the things we love, putting aside partisanship and fears for the sake of truth.

Most of us don't face anything like the daily challenges of illness and pain that Tonti-Filippini endured for many years. His achievements and his intellectual character are exemplary of the kind of strength we all should strive for, to do our part in the difficult and often painstaking pursuit of truth.

*Zac Alstin is a freelance writer and PhD student in Philosophy of Religion who lives in Adelaide. He blogs at zacalstin.com
Image credit: Catholic Leader*

Tough talking Tony

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.

The masala stone

AUSTRALIA

Bernard Appassamy

Some envy my ever-lasting tan. The child of horrified Caucasian friends asked why I was always dirty. The colour of my skin. Described as chocolate brown, *café au lait* or olive. In various shades across my body. It matters because it testifies my family's roots, and speaks of a proud love that defied its times.

Comarassamy Soupa Chetty, my paternal great grandfather, was the son of Appassamy Soupa Chetty, a Tamil merchant migrant from India's South East, who settled in Mauritius in the first mid-half of the 19th century. Comarassamy converted as an adult to marry Anne Euchariste Clam, a Catholic with a family name allegedly of Dutch ancestry. He then changed his full name to Joseph Appassamy.

Any country with a colonial heritage carries sensitive layers of identities, Mauritius more so because of its size, no indigenous population, and a hybrid nation born from waves of European, African and Asian immigration. The inevitable process of mixed marriages has been excruciating and scarring. Anne and Joseph's budding affection must have been fearless; their commitment endured and led to six children and more than one hundred current descendants across the globe.

In 1968, the independence of Mauritius from the UK divided the country, raised racial tensions and provoked riots. Thousands emigrated. The extended Appassamy family was split with a portion moving to Australia. My parents chose to stay with my two sisters and me. I recall distressing farewells at Plaisance airport and Quay D at Port Louis harbour, and my family standing watching the Qantas plane or the 'Patris' ship depart, gradually shrink, and grow fainter till it vanished.

Families, like mine, that are born from migration are reborn punctually through the scent of their cuisine. I like to think that the Indian curry has transcended its origin, slowly bridged Mauritian ethnic communities, and established its own version as a national treasure. For those who left, the making of a curry remains a patriotic ritual.

What defines a uniquely Mauritian curry? A sound, more than a taste or recipe, comes first to my mind. It's a late afternoon in the early 70s. I'm a teenager doing my schoolwork at my desk in my bedroom. A grinding rhythm from the garden is audible through my window. Leaning over the *ros kari*, Jessie, our family cook, is crushing spices for the evening curry. With her two hands, she holds flat a cylindrical stone, the *baba*, and rolls it with her wrists back and forth, on a large rectangular base, the *mama*. Both are solid grey basalt hand-chiseled by *tonbalis*, stonemasons, from the volcanic boulders of Mauritius.

I see Jessie as a priestess and the *ros kari* as her altar, officiating a marriage of sorts between aromatic spouses. Their names and colours evoke a primeval celebration: gold turmeric, crimson chillies, emerald curry leaves, amber coriander seeds, khaki cumin and more. Some are roasted, others dried or fresh. Proportions vary. A little flicked water, then and again, to bind the paste, is compulsory. It takes skill and years of practice to drive a *ros kari*, to develop a method that pulsates and reiterates, and imparts the essence of the basalt stone into the masala.

Later, Jessie picks the oldest pot with broken handles to cook her curry. She heats up the oil before frying the masala, and a new magic begins. Jessie flings open a door to a pungent, intoxicating world that tickles and stings. The house is silent but the kitchen is exploding.

At my desk, I am distracted. Soon I race to Jessie having torn a piece of bread on the way. She is expecting me and, from a cooking spoon, tips some sauce on my bread. I savour Jessie's curry. She glows as, with my mouth full and my eyes watering, I nod effusively my appreciation.

For those Mauritians who still choose to prepare a curry from scratch, the *ros kari* has, of course, been supplanted by a panoply of blitzing appliances. The majority, including myself, reach for curry powder mix. The action of adding just enough water to make a paste, and frying the paste remains the same. While some argue that the test is in the taste, a traditional masala remains, more than a benchmark, evidence of a forgone sensual harmony.

