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A train traveller's view of life on both sides of the track

INTERNATIONAL

Catherine Marshall

The memory is as clear as day: the train is surging along the tracks and through its curtained window I can see the landscape flying past in a blur of dun-coloured pastures and swaying grass. My little sisters and I stand at the window and stare out at the passing world. The youngest is not yet two, and though she will grow to be six feet tall one day, for now she must stand on tiptoes to take it all in.

We see children running beside the train, laughing and waving. My mother opens the windows; fresh air surges into our compartment, blowing our hair back and stinging our eyes. She finds the sandwiches left over from yesterday’s lunch and throws them to the children. My sisters and I watch, transfixed, as they come to a halt and scramble about in the dirt for our gifts, tightly wrapped in grease-proof paper.

The train chugs on, and the children shrink to specks on the horizon. The sound of the train floods the compartment now, hot metal wheels gripping a hot metal track, the repetitive forward lurch reassuring us of progress - from the Goldfields of the Transvaal to the flat expanses of maize fields in the Orange Free State to the haunting, empty space that is the Cape's Karoo.

That very first train journey came to mind last week as I travelled by rail from Singapore to Bangkok on Belmond’s Eastern and Oriental Express.

As we crossed the Johor Causeway from Singapore into Malaysia, it struck me that the railways lines that cut through the countryside can also underscore the divide between rich and poor; no matter how elegant the train, class disparities and the struggles of
daily life cannot be shielded from the passengers who travel on them.

Railway lines take the path of least resistance and the routes of most gain, and so they bring us right up close to the people who live alongside them. Sitting in our beautifully-appointed compartment, crossing from Singapore onto the isthmus of mainland Malaysia and the protuberance of southern Thailand, we are given a unique insight into the lives of the people whose countries we are passing through.

We can watch them tending their vegetable plots, hanging up their washing, nursing their babies. We can see how they make their living, harvesting endless rice paddies, baking bricks, sorting through scrap metal. We can peer into the windows of these people's homes, seeing for a fleeting moment the very heart of their lives.

Though my earlier journey was of the budget variety - soggy sandwiches for lunch, shared toilets, fights over who would sleep on the top bunks and a memorable bout of vomiting as the train lurched and swayed in the middle of the night - it had highlighted my own privilege by drawing me far closer to South Africa's poor and marginalised than my safe, white existence had previously allowed.

As the children ran beside the train we had caught one another's eyes. They were barefooted, the soles of their feet immune to the stony ground upon which they ran. Up close, I could see that their clothes were ragged, their skin dusty. Their huts were arranged in clusters off in the distance. It was so different an existence from my own.

Today, rail travel is mostly reserved for the poorer classes. The rest of us take planes. But there is something that is lost in this age of air travel: an understanding of how railway lines have transformed many countries from subsistence communities into export economies; an opportunity for connections to be made between communities living along railway lines and the travellers who pass their way.

Last week as we reached the outskirts of Bangkok, we could see a city that had crowded in around the steel arteries connecting it to its furthest outposts and to towns and villages in neighbouring countries. People crossed casually from one side of the tracks to the other in the train's wake; dogs ran alongside us, tails wagging; houses stood beside the tracks, undeterred by the daily schedule.

Though we were travelling in style, it seemed to be the most democratic, the most honest way in which to greet this city, like being welcomed into an acquaintance's home through the back door.

Catherine Marshall is a Sydney-based journalist and travel writer. She was a guest on Belmond's Eastern and Oriental Express.
#LetThemStay reveals the political capital of compassion

AUSTRALIA

Somayra Ismailjee

Since the first Australian churches offered sanctuary to the 267 refugees facing deportation to Nauru last week, a steady stream of voices have joined the call for compassion. Among them now are over 44 churches, five cathedrals, 21 mosques, and the premiers of five states.

The initiative seems to have sparked a nation-wide awakening. On Monday night, for a second time, thousands of people rallied around the country under the banner of #LetThemStay - the hashtag launching a heartfelt campaign from our screens to the streets.

Seas of protesters stood in public spaces holding banners, placards and candles, pleading for a show of humanity.

On the same night, human rights abuses in offshore processing centres continued, reiterating the necessity of the campaign. Australian friends of asylum seekers on Nauru reported that detainees had been physically assaulted by guards for taking extra fruit to eat from the centre.

Such allegations that do not exist in isolation. A senate inquiry into the detention centre on Nauru last year found that there had been 30 official reports of child abuse by staff, 24 of those involving physical contact, and an additional case of excessive force by the end of 2015.

Yet in light of the protests, the cry ‘the tide is turning’ can be heard from refugee advocates and activists across the nation. And though the currency of compassion we have seen blossoming in recent weeks seems a new development, the seeds have been
sown for quite some time.

From the First Home Project in Perth that houses resettled refugees, to the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre that serves hundreds daily, to persistent calls from Gosford Anglican Church to hold onto common decency in the wake of Islamophobic unrest, many have been at work suturing the wounds left on vulnerable people by an emotionally stunted nation-state that has closed its border and its heart.

The levels of psychological damage caused by mandatory detention have been well-documented in adults and children alike. Even the chief medical officer of the Australian Border Force has spoken out on this, and rightly so. The foundations of medical ethics lay in beneficence, a notion that must be revived and universalised to overcome the neglect asylum seekers are forced to endure.

Several of the refugees facing a possible return to Nauru suffer from severe physical ailments, including cancer and terminal illness. For any other patient, the immorality of causing them further harm would be seen as unequivocal; here, our dehumanisation of asylum seekers serves as a twisted justification.

Conservative discourse around granting asylum is framed in the language of loss - refugees are spoken of as a threat to everything from job security to 'our way of life'. Our deterrence policies are founded on a brittle idea of national security as a dire necessity - an attempt to show strength in a time of fear.

We conflate perpetrators of violence overseas with its victims who come to seek asylum, merging them into the same racialised threat. The clearest example of this could be the 2013 name change of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

In our quest for national security, however, we have only served to increase our fragility.

Compassion is one avenue to change. As a political language, compassion is itself a reclamation of power. Extending safety, resources, or even a mere welcome to people in need proves that we have something to give. Strength is embodied by a capacity to aid and assist, rather than in cruelty.

The show of concern by Victorian premier Daniel Andrews rippled through the populace as a reminder that for too long, politics has ignored the affective. Empathy, care and compassion are traits that facilitate human connection, appealing to us on a level of emotion that runs deeper than mere rhetoric. A nation that had abandoned its moral compass is being guided back to it, slowly and instinctively.

From pastors to politicians, doctors and lawyers to comedians, #LetThemStay has united people in a cohesive call for change. As two protesters unfurl a banner from the Yarra Bridge today, a week on from the beginning of the campaign, it's evident that a resurgence of compassion is here to stay.

The collective humanity of the Australian nation hinges now, more than ever, on the undoing of apathy and indifference to ensure a pursuit of justice. While the momentum continues to build, it's crucial that our hearts do not harden once the dust has settled.
Somayra Ismailjee is the recipient of Eureka Street's inaugural Margaret Dooley Young Writers Fellowship.

Somayra is a 17-year-old writer from Perth, of Indian and Burmese heritage. She has an interest in current affairs, ethics and social justice, particularly the intersections of racism, Islamophobia, misogyny and classism. Her work has appeared in New Matilda and Right Now Inc among other publications.

Follow her on Twitter @somayra_

Main image: Andrew Hill, Flickr CC
Puppets' portrait of privilege and pathos

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert


As screenwriter for comic such oddities as Being John Malkovich and Adaptation, Kaufman delineated a particular type of over-educated, middle-class, white male character. His protagonists are artists whose alienation and self-loathing is at odds with their social privilege, and whose creative drive entails a winnowing for authenticity or immortality that leads them inexorably down the rabbit hole of their own navels: the search for meaning as the ultimate act of self-absorption.

This Kaufmanesque archetype (which is arguably, and at times blatantly, an avatar of Kaufman himself) was fully actualised in the character of Caden Cotard, the egomaniacal theatremaker played by Philip Seymour Hoffman in 2008's Synecdoche, New York, Kaufman's directorial debut. And he emerges again fully formed in the shape of Michael Stone, the celebrity self-help author adrift in a sea of menacing existential fog in Kaufman's long-awaited follow-up, Anomalisa.

The film spans a night and a day in a Cincinnati hotel, where Michael (voiced by Thewlis) is scheduled to speak at a conference. All is not well with Michael. If his palpable resignation isn't evidence enough of this, consider the fact that every human he meets has the same face, and the same voice (that of regular Kaufman collaborator Noonan); from the garrulous taxi driver who drives him from the airport to the hotel to the wife with whom he shares a few words over the phone.

During the course of the evening, Michael has what develops into an ugly and insulting encounter with a former flame; later he meets and drinks with a pair of women who have come to hear him speak. He is drawn to one of them in particular, Lisa, who, aside from Michael himself, is the only character in the film to be voiced by an actor other than Noonan (Leigh has that honour). Amid his existence of depressing sameness, Lisa is an anomaly (hence the film's title).

It is worth noting, if it is not already apparent from this description, that Anomalisa is a work of stop-motion animation; the characters portrayed by humanoid puppets whose open facial seams serve as a constant reminder of their artificiality. Kaufman's co-director Johnson is known for his work on more puerile 'adult' animations including Moral Orel and Mary Shelley's Frankenhole; together they tune the form into a story that is sensitive and deeply humane.
The film consists predominantly of several long, gently paced scenes, where the drama plays out in the dialogue and the finely nuanced characterisations of the puppets. Central to these is the nightlong encounter between Michael and Lisa, whose intimacies include what is surely the most genuinely touching puppet sex scene ever put to film. That the characters are so recognisably, vulnerably human is testament to the excellence of the writing, animation and voice performances.

There is an ominous undercurrent to all of this, implicit in the fact that Michael's attraction to Lisa is based on her being new and different, which are necessarily transient qualities. The extent to which the encounter exploits Lisa and is an outworking of a deeper impending crisis for Michael is unpacked during the film's surreal final act. Needless to say that for iterations of the Kaufmanesque archetype, fulfilment is not to be found in the indulgence of selfish impulses.

Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of Eureka Street.
Gospel brutality reborn in our harrowing of refugee children

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

The High Court decision on detention in Nauru was brought down just before the Christian season of Lent. It left the government free and determined to deport many young mothers and children to Nauru.

For the mothers and children deportation will bring new trauma with renewed threat to their already precarious mental health. For the Australian public it again makes us ask what brutality, even to children, we are ready to tolerate.

The pain of the children and the savagery of their treatment are suitable subjects for Lenten reflection.

Religious feasts, like Lent and Ash Wednesday which introduces it, are often linked to significant public events, particularly those which are catastrophic, violent or shameful. We speak, for example, of the Tet offensive, of the Easter Uprising and Bloody Sunday in Ireland, of the Yom Kippur War, of the Ash Wednesday bushfires.

Such seasons of reflection also encourage us to be more sensitive to the large public events which form their context. This year violence in the Middle East and the vast number of people forced from their own nations to seek protection where they can find it are a sombre background to Lent.

They also fit: Lent begins with the ashes of illusory hopes, leads to the cynical torture and execution of Jesus and the apparent failure of his movement, and ends in the new
hope of Easter day.

Australia’s harrowing of refugees and their children fits uncomfortably well with Lent’s universal evocation of suffering and torment.

Their flight from persecution and violence in their own nations, their incarceration on Nauru and Christmas Island, their brief hope when brought to Australia to bear and rear their children, and the snuffing out of that hope with a return to Nauru where their children will find no flourishing of life, echo the journey of Jesus in Passion Week when, too, the crowd applauded each new humiliation.

We might hope with powerless sympathy that those brutally treated will find in their experience and their own religious traditions intimations of the hope and strength associated with the Christian Easter.

The association between public life and the foundational religious stories is not merely descriptive. The stories and their characters also map an ethical framework for interpreting public events.

Brutal Herod, doubting Thomas, vacillating Pilate, treacherous Judas, scheming Caiaphas and enduring Mary enshrine for Christians ways in which people should and should not act. They are images that help us evaluate what is done in our times and also assess our own prejudices, actions or failure to act. They represent a call to personal judgment.

But the naming of events can also shape the capacity of a society to respond to new challenges. The events of Bloody Sunday, for example, made it difficult to promote just and harmonious relationships between Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Island. Naming it Bloody Sunday, with its religious reference and ethical weight, made it even more difficult.

For the deportation of children and their mothers to Nauru, the story with most resonance is that of Herod’s murder of the children around Bethlehem for dynastic, and so security, reasons.

The story gave rise to a feast remembering the children killed - the Holy Innocents. Story and feast stand as an assertion of the dignity of each human being, especially the smallest and most vulnerable, and as a condemnation of political brutality.

The story also warns the government of unintended consequences. If public outrage at the brutality involved in the deportation of children to Nauru leads government leaders and ministers to be identified with King Herod or similar monsters, they may lose the moral authority and respect they will need to carry through difficult decisions.

In times favourable to them this may not be a disaster. But at a time when the challenges facing Australia demand strong leadership and policies that will inevitably anger powerful interests, government leaders will need strong moral capital and support from across society.

The obloquy that may follow from pursuing mothers and children to despair and diminishment could strip the government of its moral authority and so of its capacity to lead change. On the other hand, of course, government leaders may be right in their judgment that no one will care.
Either way Lent invites reflection, even on what is in the government's self-interest. But for those who enter Lent on its own terms it invites us to hold in our hearts and cry out for the people, particularly children, who are dragged along the way of the cross.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of *Eureka Street*.

Main image: Takver, *Flickr CC*
Notes (in Latin) on a football scandal

AUSTRALIA

Brian Matthews

William the Conqueror commissioned the Domesday Book in 1085, 19 years after his successful invasion of England. Allowing for some significant exclusions - among them the city of London - this extraordinary survey of the country was completed by the end of the summer of 1086.

Its 413 pages were written in Latin by one scribe and checked by one assistant. Its purpose was to provide William with information about his subjects' assets and the amount of tax the country could sustain.

In the process, of course, the Domesday Book gave a detailed picture of the state of the economy and the society 20 years on from the massive disruption of the conquest.

All over England and in parts of Wales towns and villages awaited the visit of the royal commissioners who would record land ownership, tenancy, livestock, buildings, woodland, natural resources such as animals and fish, farm equipment, and much else. When the commissioners arrived, it was, as people in later years came to see it, a kind of Day of Judgment - hence the name: Doomsday.

Sleepy villages like Alstonefield, on the Staffordshire/Derbyshire border, with its fine village green and population of a few hundred people spread thinly through the district, were of interest to the commissioners who recorded that in the year of their enquiries, 1086, Roger Earl of Shrewsbury held the Manor and its land which they assessed at '3 virgates'. A virgate was a land measurement roughly equal to 30 acres which in turn is about 12 hectares.
But because the survey was not as exhaustive or as wide-ranging as may have been originally planned - William's death in September 1087 was one of several events which sapped the enterprise of some of its original momentum - there were villages which, waiting apprehensively for the commissioners to arrive, were spared such notoriety.

To be overlooked by the Domesday commissioners turned out to be a blessing then but a pity later on. In modern times 'mentioned in the Domesday Book' lends a certain cachet to some otherwise unexceptional villages and towns.

One that was spared a visitation was the Hertfordshire village of Eslingadene. As historian Henry Bateson notes, 'Neither the church nor the manor is mentioned in the Domesday Book.'

As a matter of fact, it seems that, while the years and centuries rolled by, not much at all was especially noteworthy about Eslingadene. It was, as Bateson describes it, 'A placid, picturesque village, typically English in its scenery ... it commands a magnificent view across the Lea Valley to where the distant skyline is broken by Burnham Beeches.

'Never of any importance, [it] has played but little part in England's history, and its historic associations are trifling.'

But one thing did change. The town, which in the tenth century had been known as Esyngden and which became Isendene and then Eslingadene over the next 200 years, seemed in some odd, abstract way to enjoy its chameleon character. If it had nothing much else to offer, it would damn well keep on changing its name if not its face. Unmentioned in the Domesday Book to be sure, but bobbing up every now and then under a new titular disguise.

And so it was that, in 1545, though many still called it Eslingadene and a few diehards stuck to Isendene, when Henry VIII granted the local manor to Giles Bridges, a London citizen and wool merchant, the manor, consistent with an alternative line of nomenclature stretching back to the tenth century, was called Essendon.

And Essendon it remained. One blot on its impressive escutcheon - Party chevronwise sable and argent three griffons' heads razed and counter coloured - occurred when a certain John Middleton (presumably not a relative of the present Duchess of Cambridge, but who knows) petitioned in 1666 for the restoration of his 'setting dog taken from him with affronting language' by Viscount Cranborne, who is described in the petition as lord of the manor of Essendon.

This was probably the same 'John Middleton of Essendon, esquire' who in 1665 was presented with others at quarter sessions for 'riotous assembly and entry into the close of Richard Pooley at Essendon and stealing firewood'.

But Eslingadene/Isendene/Essendon was its customary quiet and bucolic self when Richard Green, one of its respectable citizens, farewelled it in the 1850s, migrated to Australia, settled near Melbourne and, honouring his native village and his upbringing, called the area Essendon.

Like its northern hemisphere namesake, Essendon, needless to say, does not appear in the Domesday Book, but Macbeth-like vaulting ambition, disjoined from care and humanity, has enrolled it in a modern Doomsday register and stained its name in a way...
that seems ineradicable.

A digital search of the name 'Essendon' simply brings up a torrent of references to Thymosin beta 4, tb4, scandal, and so on, replacing and overwhelming so much that is honourable and proper. So that if a latter day Domesday scribe were to annotate the name 'Essendon' in his records, he might have to write, however reluctantly or sadly: *Omni ope atque opera*. Whatever it takes.

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

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas
Nuclear waste danger knows no state borders

ENVIRONMENT

Michele Madigan

The South Australia Royal Commission into the nuclear fuel cycle will give its interim report at the Adelaide Town Hall at 6pm next Monday 15 February.

It is likely the Commission will recommend that the South Australian Premier’s plan to import international high-level radioactive waste proceed, despite obvious risks and clear dangers.

At the same time, federal plans for a national dump - likely to be located at a remote site in South Australia, NSW, Queensland or the Northern Territory - continue, with comments due on 11 March 2016.

It would be a mistake for anyone living outside of South Australia to think that the premier’s plan is just a South Australian problem. Transport and containment risks are hugely significant. State boundaries are no guarantees of safety.

Professor John Veevers of Macquarie University notes the 'tonnes of enormously dangerous radioactive waste in the northern hemisphere, 20,000km from its destined dump in Australia &hellip; must remain intact for at least 10,000 years.

'These magnitudes - of tonnage, lethality, distance of transport and time - entail great inherent risk.'

In 1998 when the federal government identified the central northern area of South Australia to be site for a proposed national radioactive waste dump, it was not only South
Australians who were concerned.

In 2003 the mayors of Sutherland, Bathurst, Blue Mountains, Broken Hill, Dubbo, Griffith, Lithgow, Orange, Wagga Wagga, Auburn, Bankstown, Blacktown, Fairfield, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith - communities along potential transport routes - opposed 'any increase in nuclear waste production until a satisfactory resolution occurs to the waste repository question'.

The NSW parliamentary inquiry into radioactive waste found 'there is no doubt that the transportation of radioactive waste increases the risk of accident or incident - including some form of terrorist intervention'.

The Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation itself acknowledges there are one to two 'incidents' every year involving the transportation of radioactive materials to and from its Lucas Heights reactor plant.

In a post Fukushima world, the dangers of radioactivity seem self-evident. However it seems that the ever-active pro nuclear lobby continues to do all possible to deny or conceal the following simple facts:

Radioactive waste gives off energy that is dangerous to humans, animals and plants. It can cause cancer, which may only grow many years after exposure. If such waste gets into the soil, air or underground water then it can get into our bodies, so even communities not living near the waste dump can be affected.

