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Strong women as self-agents in remote communities

AUSTRALIA

Jasmeet Sahi

It’s incomprehensible how a child can take her own life. Back in March, news broke that a ten-year-old girl had committed suicide in the remote Aboriginal community of Loma, in the Kimberley.

She had compounded trauma and hurt most of her young life as a victim of family violence, which by the age of ten became too much to bear.

Let us think about this for a moment. How did she know that suicide was an option?

Recently I spoke to Clare Wood, who has a background in remote Indigenous mental health care in the Kimberley. She said the region has such a history of suicide that people from a very young age know that people die by killing themselves.

Research indicates that knowing someone who’s died by suicide increases chances of harbouring suicidal thoughts and acting on them. And statistics indicate 95 per cent of Aboriginal Australians are affected by suicide in their families, sometimes across generations. So, do the math.

The government’s ambiguous and often paternalistic approach to Indigenous affairs is well established. At one end there is the forced closure of remote communities, and at the other Prime Minister Turnbull acknowledging the suggestion from Aboriginal leaders: Do things with us and not to us.

Narungga Elder, Tauto Sansbury in his searing response to the PM’s Closing the Gap speech in February, said that the ‘gap’ would always remain unless the state and federal
governments 'gave up their missionary approach to Indigenous affairs'. He called for recognition of the reality of the everyday life of Indigenous people.

Community and family are central to this. It's no surprise, because it is the tight-knittedness of community or family circles that is often the refuge for those struggling with trauma.

"People were different when they were out on country than when they were in the confines of the community. A lot more language was spoken, stories and cultural notions were shared."

Wood works as an enterprise facilitator for Enterprise Learning Projects, assisting women in remote communities in Kalumburu, Western Australia, to set up their own businesses. She aid the women utilise their profits for cultural activities like going out to country for fishing, or for a long walk, often taking the young along.

During one visit to the community, Wood accompanied the women and noticed that people were different when they were out on country than when they were in the confines of the community. She observed that a lot more language was spoken, stories and cultural notions were shared - something the children did not hear their parents do too often in the community.

A cross-generational revival and transmission of knowledge was taking place as part of this ordinary walk in the bush to find bark to make clapping sticks from, perhaps to be sold commercially.

From a mental health perspective this is important. Canadian research that studied suicides among First Nation's youth in Canada indicates that indigenous communities that have continuation in their cultural practices have lower rates of suicide.

But it's not easy to just venture out into the bush to fish or for a walk. Wood said cultural funds that support such activities, which may include a serviceable vehicle to drive into the bush, petrol, fishing gear etc., are not readily available.

'That's the main factor why the women want their own businesses,' said Wood. 'It might sound simple, but support to go fishing once a month with families, to go back on out to country, things like that might not be funded in an ongoing way, and that's where the women were like, "We know this is what our young people need, we know this helps families, we want to find a way to be in control."'

Doreen, a women's leader from the community in Kalumburu, said, 'it is our dream for us women to get up and make the community stronger. Us strong women are volunteers to make things good for our children and our future, so funding can help us to do this.'

Such determination ought to be respected and facilitated. What this means is making avenues where Indigenous culture and cultural life are at the centre of the conversation to effect change. Instead of adopting a 'helping' attitude, there needs to be a shift towards facilitating self-agency as an economically rational approach when it comes to Indigenous Australians.
Jasmeet Sahi is a Melbourne-based writer and editor. Currently the women in Kalumburu are being assisted to set up their own op-shop and are fundraising via a go fund me page for a sea container to the community to act as a shop and storage.

Pictured: Clare Wood with members of Kalumburu community
Election budget fiddling

AUSTRALIA

John Warhurst

This budget won't produce much memorable commentary because there was little memorable about it.

When the history of May-July 2016 is written it will be forgotten and all interest will be on the 2 July election. The most memorable budget, which will define this Coalition term, came two years ago in 2014, when its first budget was a disastrous flop.

There weren't even any great surprises this time as almost all of the Budget was leaked and could be read about in the papers on the previous day. Commentators were able to draft their responses 24 hours early and didn't have to change much afterwards. It will all soon disappear into the maw of official election campaigning.

It was a political budget, of course, as all budgets are in the sense that winners and losers are often decided by political calculations. But it was political in a special sense this time given the forthcoming election. It had a special urgency.

It turned out to be neither an election-winning nor election-losing budget. It was more continuity than change. In that sense it probably was the best the government could hope for given the nation's economic and financial circumstances. However it falls far short of the sort of budget that might have been expected from a prime minister like Malcolm Turnbull whose image is one off a 'big picture man'.

It was in no way a visionary budget in that it avoided the bigger questions of taxation reform and redistribution, while continuing previously announced huge cuts in areas like
foreign aid. Where it did take some steps they were cautious rather than bold ones.

Essentially the steps were fiddling, where small cuts were made in order to fund small gains for people at roughly the same socio-economic level. There was not much evidence of a coherent plan despite the promises by Treasurer Scott Morrison, who now has to sell it.

On taxation questions, like the treatment of superannuation concessions, it may have taken the edge off any possible Labor advantage in the election campaign by taking sensible steps to eliminate some of the unfair advantages to high income earners. But it avoided big questions like tackling negative gearing and capital gains taxes despite widespread popular and expert encouragement to do so.

"There was not much evidence of a coherent plan despite the promises by Scott Morrison, who now has to sell it."

This is not to deny that it is essentially still a Coalition budget. It leant towards traditional Coalition voters, like small business owners and taxpayers with taxable incomes just above $80,000. It stuck to already announced drastic cuts in areas like foreign aid.

The welfare sector was not really freshly outraged by failures to assist the most disadvantaged, such as those on totally inadequate unemployment benefits, because it was what it had expected. Their reactions were full of resignation and disappointment rather than anticipation of a successful fight.

This was a budget produced by a government that has calculated that the election is theirs to lose. That is, their interpretation of the state of play clearly is that the even balance in the current public opinion polls means that they will probably scrape back into government with a reduced majority if only they can avoid any major stuff-ups and project an image of moderate competence. Labor has a long road back still to completely rekindle voter confidence. It may do so but it remains unlikely.

That is not to say that there will not be plenty of fodder in this budget for the election campaign. Within the tight limits of the usual major party election competition Labor still has the opportunity to project itself as the greater champion of fairness and even of innovation and forward thinking. It will still be the party of greater new spending on education, for instance.

But as usual the question will be how brave does Labor want to be. It remains afraid of reinforcing an image as the big spending party and this will limit its options when it frames its campaign pitch.

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John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and a former chair of the Australian Republican Movement.

Original artwork by Chris Johnston
Changed by faith in a miraculous child

REVIEWS

Tim Kroenert

Midnight Special (M). Director: Jeff Nichols. Starring: Michael Shannon, Joel Edgerton, Kirsten Dunst, Jaeden Lieberher, Adam Driver. 112 minutes

When we first meet Alton Meyer (Lieberher) - the enigmatic, miraculous child at the heart of this engrossing sci-fi drama - he is shawled in a white sheet, gazing upwards through a pair of blue goggles, his ears covered by a pair of bulky yellow earmuffs.