Jessie is now long retired. Her signature curry is eggplant with *sevret*, tiny local freshwater shrimps. My late uncle Jacques, who migrated to Sydney with his *baba* in his luggage on Qantas, and his *mama* in a wooden crate that followed on the 'Patris', kept for decades the Sydney-based Appassamy clan queuing at gatherings for his ox tail curry, nibbling the juicy, gelatinous meat from the bones, and sucking the marrow. The colour of my skin? I prefer masala.

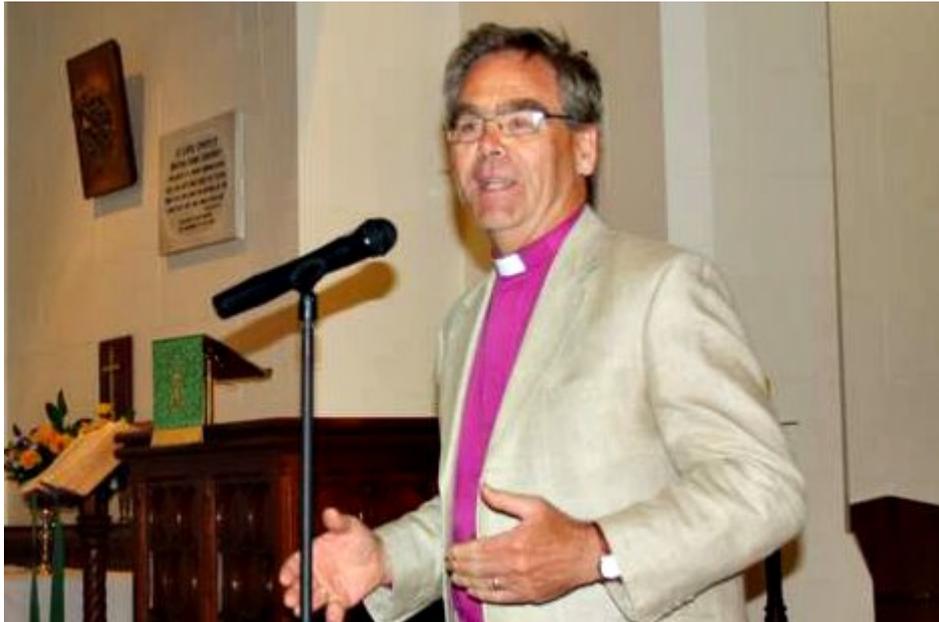
Bernard Appassamy is a Sydney writer and artist who is a bilingual medical care coordinator.

Photo credit: Marie-Claude Pascal.

Which bishop is challenging the bank on fossil fuels?

RELIGION

Jill Sutton



The church and our financial system don't really go together, or do they? We may find out when shareholders of the Commonwealth Bank hear Bishop George Browning at Wednesday's CBA AGM. Presenting a [resolution](#) which has appeared on the CBA notice of meeting, the former bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn will be requesting more transparency about the bank's fossil fuel investments.

This resolution reflects a justifiable concern that investment in such fuels may drop in value because their ongoing use will take our global temperatures beyond a two degree increase, the UN-agreed limit for a habitable world. In a nutshell, some shareholders are worried their banks will be stranded with investments in 'un-burnable carbon'. Bishop Browning also sees such a profligate abuse of our resources as a threat to the sacred balance of the whole of creation.

The media has already drawn our attention to the incredible profitability of our big four banks in Australia compared with other banks in the world, and to the apparent abuse of trust in some banks' financial counselling operations. In addition, there has been an avalanche of divestment, including from the Rockefellers and the ANU, as they discern a lack of concern for environmental, social and governance issues.

Despite all this, putting a resolution at a company's AGM has turned out to be more complicated than the ordinary citizen might expect. The Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR) was formed in 2012 because of this very challenge to our 'corporate democracy'. It has taken considerable homework for the ACCR to gather the requisite 100 shareholders in order to put this resolution to the bank and, not taking any chances, it took care to express its resolution in several formats.

It submitted not only an 'ordinary resolution', asking in a straightforward way for more transparency concerning fossil fuels involvement, but, because it knew that the bank might not agree to table the resolution in this form, it also phrased its request as a 'special resolution'. This latter is not really suitable because it requires alterations to the

corporation's constitution and, understandably, shareholders would rather avoid such a cumbersome and time-consuming procedure. The ACCR only included the special resolution option because corporations have been known to argue that it is the only legal format open to shareholders seeking change.