It is not medical waste, which decays quickly, that is the problem, but other types, such high-level international waste, which take tens of thousands of years.

The environmentalist Dr Jim Green advised one community shortlisted for the proposed national dump: 'the long lived intermediate waste would ... be sitting in an above-ground shed ... for an 'interim' period likely to last for many decades since absolutely no effort is being made to find a disposal site for it ...

'The risks ... pretty much anything you can imagine has happened at one or another radioactive waste repository around the world: fires, leaks, water infiltration and corrosion of waste drums, a chemical explosion ...'

With the federal government seemingly having no intention of building a suitable underground site, it's certain that just one state government, intent on making supposedly huge profits out of importing high-level waste, is not envisaging spending the billions required to build such a facility either.

These problems of transport and containment are extremely serious and remain unaddressed. Just one state premier is intent on importing high-level waste from other countries, but it's not just one state or territory being put at risk.

Clearly federal and state governments of both persuasions continue to see Australia's vast expanses as simply a commodity to be exploited, whatever the enormous risks involved.
Michele Madigan is a Sister of St Joseph who has spent the past 38 years working with Aboriginal people in remote areas of South Australia and in Adelaide. Her work has included advocacy and support for senior Aboriginal women of Coober Pedy in their campaign against the proposed national radioactive dump.
Fleeing Syria's pious knights

CREATIVE

Geoff Page

The re-run

1. Splashing happily ashore, they land amid the tanning limbs then keep on veering north. Not everyone has made it though; a three-year-old with little shoes, washed-up face down in Turkey, is flicked around the world.

2. Google Earth within the palm has shown them where to head - though not exactly where a phone can be re-charged.

3. The poorer half of Paradise, is rolling out barbed wire, remembering the Ottomans in 1529. The pious knights of 1640, those fine sectarians, who charged for thirty years across the northern sweeps of Europe, are born again in Syria with new nomenclatures; so once again the hapless foresee it's time to move.

4. Doctors, dentists, engineers straggle with them also. Not all who flee are peasants, shepherds, luckless artisans. Mixed in with the cheerless too, some Warriors of God who plan Kalashnikovs for later.

5. There were some cheers in Munich station but not all Eden proves to be so free with food and toys. There's something deeper in the blood.
They have that sense of déja vu: horsemen, pikes and princes.

6. navigate by phone. Playground 101.'Hello, Other Girl. I'm Milla', she chirpily begins, just gone two and proving fluent.'Other Girl', we're told, is 'Freya', somewhat shorter, no less smart. Two mothers and a grandpa are talking here together.'Race you to the swings!' yells Freya. A life-long bond begins right here. As we converse, they climb and swing and chase from this to that, shouting backwards over shoulders. Short or tall, there's no distinction on dips and slips and roundabouts as now two older kids appear, a boy and girl of Milla's height. We adults, keeping half an eye, are following the plot. Allegiances are all forsworn. Freya runs away at speed. With all this new sophistication, Milla's hardly seen her leave. She's climbing with the big kids now but something's not quite right. She's noticed Freya standing there, forty metres off, as if about to stamp a foot. At this point, Freya, 'Other Girl', runs to join her mother. Our gossip's not much interrupted. Then Milla comes up too and asks 'Why you cwanky with me, Freya?' Freya, holding close to mother, offers no reply. The older two, the boy and girl, who'd not announced their names are walking off without a wave. It's not quite practical to chase them so Milla has another try: 'Why you cwanky with me, Freya?' Our adult, anodyne there-there can cut no sort of ice. 'Time we all went home,' we say. Playground 101. All done. The future's on its way.

Geoff Page is a Canberra-based poet. His most recent books are New Selected Poems, Improving the News and Aficionado: A Jazz Memoir. He also edited The Best Australian Poems 2014.
Hope lies beyond latest climate shock therapy

ENVIRONMENT

Lyn Bender

News about climate change can be depressing. But it was downright shocking to learn that budget cuts to CSIRO have led to the decimation of the agency's climate science. This despite the fact that CEO Larry Marshall says climate change has been 'proven' and that now is the time for action.

Hardest hit will be modelling and monitoring of the oceans and atmosphere. Predictions will be compromised, as will observation and monitoring if our Paris targets and evidence based adaptation and mitigation.

The earth is very ill. The habitat of humans and earth's ecosystems and dependant species are in severe decline. Should our rising emissions continue, we will bequeath a ravaged planet to our descendants.

Pope Francis - the most compassionate hopeful and scientifically informed Pope of all time - is not holding out for a miracle. Speaking prior to COP21 in Paris, the Pope declared: 'We are at the limit of a suicide, to say a strong word.' Our world is on a suicidal course, unless we pay attention and pull out of this nosedive into the sixth great extinction.

Psychologically, we may defend, deny, delude, distract, rail against the truth and shoot the messanger; but that won't save the earth. We may sacrifice Africa, the Pacific Islands, Bangladesh and their people, to drought and inundation; but the rampaging of an anthropogenic changed climate will get us all in the end. That poor and less developed
nations will suffer first and most is cold and immoral comfort.

We tell ourselves it won't happen to us. That is a psychological defence against an unbearable reality. It can be our fatal undoing, leading to a failure to heed warnings.

Professor Robert Manne asks in his Monthly essay 'Diabolical' why we have failed to address climate change despite knowing its human causes and dire consequences. Australia's emissions have risen to all time highs and will not peak before 2030.

I have been told - and research shows - that climate news is seen as boring and repetitive, and should not be doomsday-ish or frighten the readers, otherwise they will switch off. Terrorism, political intrigue, sport, jobs and the economy are the favoured news items.

Alan Rusbridge, as retiring editor of the Guardian, called climate the biggest story of our lives. He regretted not waking people up to this. 'It is such an enormous story that you would expect it to be on the front page every day - and it almost never is.'

The media has, ironically, reported on its own failure to report climate change. In Canada, the Toronto Star noted that while individual stories on climate change were being reported, 'The big picture is still missing, as are sustained, deeply informed efforts to push public policy in the right direction.'

US Newsweek reported on media distortion of, and failure to cover, climate science. In Australia a report by Professor Wendy Bacon concluded in 2013 that a third of Australian media distorted, and promoted doubt of, climate science.

Such doubts and distortions could prove to be lethal. 2015 is the hottest year ever recorded. It has produced droughts, floods, fires, tornados, increased vector born disease and mass animal deaths. All of this was predicted by Al Gore over ten years ago.

But the truth is still inconvenient. Vested interests have impeded action and the wheels of our killer fossil fuel system keep turning.

You get the government you deserve. Australian citizens have outsourced responsibility for refugees and climate protection. The ease of bipartisan agreement on such crucial dilemmas confirms the point. A dormant electorate creates a negligent, sleeping, self-satisfied and corrupt government.

Australia is one of the worst global emitters. The planet has warmed by one degree. We are half a degree from our COP21 agreed 'safe' limit. The warming rising ocean contains nearly 5.25 trillion tons of plastic. Over 72,000 hectares of Tasmania's ancient forests have burned over this extended fire season.

Is there hope?

Coal and gas are tanking, with major energy company AGL pulling out of CSG exploration in Queensland and NSW. Renewable energy is on the rise globally. The conversation has shifted from outright denial of climate change to ways of responding.

We are halfway through our climate denial therapy.

As media increasingly join the dots on climate change, we are facing the truth. It is the
beginning of the end of the age of climate denial.

Humans ignore seemingly distant threats, but respond to the visible and palpably immediate. We can see and feel these threats right now.

It is in our hands. If we take active responsibility we have reason to hope.

Lyn Bender is a Melbourne psychologist. Follow her on Twitter @Lynestel

Main image: Takver, Flickr CC
**Electing a president in an age of superheroes**

**INTERNATIONAL**

**Jim McDermott**

After a nightmarishly interminable American pre-primary campaign process, filled with enough candidates to fill a clown car, the American polls finally opened in Iowa last week. And though Donald Trump only came in second, odds remain very solidly in his favour that he will be the Republican nominee for President come the summer.

Anyone who insists they understand why Trump remains so popular in the United States is lying. Even after all these months, it's a mystery. He's run before; did poorly. He's a billionaire who has had four businesses file for bankruptcy. His policies might as well be tweets, they're so lacking in detail.

And he regularly says mean, indefensible, appalling things, such as his comment a week ago that 'I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters.'

Almost any other candidate would be out of the race after one such comment. Trump makes them weekly. And polls suggest his popularity soars highest when he does.

For me, one story of this election - and recent elections, as well - is that when it comes to President, many Americans want someone who speaks to their own deepest dreams and ideals and insists that such things are attainable. A champion.

In 2008 Barack Obama captivated the American electorate with his persistent refrain that 'Yes we can' pull our country out of the quagmire of wars, arrogance and economic collapse that the Bush/Cheney presidency had presided over, and build the fairer, more
welcoming nation that we wanted.

Trump's vision of reality is almost the polar opposite of Obama's, a sort of post-apocalyptic hellscape where foreigners, the unemployed (and women) are eroding society all around us. But, he, too, has positioned himself as a champion of those filled with frustration, insisting it doesn't have to be this way.

And through this lens, the relationship between his verbal abuse and his popularity makes a kind of sense. He's the candidate who 'tells it like it is', who is unafraid to throw a punch at anybody, especially 'sure things' like Jeb Bush or Hillary Clinton that the political establishment has been trying to force the electorate to accept.

Underlying all the bluster, misogyny and phobia, Trump's message is that nobody has the right to push you around. And that speaks to people, far more than experience or demonstrated expertise.

That dichotomy of romance versus resume is even clearer in the Democratic campaign.

Bernie Sanders is in many ways the Trump of the left, a political outsider who says what progressive-leaning Americans have long been thinking - that the wealth disparity in American society is appalling and unjust; that our young people are being driven into completely shocking levels of debt; that our future is left in the hands of fossil fuel companies with no real interest in saving the planet.