Within the context of the film there are practical reasons for these adornments, which we will soon learn. Visually however there is also a strong association here with an iconic image from Steven Spielberg's 1982 classic E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial; of that film's bulb-headed, blue-eyed hero, wrapped for discretion in a white blanket as he flees government agents.

Such associations are not accidental. Arkansas born filmmaker Nichols is known for his at-once intimate and mythic takes on Southern Gothic drama in films like Take Shelter and Mud; yet he sought in Midnight Special to explore a sub-genre of sci-fi government chase movie that was popular in the 1980s (along with E.T. Mark Lester's Firestarter comes vividly to mind). They are films that, in Nichols' words, contain a 'mystery that unfolds into some sense of awe'. And so we have Alton, an eight-year-old boy who possesses super-human powers, the nature and purpose of which is revealed gradually to characters and audience alike.

The pursuit of Alton is two-fold. On the one hand there is the heavily armed cult, led by the Southern Baptist styled preacher Calvin Meyer (Shepard), from which Alton has escaped under the care of his father Roy (Shannon). On the other, there are the government forces, personified by NSA operative Paul Sevier (Driver).
The cult is enamoured to Alton because of his penchant for emitting scintillating beams of light from his eyes (hence the aforementioned goggles); also for his apparent gift for speaking in tongues, and for making prophecies they believe predict an imminent day of divine judgement. To them, he is a possible saviour.

"This is apocalyptic imagery, but the Bible is only one of the film's many resonances and reference points."

Said prophecies, it turns out, contain classified data - hence the government's interest. Alton's gift is not for relaying divine communiqués, but for absorbing earthly telecommunications. It is a powerful gift that is not entirely within his ken or control; during one spectacular sequence, he pulls a satellite out of the sky, causing deadly fireballs to rain upon the earth.

This is apocalyptic imagery, but the Bible is only one of the film's many resonances and reference points; elsewhere Alton is seen to be leafing through a Superman comic, earnestly, as if it might contain some clue as to the nature of his own superhumanity.

This is in some ways a confounding film, whose enigmas could well be simply plot holes. For example, Alton needs to reach a specific location by a specific time; but even once the purpose of the trip is revealed, this specificity of time and location seems arbitrary.

Still, Nichols' vision for the characters and their high-speed, high-stakes pilgrimage along the highways and back roads of the southern United States is confident and compelling. Adam Stone's cinematography is beautifully composed from a minimalist palette (many of the scenes take place at night), allowing the natural environment to loom both striking and fearsome.

Yet despite its epic scope the film is also deeply intimate and, dare I say, spiritual. Roy, as portrayed by the marvellous Shannon, regards his son with a mixture of stern, protective love, and helpless wonder. They are joined in their quest by Roy's childhood
friend Lucas (Edgerton), a state trooper converted to Alton's cause after literally seeing the light in his eyes. Also by Alton's mother, Sarah (Dunst), who of all the characters has the most direct experience of the 'sense of awe' that ultimately unfolds from the 'mystery' of Alton's story. All are selfless in their protection of Alton, and all are changed by their faith and self-sacrifice.

Tim Kroenert is acting editor of *Eureka Street*. 
Another Coalition budget for the well-off

AUSTRALIA

Marcelle Mogg

In recent months, the Prime Minister and the Treasurer have been at pains to stress that their vision for Australia's future would be outlined in the Federal Budget. What was revealed on Budget night was that the vision they hold is all too narrow, and those most in need are hidden from view.

Vulnerable Australians have again been overlooked in this third Federal Budget from the Coalition Government.

With a focus on supporting business and those who already enjoy financial and social security, the Government has preferred to put money in the hands of businesses and the affluent rather than low income Australians.

The 2016-17 Budget provides tax cuts to the rich and service cuts to the rest.

This Budget has given tax relief to those earning over $80K. This measure will cost $4 billion, which could have been spent on investment in families and communities.

The Government still clings to the old rhetoric, evident in their Budget priorities, that the 'trickle down' approach of stimulating business and giving tax relief to those on higher incomes will generate more jobs and therefore greater resources for those whose means are modest. It's a noble theory, without any evidence whatsoever to suggest that it reflects reality.

Even the International Monetary Fund recognises that the best way to grow an economy is to reduce the divide between rich and poor, ensuring that all people have a chance to
participate in the social and economic life of a country. The Coalition government remains resolutely opposed to this growing body of evidence, continuing to rely on economic structures that do nothing but entrench disadvantage and then blame the poor for their fate.

Social service agencies know what works to arrest disadvantage and overcome poverty. Those living on the fringes of our communities would welcome the opportunity to be a focus of investment.

"For the third year running, this government offers nothing to those who are homeless or experiencing significant housing and rental stress."

Government and business, working in partnership with social service providers in innovative relationships, could change the outcomes in life for the young people, families, people with disability and mental health challenges who are desperately looking for an opportunity to participate in the social and economic prosperity that all Australians desire.

For the third year running, this government offers nothing to those who are homeless or experiencing significant housing and rental stress.

Securing the basics in life - a house, an education, and health care - is increasingly beyond the means of average Australians, and impossible for those on low incomes. The successive failure of this government to address Australia's housing crisis, rental affordability and rising homelessness is a disgrace. A long-term strategy which includes binding agreements between the Commonwealth, states and territories is needed to stimulate housing construction and ensure greater affordability.

The compulsory rent deduction for public housing tenants outlined in the Budget is troubling. Public housing tenants actually have a high degree of compliance in meeting their rental obligations. This unnecessary restriction on people managing their own incomes, which strips people of the capacity to manage their budget in order to best balance their costs of food, utilities and health care, means that people who are already vulnerable are subject to greater disadvantage.

While the reworking of the 'work for the dole' scheme (Youth Jobs PaTH - Prepare, Trial, Hire) as an initiative to help some 100,000 people under 25 to secure jobs is a welcome attempt to get vulnerable young people into employment, the focus on making payments to employers of $10,000 after only six months' engagement is misguided. It may result in young people, already a highly vulnerable workforce cohort, being terminated at the end of the six month period, resulting in workforce churn.

Payments of $10,000 to employers effectively create a cut-price labour force that is open to exploitation by disreputable employers.

In delivering his Budget speech, Scott Morrison said that 'wherever possible we prefer to leave a dollar in Australians' pockets than take it for the government's pocket, because we know that it is money in your pocket that can help you and your family most'.

By the Treasurer's own measure, this Budget fails to support those Australian families most in need of that help. Australia has an estimated 600,000 children living in poverty
and this Budget offers them little hope. If the government invested in these children's families directly they could have secured the future of the children and stimulated the economy.