Naturally, it was a bitter disappointment for the ACCR that the CBA chose the special resolution option to circulate in their AGM papers, but, since then, a surprising development should give heart to supporters of corporate democracy. The CBA has now committed itself to make disclosures on the emissions of its fossil fuel investments in a considerable part of its activities!

However, this situation can be a bit like a game whose rules only become clear to its participants as they play it. Banks and other powerful organisations can still exploit any lack of clarity. They might agree to consider the concerns of the shareholder this time, but the option of consigning a resolution to the status of 'special' is still available to them. This is why the ACCR is a party to a pending legal case to test whether in fact it is legal for a corporation such as the CBA to insist that shareholders can only present their concerns in the form of the more cumbersome 'special resolution'.

It has been encouraging to discover that organisations elsewhere, for example, the Inter-faith Centre for Corporate Responsibility in the US (or ICCR), have fostered a healthy corporate democracy without such convoluted machinery. For example, groups of nuns who are ICCR members have drawn attention to the use of slave labour in South America and their efforts have eventually seen companies put steps in place to eliminate it as a practice in major production chains! It is disappointing that so little engagement of this sort has been evident in Australia although perhaps the recent divestment actions of the Uniting Church and the Anglican Church have been encouraging if symbolic developments.

Bishop George Browning has already been known for his leadership in the International Anglican Communion's environmental action and in more local climate change initiatives. It is in the hopes that this social justice concern of the churches will blossom, that the ACCR has appointed him to present their resolution.

The Bishop takes his 'stewardship' responsibilities to future generations as his every-day and over-riding life consideration. Today he looks forward to bringing the disparate orbits of church and finance into a new alignment for consideration of matters which are of mutual concern.

In the light of this, it should not surprise the finance industry that Rev. Tim Costello has agreed to present a similar resolution to the AGM of the ANZ bank in December.



Jill Sutton convenes the Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility.

Image: Clean Energy Fraternity.

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

The honourable and quirky Wayne Goss

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan



Those of us brought up in Queensland owe a lot to Wayne Goss. I first met him when he was instrumental in setting up the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) in Brisbane in 1974. He was the articled clerk. Roisin Hirschfeld was a young social worker at the ALS. They later married and their two children went on to become Rhodes scholars.

With Mark Plunkett, I used go in one day a week to the ALS as a volunteer law student. Matt Foley was there in the wings too. (Plunkett went on to sue Joh Bjelke Petersen for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice when the police commissioner was precluded from investigating assaults on student demonstrators. Foley became Attorney General in the Goss government.)

Wayne was a no nonsense fellow with a real commitment to justice for Aboriginal Australians during the difficult Bjelke-Petersen days in Queensland. He had a quirkish and devilish sense of humour. He put himself on the line, committed to legal representation for indigent Aborigines, appearing constantly in the courts, day in and day out. He would always come back to the office with a smile and a joke about the latest put down he suffered at the hands of the unforgiving magistrate not much given to pleas invoking past dispossession. He was irrepressible. He delighted in the quirks of human nature, especially from the bench, and later in the parliamentary chamber. He knew there had to be a better way.

In 1989, seeing off Joh Bjelke-Petersen, who had been rolled by his own, he beat the National Party at the polls and was elected premier. In his first term, he decided to do something about Aboriginal land rights in the most difficult state of the federation. He did this when there was no political or legal imperative to do so. He acted because he believed it was right. He believed in Aboriginal self-determination within the life of the polity. He retained the services of two young Aborigines to advise him - Noel Pearson and Marcia Langton. His chief bureaucratic adviser was Kevin Rudd.

As ever, he proceeded cautiously in his attempt to balance all interests. He announced

his 'modest, blanching and responsible' land-rights package, telling the Queensland public: 'We rejected out of hand the Northern Territory approach as being too radical both in the way it affects the community generally and the specific impact on agriculture and mining.'

Despite his best efforts, things turned sour, and Aborigines knocked down the gates of Parliament House. He was understandably very hurt, but philosophical, about the course of post-colonial relations. Wayne was unerring in his commitment to do what he could to alleviate the unjust plight of the first Australians. He was no starry eyed romantic. He never lost his sense of humour, or his unwavering commitment to justice for the first Australians.