And most of all, that it doesn't have to be this way. That we can fight back.

And much like Trump, Sanders' position papers offer little substance. He's a candidate of the dream, rather than the practicalities. He has been in state and federal politics since the 1960s, but until 2015 he was an independent, with no political affiliation.

That intellectual and political independence allows him to speak truth to power (though not when it comes to the gun lobby). But how it will translate into votes in Congress is hard to know.

Clinton, in the meantime, has more political and government experience than anyone on either side of the aisle - in fact, probably more than all of them put together. She's done it all: lawyer, state government, First Lady, Senator, Secretary of State. Truly, when it comes to competence and experience, I would be hard pressed to name the last candidate equally qualified. 

But many Democrats don't see in her a champion for their dreams. As much of a rock star as she is on the world stage, she's at best an average campaigner and at times terrible: stiff, repressed, wonky, out of touch. In the summer her media team sent out a tweet inviting students to describe their experience of student debt in three emojis. You could hear Twitter gasp (then pounce) at the bizarre misstep.

There's also a lot of fears on both sides of the aisle that she's just plain dishonest, that she and her husband have always seen themselves as above the truth in any number of ways (a feeling her secret email account only reinforces). And that no matter how much Sanders pushes her platform to the left, none of it means anything about how she'll actually govern after the election.

Those fears could be entirely correct. Honestly, in some ways it's a criticism that could be levelled at Obama, with his hearty embrace of drone strikes and the prosecution of
whistleblowers.

But at the same time, it's hard not to see this American hunger for heroes as a dangerous Achilles heel right now. The ability to articulate a population's hopes or fears does not demonstrate the aptitude to get anything done. And the insistence that things don't have to stay as they are is not itself a concrete, realisable plan for change.

In this age of social media, where the capacity to instantaneously express an opinion online seems to lead people to believe they've 'made a difference', perhaps we no longer can see that distinction. If only our choice of president was equally inconsequential.

Jim McDermott is an American Jesuit and screenwriter.
Offers of sanctuary brighten Australia's refugee dark age

INTERNATIONAL

Justin Glyn

Anglican and Uniting Churches across Australia have made headlines by offering sanctuary to those who stand to be returned to Nauru under the latest High Court ruling in M68, including 37 babies and a raped five-year-old whose attacker still resides there. In doing so, they have been rediscovering an old concept and reminding the government what refugee law was for in the first place.

The tradition of sanctuary is an ancient one. In the biblical book of Numbers, chapter 35 verses 11-32, the Israelites are commanded to establish cities of refugee to which those accused of homicide could flee.

The early and Mediaeval Church developed the concept into a penitential one. A criminal, sorry for their sins, could gain immunity by seeking sanctuary in a church.

This was particularly useful in the rather fluid legal environment of Europe in the centuries after the fall of Rome. Central authority was often lacking and the Church provided a functional system for meting out a basic form of justice. Sanctuary, often coupled with exile after a period of time, provided an escape valve and a way of avoiding brutal blood feuds lasting for generations.

Later Mediaeval canon law, increasingly influenced by the newly revived Roman law and the rise of the nation state, came to see sanctuary as a matter of jurisdiction. While the early church had seen it as part of a penitential process and a circuit breaker in resolving disputes, the new generation of Roman trained canon lawyers saw it as a matter of jurisdiction - the state's rule stopped at the Church door.
Needless to say, as nation states became more powerful, especially after the 16th century Reformations, that argument cut less and less ice with secular governments.

Instead, the concept of sanctuary got transferred onto the international law stage. Now, it was no longer the Church that was sacrosanct but the territories of other states. As a result, states dealing with each other would regard each others' missions as sovereign territory or, at the least, immune from the law of the state on whose territory they were located.

As a result, the concept of protection in another country's embassy came about. This became a particularly well-used custom in Latin America and is far from dead - as seen in examples like that of Julian Assange and his long stay in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

The concept of territorial protection extended further. While refugee in exile and extradition treaties are as old as history, the law of extradition and asylum really only took centre stage in the 20th century, when detailed principles were developed as to when states would agree to extradite people to other countries - and when they would refuse.

A landmark in this area was the Refugee Convention 1951, when countries around the world determined to take steps to avoid a repeat of the horrors of the Nazi Shoah.

In Australia, the wheel has now come full circle. The state is unwilling to accept its protection obligations under the Refugee Convention (at least in respect of people arriving by boat). And the majority of the High Court has declared that it is also unwilling to make the state change its mind. A retrospective removal of the plaintiff's rights after the court case began, and a nominal transfer of Australia's obligations to Nauru, have sufficed to ensure that Justice's blindfold remains securely in place.

In these circumstances, where the organs of the state are (as in the Dark Ages) unable or unwilling to protect the vulnerable, it is the churches who are speaking out once again.

This is not without precedent. While churches have had no legal rights to grant sanctuary for centuries (and even Canon Law's provisions in this regard were finally removed by the 1983 Code), both Catholic and Protestant churches have, on occasion, granted informal sanctuary to asylum seekers in Latin America, the United States and Europe.

Their calculation has been that to have jackbooted troopers kicking down the doors of houses of worship would be such a bad look that the fear of a PR backlash would provide some degree of protection. It has, surprisingly, often worked.

Unfortunately, the record is not unmixed. The time spent in sanctuary takes its toll on people who are already damaged. In this case, they are likely to be even more so, since they have the combined legacies of overseas persecution and Australia's 'welcome' in Nauru weighing on them even before they enter upon a new life in hiding in a Church.

There is also no guarantee that the optics of kicking down church doors will matter to a government content to return a five-year-old into the vicinity of his rapist. There are examples of previous Australian offers of sanctuary increasing the government's determination to go through with deportation.

So this is no easy solution. Nevertheless, the offer of sanctuary does indicate the presence of people of good will who remember a tradition of offering shelter in the face
of persecution and indifference. It speaks to the hope of penitence of changed hearts in a world grown cold to the cries of the suffering.

Time will tell whether or not, in this year which Pope Francis has designated as one of mercy, Australia's churches can help its government and people rediscover the meaning of sanctuary.

Justin Glyn SJ is studying for the priesthood. Previously he practised law in South Africa and New Zealand and has a PhD in administrative and international law.
No retrospective fix for traumatised refugees

AUSTRALIA

Kerry Murphy

On 5 May 1992, a group of Cambodian asylum seekers in detention was preparing for their court case in the Federal Court the next day. Many had been in detention since their arrival in November 1989. Their legal team was confident that this detention was not lawful, and they had a hearing in the Federal Court set for 6 May to consider the application for the Cambodians to be released from detention.

What the Cambodians did not know was that that evening, the Labor Government under Prime Minister Keating would rush through a Migration Amendment Bill, supported by the Liberal opposition, which legalised this long detention.

When the lawyers arrived at court the next day, the goal posts had not only shifted, all the rules had dramatically changed.

Eventually the case was heard in the High Court, in Lim v Minister for Immigration (1992) 176 CLR 1. Although the Cambodians lost this application to be released, the High Court held that prior to the amendment of 5 May, they were unlawfully detained. The government again reacted and passed a law that all the detained Cambodians were only entitled to $1 a day for their unlawful detention.

An insulting offer of compensation. I recall a Labor senator telling me that 'a dollar is a lot of money in Cambodia'. 'But we are not in Cambodia.' The senator walked away.

It is not the only time governments have used the Parliament to change the law in order to win cases before the court. It is an unfair practice, as only one party to a court case
has the power to do this.

The M68 case decided on Wednesday, which challenged the detention and transfer to Nauru of asylum seekers, was effectively won by the government because they changed the law retrospectively to make sure they would win. Although one judge, Justice Gordon, the newest judge on the court, wrote a strong dissent, the other six judges found for the government, mainly because of the retrospective change.

The change was the insertion of s198AHA on 30 June 2015, with bipartisan support. This amendment was made to operate retrospectively from 18 August 2012.

This was not an arbitrary date, but a critical date when the agreement with the Nauruan Government was made to accept asylum seekers as part of Prime Minister Gillard's attempt to slow the boats, after the High Court threw out the controversial Malaysian refugee swap plan in 2011 in the M70 case.

In August 2012, Labor amended the Migration Act (yet again) after the loss in M70, with reluctant bipartisan support. While the changes were then thought to be watertight, the Government's view changed after the asylum seeker known as M68 commenced her High Court challenge to being returned to Nauru in September 2015.

She claimed the detention in Nauru was not lawful in Nauru, but also that it was really detention by Australia, because all the bills were paid by the Australian government.

The challenge revisited the 24-year-old Lim case which had set out principles about the lawfulness of detention. Detention had to be for a proper administrative purpose, such as assessing a case. It could not be punitive because punitive detention could only be ordered by a court - not a bureaucrat.

The majority of the High Court held that a question of interpretation of Nauruan law was not needed. As a footnote, the High Court of Australia is also the highest court of appeal for Nauru, but it was Australian law, not Nauruan law, that was relevant here.

The addition of s198AHA on 30 June 2015, with retrospective effect back to 18 August 2012, meant that while the government may not have acted within the law to transfer M68 to Nauru originally, that didn't matter because the law was changed retrospectively, so the questionable legal actions were all fixed.

The Lim principle was considered, but for three judges it did not matter because s198AHA was all that mattered. Other judges considered it, and no doubt lawyers will need to study it to see whether the wall of mandatory detention has a crack.

Legally the case may be over and M68 can be returned to Nauru. Politically the government does not want to be seen as going soft of detainees, not after their aggressive 'stop the boats' campaign for years in opposition and now in government.

Also it may undermine the punitive intentions of the detention and offshore processing policy. You do not send people to Nauru at considerable expense simply to help develop Nauruan refugee resettlement. It is a deterrent for others, and a punishment for the asylum seekers caught up in the policy.