"This Budget will further increase inequality in Australia. Tax cuts for the rich while people on Newstart and other welfare payments are asked to live on inadequate income will ensure that vulnerable members of our community continue to get left behind."

Of concern is the government's focus on some 90,000 recipients of the Disability Support Pension who will be subject to review via a Disability Medical Assessment as part of what is described as an 'overall review process for those considered to be a high risk of not being eligible for the payment'. The government does not expand on how it has arrived at a figure of 90,000 DSP recipients as being likely to be ineligible for support.

The allocation of $10.9 million over three years to provide additional support for recently arrived humanitarian migrants, to strengthen their sense of belonging to the community and strengthen their participation, is welcome.

So too is the commitment of government to work with the sector in developing innovative practice to support individuals moving from welfare to independence through its Try, Test and Learn Fund. The $96.1 million announced will go some way to recognising the innovation and creativity of social service agencies in delivering efficient and effective services to support individuals and families.

An additional $100 million channelled into domestic and family violence initiatives, building on the $101.2 million provided through the Women's Safety Package announced at 2015-16 MYEFO, is also a welcome recognition that much more resources need to be allocated to addressing violence in the home.

The additional $7.1 million in the coming financial year to support financial counselling for problem gamblers is a very positive step, and hopefully such measures continue into the future. Problem gambling devastates many families across Australia, and continued support is needed over the long term to assist people to rebuild their lives.

The Dropping off the Edge 2015 report found people in Australia's most disadvantaged communities are locked out of economic and social opportunities. The report also highlighted that residents in these communities are not just dealing with one form of disadvantage but multiple, complex barriers to individual wellbeing and community participation. This Budget has missed the opportunity to address the failures of the previous budgets, for the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.

This Budget will further increase inequality in Australia. Tax cuts for the rich while people on Newstart and other welfare payments are asked to live on inadequate income will only serve to ensure that vulnerable members of our community continue to get left behind.

With this Budget now released, and a Federal Election imminent, we need political leaders from all parties to commit to building a future for all people, so that the commonwealth of this country may be shared to benefit all Australians, especially the most vulnerable.
Marcelle Mogg is CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia.

Main image: Shutterstock

<!--Follow him on Twitter-->
Kicking corruption in church and police 'closed systems'

AUSTRALIA

Paul Coghlan

A Victoria Police joke: 'Why do police show their badges when they walk into a police station? So they don't get treated like everyone else.' Many a true word said in jest.

Having worked in closed organisational systems like Victoria Police and various government departments, I have often reflected on how and at what point organisations and their employees become comfortable with the belief that their ideas and attitudes are better informed than those of the general populous - and that their survival is more important.

Once comfortable with that idea - what's next?

A very stark example of this are the recent court decisions relating to the Hillsborough Stadium disaster in 1989, where 96 people were killed.

The Liverpool Football club song assures its supporters they'll 'never walk alone' though their 'dreams be tossed and blown'.

The South Yorkshire Police motto is Justice with Courage.

After the Hillsborough disaster members of the South Yorkshire Police - some very senior - decided that blaming the victims and Liverpool football fans for the disaster and deaths, and harassing their families to secure their own personal and organisational safety, was the preferred path to take.
For 27 long years the parents, brothers and sisters of the deceased victims, the blameless, were forced to walk alone, and be subjected to attacks and harassment from the police, who actually were to blame, and who were employed to protect those who were fatally injured.

"Many such organisations pride themselves on what they see as their specific knowledge. They function with an unquestioning view of the world, holding their own truths to be self-evident."

More recently, in Australia, the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse have asked of us as individuals and members of certain groups and organisations to try to understand how it is that we seemingly comfortably turn away from those in need of our help and protection.

A theory of group dynamics holds that all groups are formed for a stated and agreed primary purpose, to achieve a certain goal; but that it is not too long before the unstated purpose becomes the protection of the group itself, and the accepted behaviours within the group become those that ensure its survival.

It partly explains the disturbing situation where organisations such as police, religious groups, churches, schools and government departments who call into question the behaviour of others, demonstrate so little ability to critically reflect on their own motives and actions.

Many such closed organisations and environments pride themselves on what they see as their specific knowledge, being in control of their brief, and all singing from the same hymn. They function with an unquestioning view of the world, holding their own truths to be self-evident. Expressing doubt is akin to treason, and whistleblower deterrence more often than not resembles communist re-education camps.

It was only a decade and a half ago that I asked a very senior policeman what the options were in dealing with a suspected outbreak of family violence involving a friend of mine. 'I just hope she's got a couple of big strong brothers,' I was told. 'That's the only way to sort that out. Bloody women always withdraw their complaint after a few days - all that paperwork done for nothing.'

There was a frightening certainty around such a shallow and ill-considered response. It asked no questions, sought no answers, entertained no doubt, its only informant being narrow and limited policing experience.

In life we often place greater value on certainty than uncertainty. Uncertainty dwells in unchartered terrain with little comfort to be found anywhere. Certainty, however, is that oh so comfortable place where we are right.

It seems to me that when we know we are right, our horizons are limited, and there is little opportunity to grow individually or organisationally. It is in times of uncertainty and doubt that we are presented with the opportunity to question, to learn and to grow.

Learning how to unlearn that which makes us certain and then leave that space open for enquiry, uncertainty and both personal and organisational growth may be the beginning
of the path that leads us away from turning away.

Paul Coghlan is a writer, a recovering Victorian Public Servant and author of When You Stop Laughing Go Home: Impressions of a Young Nation - Timor Leste 2010-2013.
The divisive life of a pacifist priest

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Although I met him only once, Fr Dan Berrigan SJ was a significant figure in my boyhood and early Jesuit years.

A New Yorker active in protest movements over his life time, Berrigan anticipated, in a more Augustinian form, the movement across boundaries to vulnerable people we now associate with Pope Francis.

Berrigan wrote beautifully and was at once attractive and challenging in his way of life. As a schoolboy I had followed with dismay the siege and surrender of the French troops at Dien Bien Phu. I saw it as a defeat for Christendom, a view confirmed by the exodus of Vietnamese Catholics from the north of the country.

The Russian invasion of Hungary followed two years later. So it was natural to see this as the falling of dominoes, to fear for the future of South Vietnam and to welcome the US and Australian intervention there. We were the good guys, deserving the support of our citizens and the Catholic Church.

My first hint at the ethical corruption that war brings to all touched by it came with the US sanctioned assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem and its aftermath.

It was then that I first heard of the young US Jesuit priest and poet who had been jailed for protesting against the US involvement in Vietnam. My colleague, Peter Steele, had written to him in prison and received a warm reply. Berrigan had made it his business to expose the ethical corruption that afflicts societies that wage war and the human cost to
the people whom war supposedly helps.

In a United States that saw itself having a providential mission to right wrongs, and believed that the end of making peace justifies all means, the symbolic actions taken by Berrigan and others, such as illegally entering military facilities, pouring blood on draft cards and assaulting nuclear weapons by tapping them on the nose with a little hammer, were bitterly divisive.