Three years ago, Wayne and I appeared together on the negative side of one of those 'Intelligence Squared' debates (pictured). By this time Wayne had gone under the knife repeatedly, taking on the brain tumour that finally took him. He was as quirky and good humoured as ever. The topic was: 'If we populate, we perish'. The chief protagonist for the 'yes' case was Dick Smith who turned up with lots of free copies of his book *Population Crisis* which he distributed to the audience. Wayne responded:

Ladies and Gentlemen, because you are a sophisticated audience, our team has decided that we will not be offering bribes in the form of free books nor will we be trying to scare the pants off you with predictions of the end of the planet. We believe that the policy debate should be lifted to a higher level. What I think I need to do is to reframe the issue: if Australia does not increase its population, you know what will happen? We'll get older; we'll get less productive; we'll lose our spark. You know what happens after you age and get greyer and greyer and greyer? You perish. Think about it.

His last words in that debate were, 'Friends, Australia has a great opportunity. Let's seize it.' He did, and so should we. I was honoured to know him. He was a very honourable man. May he rest in peace.

Frank Brennan SJ, professor of law at Australian Catholic University, is presently Gasson professor at the Boston College Law School.

The Vatican's Francis Revolution gains pace

RELIGION

Paul Collins



An important power shift has just occurred in Rome, and it has a genuine Australian connection.

The long-rumoured removal of US Cardinal Raymond Burke as Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, the top tribunal in the Vatican's judicial system, and effectively the appeals court for all other tribunals in the church, occurred at midday on Saturday.

Burke has been made Patron of the Sovereign Military Order of the Knights of Malta. His replacement at the Signatura is Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Secretary for Relations with States, effectively the Vatican's foreign minister. Mamberti's replacement is Liverpool-born Archbishop Paul Gallagher, currently papal nuncio to Australia.

The sidelining of the 66 year old Burke signifies an important power shift. A bluntly outspoken conservative critic of Pope Francis' pastoral approach to difficult moral issues, his rejection of a hierarchy of truths (the notion that some teachings are more important than others) has placed him at the far right of the Catholic spectrum. Burke has said that Catholicism risks schism if bishops at the Family Synod next year 'go contrary' to the Church's established dogmas.

A 'folk hero' for some Catholics, Burke was appointed bishop of La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1994, and promoted to Archbishop of St Louis in late 2004. He was appointed Prefect of the Signatura in 2008 and was made a cardinal in November 2010.

He exercised considerable influence on the appointment of new bishops in the US as a member of the Congregation of Bishops. He was removed from the Congregation by Pope Francis in December 2013. His dismissal from the Signatura was certainly brutal by Vatican standards. The Roman saying is 'Let him be promoted that he may be removed', but with Burke they didn't even pretend he was being 'promoted'. Perhaps it is because he had 'leaked' his own demotion some weeks earlier.

He is known for his devotion to the Tridentine liturgy and practices such as wearing a

cappa magna. He has claimed that contemporary 'moral corruption' is 'strictly correlated' to the liturgical 'abuses' that in his view came in the wake of Vatican Council II. *Whispers in the Loggia* blogger Rocco Palmo has described him as 'arguably the most polarising figure on the global Catholic stage.' His removal from the Signatura and Bishops strips him of any real influence on the wider church - at least for this papacy.

Burke's replacement at the Signatura is Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, a Corsican. This leaves his very senior and important post of Secretary for Relations with States vacant. The Secretariat of State is the central body of the curia and is presided over by the Secretary of State, currently Cardinal Pietro Parolin. He is effectively the papal prime minister. Serving directly under him are two under-secretaries with the rank of archbishop, one for Ordinary Affairs (this person runs the curia and deals with general matters concerning the church) and the other for Relations with States i.e. the Vatican's dealings with foreign governments. Thus the secretary of this section becomes the Vatican's foreign minister.

60 year old Paul Gallagher's appointment as Secretary for Relations with States comes as a surprise to many, although he is a close friend of Parolin. He returns to Rome as a cleanskin 'who is not part of any clique', and as someone of real competence. Rocco Palmo says he is 'the first native born English speaker to hold the post.' This is not strictly true. Australian-born Archbishop (later Cardinal) Edward Cassidy was Secretary for Ordinary Affairs from 1988-9.

Gallagher was born in Liverpool, near where the Beatles came from. Ordained in 1977, he did parish work in Liverpool, graduated from the Gregorian University in Canon Law and entered the Vatican diplomatic service in 1984.