It seems unlikely that we will ever be able to approach this contentious area with a humanitarian and reasoned approach, given the fact that since 1992 the policies of both Labor and the Coalition have been reactive and punitive. And it is easy to make
retrospective laws to fix a legal problem. If only we could all fix our mistakes retrospectively!

In the meantime, the serious allegations of sexual assault of detainees and children on Nauru remain unresolved. Assuming these offences are true, then no retrospective fix will be possible for those people who fled out of fear of persecution, only to face a punitive and hostile policy.

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Main image: Louise Coghill, Love Makes A Way, Flickr CC
The Bernie Sanders Factor in US and Australian elections

INTERNATIONAL

Fatima Measham

As the US election year warms up with caucuses in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina, it is worth noting that the spectacle of the nomination process can mute certain realities. Candidates generate quite a bit of heat and noise within their party, but whether a presidential nominee actually wins the majority of votes in the Electoral College is another matter.

There is also the longer, post-election context: how much would your nominee set back the party for future races, if they lose?

One factor that has become inescapable, particularly for Republicans, is that their white conservative base is shrinking. Projections by Pew Research Center indicate that in 50 years white Americans will constitute less than half of the population.

So while the Republican slate has perhaps enlivened some of its constituencies with nativist campaigns and evangelical appeals, it is difficult to imagine such a strategy securing the longevity of the party.

Republican pollster Whit Ayres wrote in the Wall Street Journal in March 2015: 'Groups that form the core of GOP support - older whites, blue-collar whites, married people and rural residents - are declining as a proportion of the electorate.' Minorities, along with young people, gays and single women, are not only growing but lean Democratic.

Ayres concluded that in order to win presidential elections, Republican candidates would have to bear 'an inclusive message, a welcoming tone and an aggressive effort to appeal to the new America that is already here'. It goes without saying that the complete opposite has ensued.

While it is not entirely sensible to extrapolate developments in the United States to Australia, it is worth speculating on the impact of our own changing demographics. Are the Liberal and Labor parties equipped to take advantage of these shifts? Are they appealing to a new Australia that is already here?

The 2011 Census indicates that more than a quarter of the Australian population was born overseas, and a further fifth has at least one overseas-born parent. The proportion of our Europe-born population has declined (52 per cent in 2001 to 40 per cent in 2011) even as our Asia-born proportion has increased (24 per cent to 33 per cent).

Such migrant patterns would surely have an impact on the composition of our electorates. It is hard to tell at this stage whether any major political party is accounting
for the policy sensitivities of this increasingly significant cohort.

For now, the apparent advantage lies with Labor. Veteran psephologist Antony Green found that the Labor vote is higher in electorates with a higher proportion of the population born in a non-English speaking country. Out of 26 electorates with more than a quarter of such residents, 24 are usually held by Labor (Bennelong made 25, when Maxine McKew took it from the Liberals in 2007).

There are of course complexities around the way migrants vote, including the fact that factors such as class can play as significant a role as ethnicity. But it remains to be seen whether they will continue to be an asset for Labor, given that young, second- and third-generation migrants are less partisan than previous generations.

In this regard, it bears pondering whether the Bernie Sanders phenomenon, captured by the ridiculously narrow margin between him and Hillary Clinton in Iowa, offers any strategies for non-majors. Sanders - along with Jeremy Corbyn’s successful bid for UK Labour leadership and the rise of Podemos in Spain - demonstrates the rhetorical potency of renewal; of politics and business not as usual.

It is the sort of thing that resonates most strongly with disaffected young people, particularly the post-recession generation. The prominence of Sanders, Corbyn and Podemos’ Pablo Iglesias is due to their critique of not just the other side of politics, but their own. They called out, within their particular contexts, the complicity between major parties. It has given them quite a bit of mileage.

Beyond the tumult of this election year, then, political parties on both sides of the Pacific may well have no choice but to contend with the challenges posed by electorates that are compellingly diverse, newly empowered and increasingly hostile to the status quo.

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The problem of privilege in transgender stories

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

The Danish Girl (M). Director: Tom Hooper. Starring: Eddie Redmayne, Alicia Vikander. 120 minutes

As a white, middle-class, straight, cisgendered man, I am conscious of the extent to which the chips of social privilege have been stacked in my favour. As such there are some public conversations that I am patently unqualified to enter. One of these is the sometimes fierce debate that exists between some feminists and some members or supporters of the transgender community.

On one hand, I appreciate the perspective that those who were born biologically female contend with a particular socialisation and set of inequalities with deep historical roots. On the other, the increasing mainstream recognition of and respect for the experiences of transgender people is necessary to the flourishing and wellbeing of this group. Those experiences are theirs to own.

The Danish Girl is the latest in a line of films and series (Transparent, Dallas Buyers Club, Transamerica) that may have contributed to, but more likely simply reflect, the growing mainstream understanding of transgenderism. It is an account of the life of Danish artist Einar Wegener, who in the early 1930s was one of the first people to undergo gender reassignment surgery, to become Lili Elbe.

But whose story is it? Hooper, the director, and Redmayne (Einar/Lili), are white, straight, cisgendered men. Viewed in the best light, the film is their attempt to engage empathetically with the lived experience of another - one of storytelling's noblest goals. But it also invites being read as the appropriation by the privileged of the experiences of the marginalised, for commercial and critical gain.

One criterion by which we might judge the extent to which it is exploitative is the authenticity and nuance of its portrayal. There are many shades to the central character, as scripted and acted; we see both the pain and the joy of Einar's awakening to his female self, Lili, from her initial stirrings, to attempts to repress her socially and medically, to the physical agony and liberation of the surgery.

On the other hand, there is an undeniable rightness to the objections raised by some members of the transgender community to the casting of a non-transgender person in a transgender role (as there has been previously regarding Jared Leto in Dallas Buyers Club and Jeffrey Tambor in Transparent). Will this come to be seen in future years as the
transgender equivalent to blackface?

In one haunting but telling scene, Einar goes to a peep show and studiously mirrors the movements of a naked woman. Similarly, Redmayne's Lili is a composite of perceived 'feminine' tics and gestures. This performed hyper-femininity is apparently intended to convey Lili's insecurity about her newly realised womanhood. But to the casual viewer, it is a constant reminder that Redmayne is acting - perhaps on his way to a second Oscar.

This placing of womanhood in a box that consists of fey hand movements, batted eyelids and a fixation on 'pretty' garments has other consequences. It plays into concerns some feminists express regarding the symbols that some transgender people identify as markers of womanhood (for example, while Caitlyn Jenner may enjoy banter about hair and makeup, these are not womanly characteristics per se).

It is one of the pitfalls of telling a story about marginalisation from a perspective of privilege that you can overlook such ethical nuances. Indeed what becomes apparent as The Danish Girl progresses is that not far beneath the skin of a film that the director (rather disingenuously, in this day and age) has described as 'risky' is a standard Hollywood, patriarchal narrative wanting to get out.

This is reflected no more pointedly than in the trajectory taken by the film's other hero, Einar's wife, Gerda. As portrayed with power and nuance by Swedish actor Vikander, Gerda is a bold and independent woman, a successful painter in her own right. In the film's opening third, Gerda's progression from very good to great artist is intriguingly bound up with her husband's awakening as Lili.

Initially, Gerda accepts and even encourages Lili's emergence, to the point of including her in their playful sex life. But she has mistaken Lili for fantasy, and only later does she realise the magnitude of the change that her husband is undergoing. She is conflicted about this transformation, and protective of her own needs, but also understanding, compassionate, and supportive.

Supportive to a fault, in fact: Gerda's capacity for self-sacrifice is seemingly endless. Lili is, necessarily, focused almost entirely on her own needs, but the narrative requires that Gerda put Lili's needs first, too, as it is only with her support and assistance that Lili's transformation becomes possible.

The result is that while it is intended as an affirmation of the transgender experience, what plays out on screen instead resonates uncomfortably with the trope of 'woman makes sacrifices so that man can achieve his goal'. This impression is, again, reinforced by the presence of a cisgender male actor in the transgender role. It does a disservice to all women, cis- and transgender alike.

As I wrote two weeks ago, as the #WhiteOscars controversy was gathering steam, 'pursuing justice on one front doesn't excuse committing injustice on another'. We need to tell and hear the stories of transgender people, in a mainstream context. But in the telling, we should not exploit the subject; nor contribute to the marginalisation of others.
to whom equality has been denied.

That is the responsibility that privilege entails.

Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of *Eureka Street*. 
High Court not the answer to Nauru depravity

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan

The moral depravity of Australian funded and orchestrated holding of asylum seekers, including children, on Nauru and Manus Island is to continue.

On Wednesday the High Court made clear that it is in no position to question the retrospective law passed by the Commonwealth Parliament on 30 June 2015 authorising the Australian Government to do whatever it takes to assist countries like Nauru with the detention of asylum seekers sent there by Australia as of 18 August 2012.
The court ruled by six to one that offshore detention and processing of asylum seekers was valid according to this law authorising the Australian government to enter into agreements with other governments and contracts with corporations to provide 'garrison and welfare services' in offshore regional processing centres such as Nauru and Manus Island.

The sole dissentient was the newest judge, Justice Gordon.

The case arose out of a claim by a Bangladeshi woman (categorised as an 'unauthorised maritime arrival' or 'UMA') who had been intercepted on 19 October 2013 on a boat headed for Australia seeking asylum. She was transferred to Christmas Island the next day. Three months later she was transferred to Nauru where she was held in detention at a refugee-processing centre for over six months.

Because of medical complications with her pregnancy which could not be treated adequately on Nauru, she was transferred temporarily back to Australia where she gave birth to her child on 16 December 2014. Not relishing the thought of taking her baby to the hellish conditions of Nauruan detention, she applied to the High Court questioning the legal validity of the offshore detention and processing regime.

The Commonwealth's lawyers obviously thought she had an arguable case. On 30 June 2015, the Commonwealth Parliament enacted the Migration Amendment (Regional Processing Arrangements) Act 2015 (Cth), which inserted s 198AHA into the Migration Act, with retrospective effect to 18 August 2012. This law authorised the government to take any action or 'make payments, or cause payments to be made, in relation to the arrangement or the regional processing functions' in other countries.