They were also followed by criminal charges and jail sentences. Berrigan and others who went to North Vietnam were seen by many as traitors.

"I found a way of addressing the question Berrigan posed through my association with the victims of the Indochinese war and its aftermath in refugee camps and Australia."

By many United States Jesuits including military chaplains, Berrigan was seen as a divisive figure. I also found his actions challenging. I was still to move from my concentration on the goals of military action to focus on what happens to people who make war and have it made on them. Berrigan and others helped me to see the dishonesty in the conduct of the Vietnam war, the cost to Vietnamese civilians and to soldiers on both sides, and the corruption of ethical sensitivity in both societies.

At a personal level I also found his actions both attractive and challenging. He displayed great integrity in his readiness to suffer imprisonment and abuse for his symbolic protests against the war that expressed his rejection on ethical and Christian grounds of the war. I found attractive his peaceful protest and his acceptance of prison as acts of solidarity with the victims of war.

He also provoked me to ask what and who I cared enough for to be ready to act and suffer as he did. This question broadened my focus from the internal life of the church to the world beyond it. Perhaps ironically I found a way of addressing the question Berrigan posed through my association with the victims of the Indochinese war and its aftermath in refugee camps and Australia.

Berrigan continued this mission afterwards, turning his attention to nuclear weapons and to the links between corporations and defence projects. His protest against a society built around a large military budget and the readiness to launch military campaigns in distant nations with reckless disregard for the people affected by war and the longer term consequences of its actions seems all the more pertinent today. He was always alive, and believed in the seamless robe of life, engaging in campaigns to preserve life, whether threatened by war, capital punishment or abortion.

I met Dan Berrigan some years ago when he made a short trip to Australia. He visited a fellow New York novice, Fr Joe Johnston, who had come to Australia after many years in the Philippines. He now ran theology seminars for a very intelligent group of young people. We were interested to hear how the meeting went - Joe's support for the Vietnam war and his hostility to illegal protest had not changed over the years. Nor had his affection for Dan. He said Dan was crazed, but a real good guy.

In the event Joe was delighted to be visited, all differences left aside. This happy result was emblematic of Daniel Berrigan’s lifetime insistence that people mattered more than
ideologies.

Daniel Joseph Berrigan SJ (9 May 1921-30 April 2016), was an American Jesuit priest, anti-war activist, and poet. He was a member of the Catonsville Nine, Catholic activists who burned draft files to protest the Vietnam War. In 1980, he founded the Plowshares Movement anti-nuclear protest group.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.
Being popular is not the same as leadership

AUSTRALIA

Fatima Measham

What does it mean to be populist? Labor has perhaps surprisingly set the economic terms of the election, and it is evident in some components of the Coalition budget released this week.

It belies the initial response from the federal government and some pundits, which has been to bill the Shorten agenda as populism.

It’s an interesting charge. An April poll found that a majority of voters regard Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull as out of touch with ordinary people. Reinforcing that contrast - Labor as in touch with the masses - would only put the Liberals at a disadvantage.

The reality of course is that no two popular things are alike. The cruel components of our immigration detention system are there because most Australians want them there, both parties would argue. Yet they have put off legalising same-sex marriage even though it has significant support, poll after poll.

Such inconsistency suggests that other things are at play. Political cowardice, perhaps, or the sort of intellectual timidity that takes dissent as a prompt for moral detours.

In democracies, public sentiment is meant to be taken seriously. Describing something as populist is a refusal to engage with the sentiment, including its source and complications, usually because we find it so disagreeable.

The subtext is: people are wrong about the things they care about. They are not being rational or realistic. It is a brave thing to say these days about support for a royal
commission into banks, softening public attitudes toward detention-bound children, or fait accompli around climate change responses.

The problem with dismissing policy as populist is that the whole point of elections is to be popular. But it also keeps discourse superficial and polarised - policies reduced to public mood rings, which change colour according to temperature.

"People don't tend to make up their anxieties. For those on the bottom rung, the lack of change keeps memory long. They see collusion everywhere against them."

It keeps politicians from engaging honestly with other imperatives; such as whether unpopular decisions carry much greater legal and ethical weight than the alternative. What damage could have been averted, for example, if our leaders had chosen 15 years ago to respond to the material insecurities that keep Australians hostile toward asylum seekers? What if they had dug deeper, reached higher? Justin Trudeau, in the way he has reset Canadian immigration policy, suggests that they could have.

In other words, populism without leadership is just opportunism, and it can backfire. Our democratic traditions are supposed to have a civilising effect on our fears and resentments. We need only observe the United States primaries and Philippine elections to understand what catharsis looks like, and what it erodes.

Yet Tony Abbott is still trying to convince us that the 2014 budget was 'fundamentally fair'. In his view, it was profoundly unpopular because the public was just not in the mood. Are they in a better mood now? Despite their hardening interest in fairness, Treasurer Scott Morrison has pegged the 'average' wage at $20,000 more than the actual figure. The vast majority of Australians will not benefit from any budget tinkering around bracket creep.

People don't tend to make up their anxieties. For those on the bottom rung, the lack of change keeps memory long. They see collusion everywhere against them. This means that they are no longer willing to absolve politicians from leadership.

As it turns out, 'populist' things are nothing more than the expectations of the governed. According to Essential polling, what Australians want from government does not change: 'better schools, more money in health, the NDIS up and running, workable cities and most of all decent, steady jobs'.

Would responsiveness to such concerns be populist? If only we could be that lucky.

Fatima Measham is a Eureka Street consulting editor. She tweets @foomeister and blogs at This is Complicated.

Malcolm Turnbull image: Shutterstock
Tears for Omid

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas
No life without if

CREATIVE

Yuan Changming

fissuring

Between two high notes
The song gives a crack
Long enough
To allow me to enter
Like a fish jumping back
Into the night water

Both the fish and I leave no
Trace behind us, and the world
Remains undisturbed as we swim
Deeper and deeper in blue silence

Upon my return, I find the music
Still going on, while the fish has
Disappeared into the unknown

pomegranate

As long as you have ample blood
Filling in your cells, your heart
Will never fade
Within your fine structure

A rosy inner being:
Each sarcotesta is inflated
With juicy passion

25th letter

yum yum yummy, you have
become so addicted
to this juicy alphabet
you can readily get high
high within your hairless skin
as yellowish as the bank
of the Huanghe River
less sleek than a china crane
but more fragrant than a young yucca
while its pronunciation can lead you
to the very truth you are pursuing, its shape
can grow from an unknown sprout
into a huge Yggdrasill, where your soul
can perch on an evergreen twig, cawing glaringly
towards the autumn setting sun

word idioms

No belief without a lie
No business without sin
No character without an act
No coffee without a fee
No courage without rage
No culture without a cult
No entrance without a trance
No epicenter without an epic
No Europe without a rope
No freedom without a reed
No friendship without an end
No fundamentalism without mental fun
No heritage without a tag
No glove without love
No ghost without a host
No groom without a room
No infancy without fancy
No life without if
No malady without a lady
No manifestation without man
No mason without a son
No millionaire without a lion
No nirvana without a van
No passage without a sage
No pharmacy without harm
No plant without a plan
No prevention without an event
No product without a duct
No recovery without something over
No restaurant without rest or rant
No sight without a sigh
No slaughter without laughter
No splurge without urge
No spring without a ring
No substance without a stance
No think without ink
No truth without a rut

you have a dream

You will be sad to depart from us tomorrow
At an antlike moment in the smallest space
Where you will become used to singing aloud
With a throat wider than your belly, the song