He served in Tanzania, Uruguay, the Philippines and at the Council of Europe. He was ordained archbishop to the titular see of Hodelm (an extinct Scottish diocese) and was appointed Nuncio to Burundi in early-2004 in succession to the murdered Irish Nuncio, Archbishop Michael Courtney who had worked for peace during the vicious civil war in Burundi. Gallagher later served as Nuncio in Guatemala and was appointed to Canberra in April 2013. He also worked for several years in the Secretariat of State, so gaining experience in the affairs of the curia.

He has been popular in Australia because he has kept in touch with pastoral life. For example he volunteered to help out in the far-flung western NSW of Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes during his first Easter in Australia. He's also been willing to talk to Catholics from across the ecclesiastical spectrum. This puts him very much in line with Francis' emphasis on the need for church administrators to keep in touch with real world ministry.

While Gallagher's appointment to Rome will be a real loss for the Australian church, it does mean that there will be someone in an influential position who knows Australia well. He might even be able to influence the appointment of new Australian bishops. That would be a good thing!



Paul Collins was in Rome for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family in October 2014.

Pictured: Archbishop Gallagher with ABC religious broadcaster Noel DeBrien.

Meeting a fish

CREATIVE

Yan An



Five Poems by Yan An *Translated into English by Ouyang Yu* **The Plane is Flying in the Blue of Despair** Blue above Blue below In the limitless blue in which directions don't even exist The plane seems to fly slowly The soundless and limitless blue That seems to almost put the trembling of the flight under control Manages only to make it shiver Causing the white sunlight to show the icy cold of a certain hardness In this blue quite nigh despair, the plane is flying As if across A vanity approaching extinction

Sleeping with a Mirror A white swan (perhaps just something white and plump) With its unreal whiteness In the autumnal Tianchi Sky Pond Further away than Xinjiang the New Boundary Is sleeping with a mirror A huge curved rock with its black moss And a big heap of white bird shit On the cliff above a big river In the wind of ancient times beneath the wings of a bird Trying to determine the posture of its flight Is sleeping with time A snake, that has shed its white skin in the forest (all this just being imagined) Chasing in vain a hungry tiger And, when lost on its way returning to its cave Is so fearful that it runs in haste As he has to rush to the wilderness To sleep with the dark clouds and the moon My father, with his white hair And his white bones under his black skin Tonight, in his dream of his home and my dream Where a white, cold light that is unplaceable And a certain sadness that is hard to describe Is sleeping with the crowd of mountains in the north **Post Office** Good fruit all shifted to the balcony Along with your berries that are the Eternal dreams of an animal called Sheep That come from the depths of an old forest Also shifted to the balcony it's summer now It wouldn't matter if it's higher Or more eye-catching All I have is a sad cement balcony Which I may also lose But the sun, the water and The rebellious wind will come The thunder, lightning and meteors will come And restless friends will discuss in secret Another meeting After the summer My cement balcony is on the higher ground Looking down all those passionate about gaining Those

made to operate by disease and business Those who cause dust and noise to sing in chorus Some are beloved and some are enemies The balcony the fruit the summer And one of our meetings Is something that is above their heads It's not important how the fruit was eventually consumed And how a group of people seven mouths and eight tongues Ended up dispersing in displeasure After all, it's only a friends' meeting Except for one observation that's quite interesting: 'Post office, core of the world The letters we have sent Are being sent elsewhere' **The Stonemason** The stonemason is my father Who lived in the North Under the clear and angry starlight He was on the cliff on many a night-- In the darkness, he kept rolling huge rocks down the mountain Angering a big river And the masses in the valley, in their sleep And, on many a day, in the enormous quarry-- The scorching sun plunged the air into silence When he, alone, beat at the violent rocks Arranged in the high summer Occasionally when the iron chisel touched a delicate spot He would be so excited as to yell, 'Look! These rocks can always turn white White and pretty' A stonemason oh, my father A lonely life that he was intoxicated with Day after day after the sundown Sinking deeper in the dejection of a dusk and the carbon blackness of the body Despite the angry northern starlight As fire-stars, brighter, splash flying in the distance Unaware of it I, in the not so far distant darkness Often wait for his return while chanting poetry: Ah, the headlights, why in such a hurry Leaving the deep valley to the heavy darkness Just when you light it up in large patches **Meeting with a Wonderful Fish** Water, like the bird Lives inside a stone This fish, also like the bird Lives deep inside the stone Where water lies like a nest Now, the fish, naked Is dug out from the stone by me Taken in the wind and in my hand The fish, ferocious like the eerie bird And that makes one heavy with thought Challenges me to take it out of the water Nor do I dare return it into the nest-like water And the thought of chucking it down from the heights And sinking it into the unknown abyss Causes me to break out in a cold sweat the second it flashes across my mind As far as I can remember the fish appeared in a dream And looked at me with its eyes that resembled a human being Its mouth open, trying to close not a word said As if it had broken its vocal cord Reminding me of one night When a kid, lost on the road Was crying, imperceptibly In the darkness half-visible Walking alone