Presumably the Nauruan government lawyers and political advisers also thought there might be some problems. On 2 October 2015, just days before the High Court hearing, the Government of Nauru announced its intention 'to allow for freedom of movement of asylum seekers 24 hours per day, seven days per week' from 5 October 2015 and to introduce legislation to that effect at the next sitting of the Nauruan Parliament. The High Court was duly informed of these developments.
It is fair to say that prior to October 2015, the Commonwealth expected Nauru to detain these people, and with that expectation being realised was prepared to remunerate Nauru very handsomely, with retrospective parliamentary endorsement.

With the air of unreality reserved to the highest courts (and perhaps some religious authorities) three of the judges observed that 'the Commonwealth could not compel or authorise Nauru to make or enforce the laws which required that the plaintiff be detained' and thus the Commonwealth was not legally responsible for the detention.

These three majority judges did concede some limit to Commonwealth complicity in Australian funded detention of asylum seekers by another country: 'If the regional processing country imposes a detention regime as a condition of the acceptance of UMAs removed from Australia, the Commonwealth may only participate in that regime if, and for so long as, it serves the purpose of processing.'

Another of the majority judges, Justice Keane, said 'the plaintiff's submission that regional processing is punitive because it is designed to have a deterrent effect on the movement of asylum seekers must be rejected. A deterrent effect may be an intended consequence of the operation of regional processing arrangements, but the immediate purpose of s 198AHA is the facilitation of the removal of unauthorised maritime arrivals from Australia.'

I daresay none of these judicial niceties will bring much comfort to the Bangladeshi mum who might feel that her baby is being punished by being taken to Nauru where both of them could remain for up to ten years should they be found to be refugees, pending resettlement in Cambodia or any other participating third country.

If the Australian Constitution contained provisions similar to the human rights protections contained in the Nauruan Constitution, the High Court may have been able to offer some relief. But the High Court made clear that the detention of asylum seekers on Nauru was detention by the Nauruan government authorised by the Nauruan parliament, and thus it would be a matter for the Nauruan courts to determine if such executive action and legislative authorisation were constitutional.

The Nauruan Constitution, unlike the Australian Constitution, sets strict limits on the government's and the parliament's power to detain persons and to deprive them of their liberty. Australia just happens to fund and facilitate the arrangements authorised by the Nauruan government and parliament, whether or not those arrangements are constitutionally valid.

Justice Gageler rightly observed: 'Their detention at the Regional Processing Centre has been under the authority of Nauruan legislation, the validity of which under the Constitution of Nauru is controversial.'

Justice Gageler, our strongest civil libertarian judge (having been the Commonwealth Solicitor-General during some of the more difficult years of Australian asylum policy), considered that 'the plaintiff's central claim (that the Commonwealth and the Minister acted beyond the executive power of the Commonwealth by procuring and enforcing her detention at the Regional Processing Centre between 24 March 2014 and 2 August 2014) to have been well-founded until 30 June 2015, when s 198AHA was inserted with retrospective effect'.

If returned to Nauru, presumably the plaintiff and her baby will no longer be detained, given Nauru's newfound commitment to liberty for asylum seekers transferred from
Australia. That then raises the fundamental political and moral question: why do we still want to transfer people like this (including babies) to countries like Nauru, Manus Island and Cambodia?

Just after Malcolm Turnbull became prime minister, I wrote to him and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten suggesting a bipartisan announcement at the opening of parliament this year. I suggested that each address the Parliament reconfirming their commitment to stopping the boats and turning back those who are not in direct flight from persecution in Indonesia. I urged the announcement of an agreed date for the closure of the facilities on Nauru and Manus Island.

I conceded that immediate closure of these facilities might allow unscrupulous people smugglers to ply their trade again with the message to asylum seekers in Indonesia that the appointment of a new Australian Prime Minister warranted renewed attempts at gaining access to Australia. I wrote, 'But after an appropriate delay, you could negate that possibility and you could close these facilities without any risk of asylum seekers thinking that Australia was once again a possible boat destination.'

Neither Turnbull nor Shorten was interested, repeating the mantras about preventing people smuggling, saving lives at sea and maintaining the integrity of Australia's borders. But all this can be done without sending this mum and her baby to Nauru. We're now told it can be done without actually detaining anyone on Nauru.

In the past, we were solemnly assured that it was necessary to detain these people in order to send a message to other asylum seekers waiting in Indonesia. The boats have stopped. They will stay stopped. Any boats that try to get here will be turned back provided only there can be the assurance that no one on board is in direct flight from persecution in Indonesia.

The people smugglers and their prospective clients now know that people are no longer held in detention on Nauru. It is no longer the hellish or uncertain conditions (with or without detention) on Nauru that deters people from getting on boats. It is the vigilance of our intelligence and military personnel which does that. The door is locked.

All major political parties are agreed on the need to stop the boats. The heads of the Australian defence force are now confident that the boats have stopped and that any future boats will be stopped or turned back. This is a very different situation from four years ago.

When Prime Minister Gillard failed to have her Malaysia solution implemented, she set up an expert panel chaired by Air Chief Marshall Houston. In August 2012, the Houston panel told the government that 'the conditions required for effective, lawful and safe turnbacks of irregular vessels headed for Australia with asylum seekers on board are not currently met in regard to turnbacks to Indonesia'.

So they looked for other short-term measures. Having studied Prime Minister Howard's 2001 Pacific solution, the panel concluded that 'in the short term, the establishment of processing facilities in Nauru as soon as practical is a necessary circuit breaker to the current surge in irregular migration to Australia'. Four years on, the Houston assessment of turnbacks would appear to be outdated and there is no longer a need for a circuit breaker. There is no surge; the boats have stopped.

Before becoming Prime Minister, Turnbull insisted that our treatment of asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island was 'harsh, but not cruel'. Now that there is no purpose to be
served by maintaining the facilities on Nauru and Manus Island, the treatment of those persons is cruel as well as harsh.

A prompt resolution of the matter is required unless Australia is to be left with a legacy of shame which will be sure to be disclosed at a future royal commission with plaintive cries from our past leaders and retired public servants: 'We didn't know the trauma caused to children and others fleeing persecution by being placed in such uncertain, isolated hell holes.'

There is no joy to be found in our High Court applying a Constitution even more bereft of human rights protections than the Nauruan Constitution. It's time for our politicians to address the political and moral question: what purpose is actually served by sending this mum and her baby back to Nauru, given that the boats have stopped and will stay stopped regardless of where we now place this mother and child and others like them?

It's time to walk and chew gum at the same time. It's not an either/or proposition. There is no longer any need for a circuit breaker. The circuit is permanently cut. We can prevent people smuggling, save lives at sea, maintain the integrity of our borders and deal decently with the residual caseload of asylum seekers including this mother and her child.

Frank Brennan SJ is professor of law at Australian Catholic University and Adjunct Professor at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.
There's no cheap path to harmony

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

Of the United Nations Days and Weeks, World Interfaith Harmony Week is one of the most recent and perhaps the most modestly celebrated. It may also be the most needed. But its claim needs to extend beyond religious faiths to secular views of the world.

The week originated in a proposal of King Abdullah of Jordan, a Muslim. He recognised that the great religions were united by their call to love God and their neighbour. They could come together on that basis without minimising the differences between them.

In Australia small local committees sponsor breakfasts, talks and gatherings to mark the week. These complement the all-important personal contact between people of different religions who are open to learn from one another about one another's faith.

These small initiatives and conversations, of course, are tiny when set against the violence in the name of religion that plagues the Middle East and elsewhere.

There, people of different Islamic groups and of other religions have been persecuted and polarised by IS with its corrupt and violent version of Islam. Hostility has been intensified by the intervention and destruction brought by foreign powers, which are then readily portrayed as anti-Islamic. Conflict fed by personal, political and economic interests is then framed in religious terms.

The conflict in the Middle East and terrorist incidents in other nations often provoke tense relationships between Muslim immigrant communities and the majority population in their host countries. This tension expresses itself in religious and ethnic prejudice and discriminatory laws, which in turn contributes to fear, withdrawal and alienation in
Muslim communities.

Disenfranchised young Muslims are then vulnerable to recruitment by IS or by whatever will replace it. So the cycle of violence is continued.

To break this cycle requires serious efforts to create interfaith harmony based on a sympathetic understanding of other people and what their faith means to them. In Western countries, including Australia, it is unreasonable to expect that Muslim leaders of Muslim, preoccupied with supporting their often poor and harried immigrant communities, will be able to take the initiative in this.

So the task must fall on the leaders of Christian churches, by first going out to seek trusting relationships with significant Muslim religious leaders, and then making similar relationships between Muslim communities and their own a high pastoral priority.

When people who are Muslim meet people who are Christian and explore each other’s lived faith, the prejudices based on the selective quotation of texts, on polemical pamphlets and on the listing of historical atrocities are exposed for the lazy rubbish they are.

Because the task of building interfaith harmony is vital for societies at large and not simply for the churches, it needs to be encouraged in appropriate ways at all levels of society. Faith-based community organisations which welcome Muslim workers and are present among Muslim communities in Australia must encourage conversations about the place religious faith has in life.

That conversation cannot be confined to the churches and to those with religious faith. In the present cycle of violence and discrimination which focuses on religious difference, exploratory conversation about their different views of the world must take place between people of religious faith and those with a non-religious outlook.

The obstacle to such conversation is the religious settlement in Australia and Western nations, which can be described as negative tolerance. This is an implicit contract neither to interfere with the religious beliefs and practices of others nor to enter into serious conversation with them about it. This has the merit of avoiding conflict. It also protects our own prejudices.

But in the present cycle, where violence designed to produce religious conflict also sharpens regional conflict, spills out into threats to the prosperity and order of other nations, and feeds religious and ethnic discrimination and prejudice in our own society, negative tolerance offers no counterbalance. It simply stands on the sidelines.