Of a frog with only one tone and one pitch
A song about your dream flowing with leeches
In a ricefield. Yes, you will have a loud dream!
You will dream of humans who will no longer

Try to catch you, skin you off, barbecue you
Or eat you alive as they do with their own
Species; you will dream of jumping
As high as summer stars, and as rapid

As winter winds. You will dream of
Equality, equilibrium and equanimity
Yes, thank his Song, thank God Almighty
From human catch you will be free at last!

birds of disparate feathers: a confucian call for commonwealth

Come, come, you peng
From the Zhuangzian northern darkness
You swan from the Horacean meadows
You pheasant from under Li Bo's cold moon
You oriole from Dufu's green willow
You dove from the Dantean inferno
You phoenix from Shakespeare's urn
You swallow from the Goethe oak or
The Nerudan dense blue air, you cuckoo
From the Wordsworthian vale, you albatross
From the Coleridgean fog, you nightingale
From the Keatsian plum tree, you skylark
Form the Shelleyean heaven, you owl
From under the Baudelairen overhanging years
You unnamed creature from the Pushkinian alien lands
You raven from near Poe's chamber door
You parrot from the Tagorean topmost twig
And you crows from among my cawing words
Come, all of you, more than 100 kinds of
Birds from every time spot or spot moment
Come, with your light but strong skeletons
Come, with your hard but toothless beaks
Come, with your colored feathers, and flap your wings
Against Su dongpo's painting brush strokes
Come, all you free spirits of nature
Let's join one another and flock together
High, higher up towards mabakoola

Yuan Changming is a nine-time Pushcart nominee and author of seven chapbooks, including Wordscaping (2016). With a PhD in English, he edits Poetry Pacific with Allen Yuan in Vancouver, and has poetry appearing in Best Canadian Poetry, BestNewPoemsOnline, Threepenny Review and 1199 others across 38 countries.
Dumped-on Elders down but not despairing

ENVIRONMENT

Michele Madigan

Gillian Bouras named it. 'Despair is surely a great temptation in today's extremely troubled world,' she wrote recently.

'What can one feel except helpless in the face of the stark realities that confront huge numbers of ordinary people through no fault of their own?'

She quotes the 416 BC Thucydides: 'the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must'.

Last Friday 29 April, I spoke with one of those suffering people facing her own stark reality. She is not an asylum seeker, but she was thinking about them in the midst of her own great sadness.

'I'm sitting here trying to eat my weetbix and keep my thoughts calm,' said Enice Marsh, Adnymathanha Elder/Traditional Owner for the Flinders Ranges area of SA. 'But do you know what I was thinking? Originally Australia was colonised by boat people. Now we have boat people trying to get into Australia. Let them come. But colonisation is again attacking the First Nations people and poisoning their land.'

Enice and the other Adynamathanha Elders had just received the shattering news that the former South Australian Liberal Senator Grant Chapman's part-owned property Bardioota is 'at the top of the list' to be the site of Australia's national radioactive waste dump. (Politician-speak for being almost certainly the eventual site.)
The proposed dumpsite is adjacent to the Yappala Indigenous Protected Area. As one Yappala resident, Regina McKenzie, later described it, 'It's like getting news of a death.'

The situation certainly exemplifies the Thucydides analysis. In her interview for ABC's AM program an hour before our own phone conversation, Enice spoke of her 'total surprise. It's a disaster. I feel absolutely shattered.'

"In a repeat of the one of the Kimba owners' comments some months back, Chapman seems to be ill-informed regarding what will actually be deposited on the property."

Outlining the numerous times that the Traditional Owners had asked the State Minister for the Environment and the Federal Resources Minister Josh Frydenberg to visit the site, she could only conclude, 'But all this has come to no avail - it's all been totally ignored.'

On Friday Frydenberg managed to have it both ways, in what seems to be a now fashionable way to go about such announcements. 'There is no final decision.' And yet, there is only one site remaining from what was a 'self selection' offer by the original 28 property owners and the shortlisted six.

Frydenberg described the selection process to date as 'rigorous'. However, as the follow up process will now include 'technological, safety and environmental assessment', an obvious question remains about just how 'rigorous' it could really have been.

In a repeat of the one of the Kimba owners' comments some months back, Chapman seems to be quite ill-informed regarding what will actually be deposited on the property, quoting the usual presenting argument used in the former SA campaign of 1998-2004: that the dump will be for medical low-level waste from various hospitals and universities around the country.

No mention as usual that there is no need for this to be stored long term in the first place. No mention of the intermediate level radioactive spent fuel rods which arrived back from France in December, and are presently housed at Lucas Heights. One wonders when such news will be broken to the property owners and the Hawker community.

In contrast, the Adnyamathanha neighbours and other Traditional Owners are completely aware of this and decry the flawed, seemingly unscientific process where one person can offer their land with absolutely no consultation to the neighbours.

Their own Indigenous Protected Area expert research and eyewitness knowledge cites that as well as being a site replete with 'countless thousands of Aboriginal artifacts and registered cultural heritage sites', 'There are frequent yarta ngurra-ngurrandha (earthquakes and tremors). We see the ground move and the hills move; we feel the land move. At least half a dozen times each year.

'It is flood land. The water comes from the hills and floods the plains, including the proposed dump site. Sometimes there are massive floods, the last one on 20 January 2006.'

In stark contrast to the previous national dump campaign of 1998-2004 which was opposed by the state government, it seems that this time no member of the SA government has come to the defence of the extraordinary Flinders Ranges, a focal point
for the tourism industry of South Australia. Wilpena is a famous tourist site of great beauty and heritage, popular with both national and international tourists.

Indeed the SA community next Friday will hear the royal commission's final recommendation to import high-level radioactive waste into our seemingly politically disposable state - disposable, now, even to our own politicians.

As Bouras concludes, despair is a temptation but there is also 'the distressing matter of indifference. Indifference can be lethal.' And what pain it gives to those like Enice Marsh who care.

But still there is resilience, and still there is hope. Not only are the Adnyamathanha determined to fight on, the five other communities that are now off the shortlist have pledged their solidarity in a continuing fight against 'this flawed process'.

Who knows the power of such leadership to break the bonds of our own indifference and despair.