A pdf of these poems, with the addition of the original Chinese, is available [here](#).



*Yan An edits a literary monthly titled Yanhe and is a member of the CPPCC National Committee in Shanxi Province. His literary work has been translated into Russian, English, Japanese and Korean.
Fish image by Shutterstock.*

West Africa needs more international help to defeat Ebola

INTERNATIONAL

Robert Vitillo



Over the years, I have had the privilege to visit and accompany Caritas and other Catholic Church-inspired organisations in Africa as they responded to the epidemic of HIV and AIDS. I always received warm greetings and handshakes, even when people were traumatised by the massive loss of life that resulted from AIDS.

On my recent visit to Liberia, however, I found a 'different Africa.' From the moment that our plane touched down at the Monrovia airport, we were confronted with buckets of bleach water with which to wash our hands and people armed with 'gun thermometers' to take our temperatures.

Perhaps the most striking difference from my other visits was found in the 'no touch' policy. Africans usually are warm and physical in expressing welcome - they offer hearty handshakes. Now, in the Ebola-affected countries, everyone seems uncomfortable as a result of the need to avoid physical contact in order to prevent further spread of Ebola. On our way into the city, my host Sr. Barbara Brilliant rolled down the car window to reprimand a young man and woman on the street who were holding hands, reminding them that they should not be 'touching.'

The Ebola situation in the country is grave and continues to disrupt everyday life for most of the population.

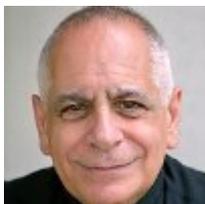
Many hospitals and clinics are closed, so it is very difficult to get medical treatment for other diseases. Some people die in the streets looking for medical treatment for infection or for a whole host of other diseases. Schools and many government offices are closed. But also the socio-economic impact is very dire in a country that just emerged from years of conflict and now must deal with the 'war' on Ebola. In the communities in which quarantine has been imposed, people do not have access to food, clean water, and other necessities.

There is a general sense of psychological trauma and anger among the people; several people shared with me their fear that social unrest and conflicts will soon begin again. So what can the international community do? The Australian government funding to Australian NGOs including Caritas Australia is helping to fight the Ebola outbreak across West Africa is helping.

For the Caritas network in Sierra Leone, the funding is being used to assist 230,000 people at risk of Ebola, through the provision of medical supplies, essential public health support and the training of health workers in the West African nation. But more international funding is desperately needed. Ebola outbreaks have remained more or less limited to areas in Africa that do not receive a large number of foreign visitors, and those who do come are not usually in close contact with people who have symptoms of Ebola. We must remember that transmission occurs only when the body fluids of an infected person have a port of entry into the body of the previously uninfected person. On the other hand, those caring for persons sick with Ebola are at greatest risk of infection, particularly when they do not use protection equipment such as masks, goggles, gloves, gowns and boots.

In Liberia, the crisis has brought the health care infrastructure to breaking point. The Catholic Hospital of St Joseph, in Monrovia, was considered one of the best health facilities in the country, but it was closed after the director and eight other staff members died of Ebola. Recently I walked the halls of the closed hospital together with one of the surgeons there that became infected with the virus but who has now recovered. He sadly showed me the rooms where his colleagues, including Br Patrick Nshamdze, director of the hospital, received care before they were admitted to the Ebola Treatment Centre where they died.