In our situation and society prejudice and hostility can be countered only if we are ready to explore and appreciate other people's religious and non-religious beliefs and practices, not in order to adopt them, but because they are important to our fellow human beings. That conversation is not easy, because in it our own convictions and prejudices, religious, non-religious or anti-religious, will also be in play.

But is there a cheaper path to harmony, and can we afford the costs of intensifying disharmony?
Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of *Eureka Street*.

Main image: [1000 Words / Shutterstock](https://www.shutterstock.com/1000-words)
GST justice

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.*
What is a brown body worth?

AUSTRALIA

Somayra Ismailjee

2996 is the number of lives lost in the September 11 attacks 14 years ago. It's a figure well-known across the world, and a figure increasingly co-opted to justify further violence - much of this in the form of the United States' ongoing War on Terror.

The term War on Terror itself is oxymoronic - war instills the very violence, brutality and mass displacement it aims to remove.

The ultimate death toll of foreign intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen is estimated to be over four million. Perhaps the indifference towards this number comes from a sheer inability to comprehend it. More likely, however, is the toxic apathy bred by racial homogenisation and the Islamophobia that follows from it.

The idea of the 'Muslim' has moved far beyond a harmless religious identity to a delusive and violent caricature. The term itself has come to represent more of a placeholder than much else - a frame maintaining a consistent appearance no matter its content.

Racialisation plays a key and definitive role in this, fuelling the marginalisation of people who fill the common brown-skinned connotation. In the immediate aftermath of crimes implicating Muslims as culprits, Indian Sikh people and their temples too face intensified violence and desecration due to being read, mistakenly, as 'Muslim'.

An overwhelming perception of Muslims as 'savage' and antithetical to peace accounts for incidents where overtly racist people can rejoice easily at the loss of human life, to little negative reaction. When a person is deemed unworthy or bereft of humanity, their death...
becomes gruesomely welcome.

This effect was seen in spades when over a hundred people were killed due to a crane collapse in Saudi Arabia in September last year. Many Americans saw the tragedy as 'karma' for the events of September 11, retweeting reports of the event with 'Thanks Jesus! On 9/11 too! God has spoken' or 'Karma is a bitch huh muslims?', and even describing it as 'retribution' and 'a beautiful rainbow.'

The idea of karma touted by these tweets is based on the notion of balance. Ironically, the numbers here do not add up. Instead, a false equivalency is established - an imbalanced equation rarely questioned by those in power.

We are taught that nearly four million and counting killed in the War on Terror cannot equal the just under 3000 lost in the September 11 attacks; that there is still a score to settle, a debt to be repaid. Why? Because a brown life is perceived as inherently less in worth than its white counterpart.

Islamophobia demands an insatiable call for retribution with a quota that can never be fulfilled. In mathematical terms, it's almost a case of the 'sum to infinity'; here, a recursive pattern where the death toll will grow constantly, yet always be inadequate. No limit has been set socially or politically.

The immediate and continuing aftermath of the War on Terror is far-reaching. Even as demonised Muslim men like Shaker Aamer are released without charge, Guantanamo Bay remains open; the effects of Abu Ghrab remain deep and scarring in the collective consciousness of a community where violent assumptions of guilt still target us.

For the billions of Muslims living across the globe, there is constant suspicion and hatred that often manifests in hegemonic oppression.

While racism is a large facet of Islamophobia and Islamophobia itself does not define racism, Muslims are seen as justification for its prevalence. As an intimidating and monolithic group in the mainstream public perception, Muslim people exemplify ideas of a cardinal threat against the Anglocentric West.

This laterally affects how brown non-Muslim minority groups are treated, best displayed by Australia's attitudes towards asylum seekers in the pursuit of 'border protection', where vulnerable people are instead portrayed as a danger to 'our way of life'.

Political, cultural and social trends are continuously guilty of equating people of colour to anything less than fully human. From the War on Terror to immigration detention centres, this allows widespread and detrimental abuse. Racism easily renders minorities worthless in institutional eyes - a fact that sorely needs addressing.

Somayra Ismailjee is the recipient of Eureka Street's inaugural Margaret Dooley Young Writers Fellowship. This is an updated version of an article she wrote last year as part of the application process.

Somayra is a 17-year-old writer from Perth, of Indian and Burmese heritage. She has an interest in current affairs, ethics and social justice, particularly the intersections of racism, Islamophobia, misogyny and classism. Her work has appeared in New Matilda,
Right Now Inc and Media Diversified, among other publications.

Keep an eye out for her articles in Eureka Street over the coming months, and follow her on Twitter @somayra_

Main image: Shutterstock
My Baghdad dreams

CREATIVE

John Falzon

My dreams take speed

Be simple just
Say what you see to whom you choose to say

So is my desk then altar or alterity?

I bite on life
The bitterness will daunt but not defeat me

And I hear you
I can never give you voice

My dreams take speed
My Baghdad dreams take speed
My rest my head against the pillow of the west
My dare not close
My eyes my sail on
Baleful

Exclamation bombs my Baghdad
I slow witted all my dreaming lovely disinherited
My magic near the edge
I love the edge
I love its line by line disdain

You don’t
Have long to live
Sweet parliament
And worse
Declaratory vat behind the archive
You have never had a heaven to go on to

Heaven knows.

The smoke the boxing ring

The gypsy ash of
Seven homely hills

Your table cloth still knows
The knowing burns
The smiling scars

For here is one who lives
And takes
And kills

Go quickly
Corner him and shred
His punch-drunk dreams
Between the stars.

**Birth poem**

Lucha
You are poetry
In social and surprise

My comrade strenuous
And straining

And
Our daughter
Simply opening
And searching with
Her eyes.

Dr John Falzon is Chief Executive of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.
Republican Turnbull must lead, not wait

AUSTRALIA

John Warhurst

The argument for an Australian head of state is once again building public momentum. The Australian Republican Movement (ARM) has had a most successful year under its new chairman Peter FitzSimons and January brought not only unprecedented approval from political leaders but also the active support of 2016 Australian of the Year, David Morrison.

The joint statement by the premiers and chief ministers that Australia should have an Australian head of state may turn out to be an important stepping stone. Notably the seven signatories included three Coalition leaders.

Only Colin Barnett in Western Australia, while reaffirming that he is a republican, declined to sign the statement, which read simply that the signatories 'believe that Australia should have an Australian as our head of state'.

Such high-level political support is a necessary but not sufficient condition for reform, as the 1999 referendum showed in some states where both the government and opposition supported change but the popular vote was lost. But such an Australia-wide united republican declaration, supported by the prime minister, the opposition and the Greens at the Commonwealth level, is unprecedented.

However Barnett's reasons for declining to sign may resonate with Malcolm Turnbull. Barnett told FitzSimons that he 'did not think that the time is right ... to prosecute the argument for constitutional change', though he believed Australia would become a republic in his lifetime (he's 65).
Unlike the ARM he may agree with Turnbull that for strategic reasons reform should wait until the passing of Queen Elizabeth as Australian head of state. Turnbull has long held this strategic view because he sees no benefit in a second heroic failure caused by moving too soon; though the ARM is merely proposing a plebiscite in 2020.

Turnbull faces a major test of his leadership this year as we enter a potentially groundbreaking reform era for causes that he has long supported, such as same sex marriage, the republic and Indigenous constitutional recognition.

He will need a judicious mix of caution and boldness in order to successfully ride these reform waves. In supporting reform he will face considerable conservative opposition. Success will breed success and his authority across the country and within his own party will rest on his ability to win elections.

Turnbull’s strategic judgement is understandable at one level and his caution will be shared by some others who were bruised by the 1999 defeat. However, political leaders who wait for overwhelming popular support before offering leadership to a political movement are also self-serving because top-down support is always necessary for success. Leadership sometimes means getting out in front.

The ARM too must continue to be energetic and ambitious. It must meet Turnbull’s challenge to become a larger and more popular movement. Republican petitions in support of the political leaders must be repeated again and again, enlisting ever larger support.

ARM should also encourage and welcome but not rely too heavily on support from high-profile community leaders. Morrison’s enthusiastic naming of the republic among his three core beliefs as Australian of the Year came at just the right time.

Furthermore, as a former Chief of Army he may be able to more effectively explain the republican position within Australian military circles. So far the majority of the military, with important exceptions such as former ARM head Mike Keating, have been unenthusiastic about transferring its allegiance to an Australian as head of state.

But that will not be enough either. Many recent Australians of the Year have supported the republican cause and some, like mental health leader Patrick McGorry and businessman Simon McKeon, have been active advocates.

The necessary momentum will come from a potent combination of parliamentary and community leadership and demonstrated popular support.

The latter is the most important, and building such support, measured ultimately in petitions and public opinion polls, is the challenge that several recent republican prime ministers have issued to the republican movement. The ARM must keep knocking loudly on their door.

John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and a former chair of the Australian Republican Movement.
Australian of the Year's strong case for empathy

AUSTRALIA

Justin Glyn

Australia woke on 26 January to the news that David Morrison had been named Australian of the Year. One of the most striking features he displayed, both in winning the award and in his acceptance speech, was empathy - the ability to enter the world of others. Though a man, Morrison shot to prominence by condeming sexism and sexual violence in the military - including as an instrument of warfare.

In his speech, he began by noting the undoubted fact that Australia Day, by its nature, is not regarded with unalloyed pleasure by Aboriginal Australians, for whom 26 January speaks to a history of genocide, dispossession and ongoing discrimination.

His stance on diversity, on combatting discrimination of all kinds, pulled no punches in enumerating the types of discrimination which still exist in Australia and the self-interested reason why we should care - excluding some from society impovershes us all, by depriving society of the benefits which each individual can bring to it.

Sadly, the empathy he displayed is a quality in vanishingly short supply in public discourse. This is not only an Australian problem, and cannot be divorced from the rise of the human rights movement.

One of the great contributions of Western philosophy to human thought has been the emergence of the individual as a focus for concern. I am not merely a member of a group, a plaything of kings or emperors, but an individual with thoughts, feelings and an interior life all my own.