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.
Five reasons the LNP’s carbon scare campaign is doomed

ENVIRONMENT

Greg Foyster

It was as if Australian politics had regressed four years overnight. No sooner had Labor released its new climate change plan than the Coalition was resuscitating Tony Abbott’s ‘carbon tax’ line.

You could almost hear the collective groan in lounge rooms around the country. Not this again.

But the Coalition’s attempt to revive the defining debate of the 2013 federal election won’t work. As other commentators have noted, Labor’s plan has been carefully crafted to avoid the carbon tax sledge. More importantly, external factors have changed to make a scare campaign less potent. Here are five reasons why.

1. It makes Turnbull look fake.

Turnbull was initially popular because people thought he was moderate. He could appeal to the political middle, not just the conservative base. But, as we’ve seen, his own party prevents him from adopting the more socially progressive policies the middle wants. The narrative of Malcolm the moderate has become Malcolm the compromised. Less turn,
This lack of authenticity is Turnbull's Achilles heel. When you came to power on a platform of not being Tony Abbott, sounding like Tony Abbott is a bit of a problem. Every Abbott-era slogan that leaves Turnbull's lips reinforces the view that he's just not being genuine.

And nowhere is that more obvious than over an emissions trading scheme, which Turnbull actually crossed the floor of parliament to support in 2010.

"Remember Barnaby Joyce's $100 lamb roasts? He claimed Gillard's 'big new tax on everything' would jack up the cost of a Sunday roast to triple figures. It didn't."

2. Business isn't so opposed.

Tony Abbott's anti-carbon tax campaign was fuelled by the united opposition of powerful business lobby groups. The Business Council of Australia, Australian Industry Group, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Minerals Council issued joint statements condemning Labor's carbon price.

This time round the response has been less united. In fact, the Business Council of Australia is broadly supportive - Chief Executive Jennifer Westacott described Labor's climate plan as a 'platform for bipartisanship'.

What business wants now is certainty to attract investment, not more political tug-of-war. That leaves the Coalition with far less ammunition than before.

3. The sky didn't fall in.

Remember Barnaby Joyce's $100 lamb roasts? He claimed the Gillard government's 'big new tax on everything' would jack up the cost of a Sunday roast to triple figures. It never came to pass, of course, and neither did a whole host of other hysterical predictions.

By the time the Coalition repealed the carbon price, Treasury estimated its average impact on households at $550 in 2014-15. That's substantial, but not exactly economic Armageddon.

In the end, the carbon tax pushed up electricity and gas prices by about ten per cent. The rest of the increase was network costs - essentially the 'poles and wires'.

Real-world data like this should reduce speculation about the effect of Labor's plan on cost of living. Concern will be capped at a more realistic level.

On top of that, the scheme actually worked to reduce pollution. Since it's been scrapped, Australia's carbon pollution has been rising rapidly. The Coalition doesn't have a good answer to this rebuttal.
4. Concern about climate change is up.

The Lowy Institute Poll has tracked Australians' opinions on climate change since 2006. The question most relevant to pricing carbon pollution is whether we should take steps on global warming now 'even if this involves significant costs'. Support for this view bottomed out in 2012 and 2013 during Tony Abbott's carbon tax scare campaign. But it's rebounded, and is at its highest since 2009.

"Rather than getting bogged down in whether an emissions trading scheme is or isn't a tax, or just how much it will add to the cost of toasting crumpets, Labor needs to focus on why it's introducing this climate change plan."

Two other recent events mean concern about climate change will probably rise this year too. First, the successful Paris Agreement counters the old, spurious argument that Australia's carbon price was 'going it alone'. It also relegates climate denialism to the political fringes.

And second, the massive bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef is the most potent visual symbol of climate change Australians have ever seen. The reef is a beloved natural wonder and watching parts of it die will affect people at a deep level.

It shifts the debate from economic self-interest to stewardship and responsibility, which will play well for Labor's argument.

5. The energy transition message has gotten through.

Opinion polls from the last few years have shown a rise in support for clean energy - and greater acceptance that renewables can provide most of our power.

In an Essential Media poll from May 2015, respondents even thought renewable energy was better than fossil fuels for electricity costs, the economy and jobs. The Climate Institute's 2015 survey found the majority of Australians now believe closing coal power stations is inevitable and the government needs a plan to do it.

There are big economic forces at play too. The price of thermal coal, which is burned in power stations, has crashed. Some of the world's largest coal companies have gone bankrupt. And the mining boom has ended. Australians have started to realise that perhaps our future prosperity doesn't lie in just digging up our geological resources. The public is much more ready for energy transition than they were four years ago.

This isn't to say Labor can't stuff this up. Bill Shorten made an early blunder when he said 'There will be no carbon tax under Labor', echoing Julia Gillard's election promise and giving the Liberals great material for a political attack ad. It's a reminder of why Labor lost the last debate - poor communication, and accepting the opposing side's frame.
Rather than getting bogged down in whether an emissions trading scheme is or isn't a tax, or just how much extra it will add to the cost of toasting crumpets, Labor needs to focus on why it's introducing this climate change plan. Cutting pollution, boosting clean energy and saving the Reef - that's the territory that will work for them. The bigger picture.

We're in for a cringe-inducing couple of months, but this new carbon tax scare campaign will soon peter out. Australia has moved on.

Greg Foyster is an environment journalist, an alumni of Centre for Sustainability Leadership, and the author of the book Changing Gears.

Cartoon by Greg Foyster
Legislating for human dignity without being misty-eyed

AUSTRALIA

Kate Galloway

The Manus Island deal has been thrown into disarray, with the PNG Supreme Court declaring the detention centre on the island to be unconstitutional.

The decision was celebrated among refugee advocates who have consistently maintained that the arrangement was at best unlawful and at worst, torture.

In response, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has instructed Australians not to get 'misty-eyed' about our asylum seeker policy. There would be no changes, he said, to our firm commitment to protect our borders thereby saving thousands of lives that would otherwise be lost at sea.

The PM's choice of words reflects something that has troubled me for some time. Frequently, broad community discourse among those who object to Australia's treatment of asylum seekers is an appeal to politicians' compassion. This language indicates an emotional, values-based response to the admittedly complex and global issue of asylum seekers, albeit an entirely rational one.

Further, it calls on politicians' personal value systems rather than using language more familiar to policy-makers. (I distinguish here calls for greater compassion among the voting public, which is an important ingredient in galvanising public support for asylum seekers.)

I wonder if the language of compassion makes it easier for parliamentarians to dismiss opposition to asylum seekers, in the way the PM did in his statement. 'Misty-eyed' invokes an emotional or sentimental state of being. The PM is saying that 'emotional'
arguments will be ignored in favour of hard-nosed, rational decision-making.

In his statement, the PM invoked the historical 'logic' of 'binary opposites' pursuant to which the world can be definitively explained in terms of dualities: strong and weak; good and bad; intellect and emotion. In each pairing, one word signifies a positive attribute, and the other a negative.