Not only these the medical missionaries, but also the local staff with whom they worked, gave their lives because they were committed to the medical oath of serving all sick people and of upholding the dignity of the human person from conception to natural death. For them the practice of medicine was not a 'business'; it was a vocation. The Brothers of St John of God are in the process of re-opening the hospital but they need financial help to do so - they also will need to organise an Ebola screening unit. They want to walk in the footsteps of their brothers and sisters in religious life in the Catholic Hospital of Saint Joseph, in Monrovia, who walked before them in service to the sick in Liberia, but they need the help of the international community. In a similar way, the efforts of Caritas Liberia to expand education and social mobilisation and support efforts to all three dioceses in the country will play a crucial role in preventing the further spread of the virus, of helping those already infected and affected, and in reducing irrational fear, stigma, and discrimination in local communities.



Monsignor Robert Vitillo is Caritas Internationalis' UN Delegation head and Special Advisor on Health and HIV.

Donate online to Caritas Australia's Africa Emergency Appeal.

Image credit: Caritas Internationalis - St. Joseph Catholic Hospital de Monrovia (Liberia) in July before it was closed.

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The Americanisation of Australia's universities

AUSTRALIA

Sarah Klenbort

In April 2012, National Public Radio (NPR) in the US ran a story about student debt, announcing that American citizens owe over one trillion dollars in student loans. Is this the direction Australia wants to follow?

According to Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, the answer is yes.

Pyne has often stated that universities in Australia are on board when it comes to deregulation. This may be true for management, but not so for lecturers, tutors and researchers.

Every semester I teach English literature to between 75 and 100 (mostly) eager students at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). UWS is the most diverse university in Australia, and possibly the world. I have students from Iraq and Israel, from the Tiwi Islands and Taiwan, South Africa and South America. Most are Australian citizens and 30 per cent are Muslim. Many are the first in their family to go to university.

We sit in a classroom in Bankstown, 20 or 22 in a circle, discussing Plato's cave and Hamlet's ghosts. We talk about the nature of utopias and dystopias. Sometimes the discussion veers towards ISIS or the biased portrayal of Muslims in the Australian media.

There are not many places where 20 people from radically different backgrounds can use literature as a jumping off point to discuss contemporary issues of the day, but the classrooms at UWS are one place where this can and does happen.

As a staff member, I am well aware of the financial situation of my students. Most are not well off. Many are in debt. On the first day of every semester, I ask them to tell me by show of hands if they work, and over two thirds have a job. Some work full time. A few are mothers who look after children and work as well as study. For most of my students, finding a way to pay their uni fees already takes away from valuable time that should be spent studying.

Three weeks ago a *Charter for Australian Public Universities* was published by a group of academics from four public Australian universities. Academics from these institutions have formed the National Alliance for Public Universities (NAPU) and voiced grave concerns about deregulating student fees. The charter has already gathered over 1200 signatures from every public university in the country, including that of the Nobel laureate, J.M. Coetzee, and over a hundred professors.

It may well be that university vice chancellors have voiced support for Christopher Pyne's calls for deregulation. But, according to the charter released last month, they are 'not representative of the concerns of university staff at large, but a management stratum that is beholden to corporate self-interest, particularly when faced with deep funding cuts and deregulation as the only option for making up the difference.'

Bravely, Stephen Parker, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Canberra, has also committed his signature to the NAPU charter, showing that the gap between management and staff is not unbridgeable.

I come from the land of deregulation. When I completed a degree at Columbia University in 2005, my university fees were \$35,000 a year. They have since increased. Columbia is not particularly diverse. It is an elite university with students who are either rich or willing to go into a large amount of debt.

According to NPR, 'Americans now owe more on student loans than they do on their

credit cards'.

I am amazed by the way Australia is willing to follow in the direction of the US when it is clear that this will only create more inequality, mainly by forcing people without money to either miss out all together on higher education or go into a huge amount of debt.

The first of eight 'principals' in the Charter for Australian Public Universities states that, 'Universities provide both public and private benefits. To fulfil these, they must function independently of market forces and political interference.'

Making uni more expensive changes the nature of higher education. Choosing a university becomes akin to buying a new car, or a holiday. University campuses in America have begun to look like five-star resorts, and they have the price-tags to match, but are new squash courts and a Swedish style sauna equal to a good education? Sky-rocketing university fees will lead to greater debt and more inequality in Australia. In a country that prides itself on its diversity and the notion of a fair go, is this really the right choice? Teachers at Australian universities think not.

Sarah Klenbort is a US-born writer of fiction and non-fiction who also teaches literature at the University of Western Sydney.

Student debt image by Shutterstock.