Descartes' cogito ergo sum (I think therefore I am) is shorthand for the idea that this interior life itself is the basis for how we approach the world and, from our point of view
This individual, only Descartes everyone, less reminding All whole.

The 20th century Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas noted that the I think of Descartes totalises - it reduces everything: God, other people, to a subset of I. We are only opened to the world beyond us if we are able to accept others on their own terms, without reducing them to what we want them to be.

This is Morrison's point, too: While the collective cannot be allowed to destroy the individual, the whole is, at the very least, the sum of its very diverse parts. If we include everyone, on their own terms, then everyone's gifts can come to the fore and enrich the whole.

All of this may sound obvious to the point of being trite. We do, however, need constant reminding of the importance of other people's points of view. Levinas spoke in the aftermath of the Shoah, the massacre of over six million Jews by Hitler.

And yet still reductive thinking about other people will not die. Indeed, it seems to be hardwired into modern humanity. Aboriginal people are still often told to 'get over' over two centuries of hurt, even though (as this brilliant but searing cartoon points out) people do not say this to those commemorated on ANZAC Day or their families.

At least some of this desire to reduce and control the Other and their approach to the world is surely born of fear. The response to the refugee crisis in Europe and (somewhat less understandably) the United States as well as Australia's own policies in this area are sold on the basis of a dreaded tidal wave of unfamiliar humanity coming to take away people's way of life and security.

The hopes and fears of individuals facing intolerable circumstances are thus mulched into a grey tsunami of fear and indifference.

And it works. Politicians who would bar the gates, turn back the boats and pull up the drawbridge are on the rise in many countries which have previously prided themselves on tolerance and diversity.

And yet, if empathy fails, then the society which they claim to be protecting is also in danger. The rights of the individual only hold their magic as long as everybody acknowledges them.

If we undermine them then not only do we create an impoverished society but we also force those we exclude to create their own systems and support groups which will, themselves, likely be based on hostility, fear and the experience of exclusion.

As the Australian of the Year himself put it, 'The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.'
Justin Glyn SJ is studying for the priesthood. Previously he practised law in South Africa and New Zealand and has a PhD in administrative and international law.
Kidnapped woman's post-traumatic love

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Room (M). Director: Lenny Abrahamson. Starring: Brie Larson, Jacob Tremblay, Joan Allen, Sean Bridgers, William H. Macy, Tom McCamus. 117 minutes

Room is an unconventional thriller, and as such this review should be considered as containing minor spoilers. The film is based on Irish-Canadian author Emma Donoghue's excellent 2010 novel Room; Donoghue also wrote the screenplay, which shares the structure and many of the same dramatic beats as its source. Both find deep wells of beauty and affirmation amid decidedly bleak circumstances.

The story centres on the experiences of Joy (played in the film by Larson), who for seven years has been held prisoner in the souped-up garden shed of a suburban maniac; and her five-year-old son, Jack. It explores the elaborate and imaginative methods Joy has employed to nurture and educate her son, while at the same time protecting him from the dark reality of their existence.

The novel is remarkable in its use of language to create the inner voice of Jack, who narrates it. This often involves charming deconstructions of idiomatic English. Jack is awed by Joy's description of their physical resemblance: 'You are the dead spit of me.' 'Why I'm your dead spit?' Later he observes a gob of her toothpaste and saliva in the basin; it doesn't look anything like him.

At the same time, the image of Jack as a product of his mother's 'dead spit' is a potent metaphor for the biological connection they share. Of course Jack also shares this connection, at least, with his biological father, Joy's captor and rapist, 'Old Nick'. Firm lines are drawn then between nature and nurture: Joy insists Jack is hers alone; Old Nick (Bridgers) spawned but didn't raise him, and thus is not his 'father'.

As director, Abrahamson brings a stylised realism to the film that mimics the novel's capacity to transmit the bleakness of Joy's situation via the wonder-full gaze of Jack. Danny Cohen's handheld cinematography captures Joy's sense of confinement and Jack's understanding (fostered by Joy) of the shed, which he calls simply Room, as a place bursting with possibilities for recreation, rest and learning.
And then - and here's where things get spoilerish - there is a breathtaking first-act climax; and when the second act commences, Jack and Joy are Outside. Here, Jack faces the prospect of coming to terms with a world that, days earlier, he did not even know existed. Joy, too, must adjust to a family life that has changed substantially in the course of seven years. She also starts to show likely signs of PTSD.

The second half of the novel functions as an extended and deeply affecting unravelling of the first half’s slow-burning suspense. The film, on the other hand, really comes into its own in this second act, thanks largely to its incredibly powerful performances. Larson is utterly absorbing throughout the film and shares a natural motherly chemistry with Tremblay, who is equally compelling.

In act two they play off against top-shelf talent in Allen, as Joy’s mother Nancy, desperate to reconnect with her back-from-the-dead daughter; and in Macy, as Nancy’s ex-husband, Joy’s father Robert, who cannot bring himself to look at, let alone interact with, Jack. The boy may have been Joy’s lifeline, and is his grandson, but he is also the product of an experience Robert finds too repellant to contemplate.

Nancy and Robert, we learn, separated as a direct result of the trauma of Joy’s disappearance - which is a heartbreaking truth for Joy to contend with, on top of everything else she has endured. Along with Joy and Jack’s parallel journeys towards reassimilation into 'normal' existence, the film examines the painful but necessary reformation of this badly damaged and forever changed family unit.

Along the way, Nancy’s current husband, Leo (McCamus), emerges as a kind of understated hero, as the first person Outside to truly connect with Jack. While Joy is given cause to wonder whether she was selfish to keep Jack with her in captivity instead of sending him away, there is no doubt her love sustained him; now, Outside, it is Jack’s capacity to love and be loved that can save them both.
Tim Kroenert is assistant editor of *Eureka Street*. 
Downsizing numbers can't silence Indigenous protests

AUSTRALIA

Celeste Liddle

On the day of the Invasion Day rally in Melbourne, I was abused on a tram for wearing a pro-Aboriginal rights t-shirt.

I was waiting for the stop when this Aboriginal man approached me for a dollar. I noticed the Aboriginal football guernsey he was wearing, and commented. He in turn complimented the White Australia/Black History t-shirt I had on.

The tram pulled up and as I boarded, he yelled goodbye to me. I turned around to look for a seat, and this bloke up the front who had witnessed the end of the exchange took one look at my t-shirt and said 'F**k that, you're not f**ken sitting near me'.

I wasn't even shocked. Indeed, I think I even expected it. It is not the first time I have been abused as an Indigenous activist on Australia Day.

And as it turned out, his bigotry was not enough to put a dampener on what was one of the best protests I have ever been to. I spent the entire day surrounded by energetic members of the Indigenous community and our countless allies, chanting for change.

What did shock me were the media reports on this rally. When I found out that the densely packed, energetic, noisy crowd consisted of only 150 people, I was surprised, to say the least.

This is according to coverage by The Australian, anyway. I could have sworn it was much larger.
Indeed, the crowd continued to grow as it wound its way through the streets to the intersection of Flinders and Swanston Streets. Not only did the protesters fill this intersection, they spilled into the side streets. As someone who has occupied this intersection several times during the large Stop the Forced Closures rallies, I and other seasoned protesters estimated the crowd at around 3-5000.

Other media sources didn't do much better than The Australian, The Age, Herald Sun and ABC all reported 'hundreds'. Indeed, the only news source which came close to mentioning the true size of the Melbourne rally was New Zealand site stuff.co.nz which stated 'thousands'.

If this were just confined to the reports on the Melbourne rally, I could probably write it off as limited reporting and editorial staff operating remotely on a public holiday. (And even then, why not update online articles when more information comes to light?) This however wasn't the case.

In Sydney, numbers reported ranged from 'several hundred' to 'more than a thousand', despite there being about 5000 protesters in attendance. In Brisbane, various sources reported 'hundreds', yet accounts via social media were staunch in stating there were at least 1500. Numbers recorded in Canberra, Hobart, Perth and Adelaide by the media were considered well below the actual attendance.

You could almost be excused for thinking that behind this minimising of protesters numbers is a calculated attempt to downplay a movement which has grown continuously over the past few years.

During 2015 numbers at the rallies to stop the forced closures of Aboriginal communities swelled to about 10,000 in Melbourne thanks to impeccable organising by Indigenous community members and solidarity from unions, lobby groups and political organisations. Despite the crowd being smaller than this at the Invasion Day rally, I saw even more energy and enthusiasm.

Non-Indigenous people showing such vibrant support for Indigenous rights, particularly at a time when we cannot go anywhere without being bombarded by Australiana, should be a source of pride. At the very least, this growth in attendance from previous Invasion Day rallies shows a shifting of consciousness in the community.

Perhaps most telling was that despite the Herald Sun feeling the protests present were barely newsworthy, the next day they ran nearly an entire page of letters from citizens complaining about the protesters and the reasons for the rally. The paper may not have seen the rally itself as being of interest to the public, but the reasons it was wrong, selfish and 'unAustralian' definitely were.

This seems a small victory in my opinion. The volume of people out on the street might be considered beneath notice by the media, but there were still enough of us to be noticed by armchair critics who then felt compelled to write in their complaints.

The movement is reaching beyond the confines of the mainstream media and we should be proud, for it shows that even in this day and age, grassroots movements can still be effective.

I challenge the mainstream media to actually stop and investigate what is unfolding right in front of them. I challenge them to walk among the cheering masses, to talk to the participants about why they are there, and to find out why a non-Indigenous person who
wouldn't have even thought of marching for Indigenous rights this time last year now feels compelled to do so.

Times are changing, and ignoring the voices of a growing movement in the days of social media is not going to make that movement disappear among the sea of Australian flags.

No matter how much you want it to.

Celeste Liddle is an Arrernte woman living in Melbourne, the National Indigenous Organiser of the NTEU, and a freelance opinion writer and social commentator. She blogs at Rantings of an Aboriginal Feminist.