The historical privilege of so-called positive attributes is no longer so certain. The privilege traditionally attached to all that is 'masculine' and 'rational' has ceded ground to the equally valuable 'feminine' and 'compassionate'. The strategy of binary opposites still holds sway however, as indicated by the PM's comment.

"Although limited, the law does provide a framework for compassionate responses to human dignity."

Because we continue to think in binary opposites, it still has currency and in this context I have often wondered at the likely success of entreaties to compassion for asylum seekers. This is not because I do not personally feel compassion for these people. And it is not because I do not believe that it is morally correct to show compassion, including through government policy.

Rather my response is partly a factor of my training as a lawyer. It has historically been usual to train lawyers to avoid emotion, instead to rely on principles and rules of law. Through my legal eyes therefore, I can see little hope for appeals to politicians to show compassion. Indeed, they already believe that they are compassionate. My conditioned response instead is to appeal to law.

Although limited, the law does however provide a framework for compassionate responses to humanity, and to human dignity. Sometimes this can be found in the body of case law built up through centuries in the English tradition, and known as common law. More frequently these days however, it is found in human rights law settled internationally and (at least sometimes) included into our domestic legislation.

Some might say that international law has no teeth. Indeed it may have limited, if any, direct application for any particular detainee. But it does help to establish global norms for governments and how they treat people. Those norms invest in each person inalienable dignity and require treatment of people that upholds that dignity.

While this law, and these norms, can be traced to 'emotions' or 'morality' or other such 'soft' frames of thought, they nonetheless provide us with language familiar to government and to governance. This language can be a useful tool in communicating our demands that government uphold the dignity of each human. And through upholding dignity, we can exercise compassion.

It is trite to say that the world can do with more compassion and not less, but it remains important in terms of promoting our humanity, to aspire to a more compassionate society. One way of communicating the value of compassion while seeking to avoid the charge of 'misty-eyed' or 'soft' thinking about asylum seekers, is to call for government to fulfil its responsibilities to human dignity.
Government must be held to account not necessarily for a lack of compassion, but certainly for the state-sponsored diminishment of human dignity that occurs through our border protection policies.

Kate Galloway is a legal academic with an interest in social justice.
Channel 7 needs to get with AFL's non-violence program

MEDIA

Garry Westmore

A mere six weeks into the regular AFL season, and already we have seen several displays of excessive on-field violence.

What’s just as concerning as the incidents themselves is that despite the AFL’s desire to stamp out the more dangerous incidents, many televised football commentators are hindering the cause by making excuses for players, playing down the severity of their actions, and failing to condemn them.

Arguably, as a society, Australia’s tolerance for violence is waning, and both the AFL and the NRL have been proactive in diminishing the prevalence of deliberate and reckless violence that might endanger players’ safety.

Since 2005 the AFL has utilised a points system to grade the severity of actions and punish those who, intentionally or not, have impacted the head of another player. Since 2011, players can be deregistered from the competition if they accumulate 16 weeks’ worth of suspensions.

The NRL also categorise contact according to severity, with dangerous throws, high tackles, and head high contact the most serious. They too have ‘carry over’ points for repeat offenders and, following Paul Gallen’s series of punches to the head of Nat Myles during a State of Origin match in 2013, introduced a one-strike policy, sending any player who lands a punch off the field immediately.

Though neither system is perfect, they send a clear message to players: if you make impact with a player’s head, expect to be suspended. Continue to get suspended through
the course of your career and risk being booted from the competition.

Yet troubling incidents continue to occur.

In round four of this year's AFL season, Stephen May of the Gold Coast Suns was suspended for five weeks after a sickening hip and shoulder to the head that left Brisbane Lions player Stefan Martin unconscious. The following week, Richmond Tigers defender Alex Rance was suspended for two weeks for a deliberate elbow to the head of Melbourne Demons forward Jack Watts.

"Last season, a head high bump by Western Bulldogs player Brett Goodes was described by Leigh Matthews as 'good, fair play', yet the AFL tribunal saw it quite differently."

Both May and Rance showed remorse. They accepted their suspensions, did little to defend their actions, and spoke remorsefully to the media, seemingly aware of the dire consequences that could easily have resulted from their actions. Asked if it was the lowest point of his career, Rance said it was, 'from a perspective of knowing better and knowing the person I want to be and the person I want to portray'.

What was disheartening though was the lack of condemnation from Channel 7 and Fox Footy commentators. 'Most uncharacteristic,' said one Channel 7 commentator of Rance's actions. 'That's just a man that's frustrated,' added former North Melbourne player Wayne Carey. 'He's tried his heart out all night, and it's just boiled over.' Carey speculated that Rance would only get a week's suspension. Rance ended up accepting a two-match ban, seemingly more aware of the severity of his actions than Carey.

And though the violent hit on Stefan Martin by Stephen May wasn't defended, neither was it strongly condemned by the Fox Footy commentators. 'A bad execution of the bump,' was commentator Jason Dunstall's assessment.

Last season too, a head high bump by Western Bulldogs player Brett Goodes was described by Channel 7 commentator and ex-footballer Leigh Matthews as 'good, fair play', yet the AFL tribunal saw it quite differently, deeming the action as 'rough' and 'high' contact and suspending Goodes for a week.

All this points to a growing divide between the AFL's view of physicality and that of those who call the game. Many commentators openly vocalise their disappointment with play they consider 'selfish' or 'lazy', yet say very little when it comes to violence.

Not that the AFL is entirely innocent. In round five a melee erupted between Geelong and Port Adelaide players - a brawl commentated with alarming fervour by Channel 7's Brain Taylor. Despite fining the players involved, the AFL still has a video of the melee on their website for fans' viewing pleasure.

The NRL too faces its own problems of on-field violence, possibly more so than the AFL, given the heightened physicality of the sport and the frequency of group tackles, which increase the potential for head and spinal injuries.

They're not helped by ex-footballers cum sports media personalities like Matthew Johns (stood down by Channel 9 in 2009 following his role in a sexual assault case) who lamented the decline of 'biff' through his skit character Reg Reagan throughout the
2000s. Once upon a time one could even own a 'Bring Back the Biff' T-shirt or hat as worn by Johns' 'comic' character.

Clearly fans of NRL and AFL don't want to see the 'tough' nature of either sport go, and there's little to suggest the kinds of impact that leaves players battered, bruised and winded will cease. It's just the AFL and NRL are keen to stamp out unnecessary and excessive violence, particularly if it has the potential to leave players concussed or even paralysed, as was the case with NRL player Alex McKinnon in 2014.

It's high time that the AFL in particular open up a dialogue with their broadcasters, and consider whether the values of their product are being supported by the vessels; the broadcasters.

Both leagues could consider raising the issue with Australian Communications and Media Authority who produce the Media Broadcasting Code of Practice, a code that despite having rules about the reporting of violent assaults has no such guideline for sports commentators and how they treat on-field violence.

As Rance said following his suspension, his hit was 'a ridiculous act, especially with the way society is going with one-punch hits'. It's about time commentators got with the program too.

Garry Westmore is a Melbourne based writer. Follow him on Twitter @garrywestmore

Original artwork by Chris Johnston
Face to face with the dark side of paradise

INTERNATIONAL

Catherine Marshall

It can be a dangerous thing, travelling to paradise. Those turquoise lagoons and snow-white beaches and lushly foliaged hills often conceal a more sinister side, a Mr Hyde to the brochures' bright-and-shiny Dr Jekyll.

So it was in the South Pacific island of Samoa this week, when Cyclone Amos skirted by.

It should have come as no surprise to me that this was a vulnerable place, for Samoa, comprising the tiniest, most insubstantial atoll, seems to have been placed in some act of randomness in the gaping centre of the vast Pacific Ocean.

It's as though shards of earth dislodged by the clashing of tectonic plates have spun out of control, landed in this oceanic morass and taken root.

Before news of the impending weather event reached us on Friday night, my husband and I had been enjoying the pleasures of Samoa - its warm, unendingly hospitable people, its soporific quality (never had we slept so much, so easily), its many attractions, such as the one-time home of the very creator of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson, who had come to this paradise in the hope that it would cure him of tuberculosis (sadly, it didn't; he is buried on a hill beside his island home).

We took little notice, perhaps because we'd quickly settled into the no-worries rhythm of island life; perhaps because the locals had seemed so nonplussed by Amos' approach.

But change came swiftly. Next morning we were told the cyclone was headed for Samoa's main island, Upolu, where we were staying. The capital city, Apia, was bracing
for floods; buildings were being sandbagged; New Zealand's High Commission had closed; all flights in and out had been cancelled.

Still, we felt calm, for there wasn't a breath of wind in the sky, and the rain - falling in fat cold drops that morning when we'd gone for a swim in So Tua Trench - had cleared. There was even a weak shaft of sunlight poking through the clouds. Surely the cyclone would change its course.

"In the space of one day we'd gone from being happily marooned on a romantic tropical island to being trapped on a tiny fleck of land upon which a cyclone was bearing down."

But that night the storm was upgraded to the highest category, a five. The Australian High Commission rang our resort to check whether any Australians were staying there. The resort owner and his staff stacked tables and chairs in the dining pavilion, lashed together bifold doors, leaving a space for the wind to pass through so the roof wouldn’t blow off.

If things got too bad, the owner siad, we'd evacuate to one of the churches on higher ground. Preferably one of those built by the Latter Day Saints, he added with a smile, since they were most solid.

Before our eyes, Dr Jekyll was transforming into Mr Hyde. In the space of one day we'd gone from being happily marooned on a romantic tropical island to being inescapably trapped on a tiny fleck of land upon which a cyclone was bearing down. But most distressingly, we'd left at home our children, two young adults and one teenager, all three too young to be orphaned.

The cyclone arrived at 2.30am on Sunday morning. The wind blew like a freight train, loud and relentless. We lay on the bed, fully dressed, rigid with terror. Our passports and phones and wallets were in a bag at the door, ready to be grabbed on our way out.

At the height of it, I stood up in the dark, opened the curtains and looked outside. Moonlight had somehow filtered through those angry clouds; though their leaves strained painfully in the wind, the palm trees stood tall; the furniture we'd stacked on the deck didn't budge. I knew then we'd be safe.

Morning came, still and silent. We looked at each other hopefully: the storm must have passed.

And so it it had: downgraded to a category three, it had had veered off towards American Samoa before dawn. It had caused flooding and extensive road damage on the island's north coast, but had only licked the south-east coast, where we were staying.

No-one had been killed. We felt a deep sense of relief and gratitude.

Mr Hyde was gone and Dr Jekyll was back in his place by early evening as we drove across the island for our late night flight. Though the airport was busy - flights to Sydney had not yet resumed and so passengers were jamming onto planes bound for Auckland instead - there was none of the panic one associates with a near-disaster.
Drivers hugged their foreign passengers goodbye; families gathered in big, brightly-dressed groups to see off their loved ones; and a fresh load of visitors stepped off a just-landed plane and into this beautiful, embracing, mercurial paradise called Samoa.

Catherine Marshall is a Sydney-based journalist and travel writer.
Paying for stopping the boats

INTERNATIONAL

Kerry Murphy

This week we learnt that the human rights protection for asylum seekers in our former colony Papua New Guinea are more protected by the PNG constitution than they would be in Australia. The Supreme Court of Justice of Papua New Guinea ruled unanimously that the asylum seekers in the Manus Island Processing Centre (MIPC) were unlawfully detained. The court was very clear on who was responsible for this unlawful detention:

'It was the joint efforts of the Australian and PNG governments that has seen the asylum seekers brought into PNG and kept at the MIPC against their will.

'These arrangements were outside the constitutional and legal framework in PNG ... The forceful bringing into and detention of the asylum seekers on MIPC is unconstitutional and is therefore illegal.'

What will happen to the asylum seekers is still unclear, as the Australian Immigration Minister has steadfastly refused to allow them to return to Australia, even to face the watered down refugee determination process that now operates for those who arrived by boat.

The process called 'Fast Track' is designed to reduce the chances of winning a case by making refusals easier to make and harder to challenge in the courts. No longer is there a requirement to have a hearing on review, and the review authority, the Immigration Appeals Authority (IAA), is directed by the Migration Act not to consider any new
information unless exceptional circumstances apply.

The PNG government has quickly moved not to change the law and constitution, but to make arrangements to close the centre and ask Australia to take back the asylum seekers. Already PNG lawyers are talking about claims for compensation for the unlawful detention, and rightly so.

One wonders if considerable money has been tentatively put aside in the forthcoming budget for the compensation of all those affected by the unlawful actions in PNG.

"You would expect PNG to seek some undertakings from Australia to cover these costs given that it was pressure from Australia that led to the current situation."

Already Australia has paid vast sums to detain people unlawfully in PNG, and PNG has no capacity to pay any compensation. You would expect PNG to seek some undertakings from Australia to cover these costs given that it was pressure from Australia, most recently from the second Rudd government, that led to the current situation.

Hopefully PNG will not copy Australia's poor record on compensating asylum seekers for unlawful detention. Back in May 1992, the Labor government changed the law on detention of Cambodians two days before the hearing in the Federal Court seeking their release. The later High Court decision of Chu Kheng Lim in 1992 found the detention to be unlawful until the change.

The response of the government was not to negotiate compensation for their unlawful action in detaining the Cambodians, but to legislate to limit any compensation payments to $1 a day. By way of justification, a Labor senator told me this was 'a lot of money in Cambodia'.

Later the Migration Act was amended yet again to retrospectively change the law so that no compensation could be paid. A similar change was made in 2001 at the time of the Tampa to retrospectively 'legalise' any 'unlawful' actions by Commonwealth officers when we were saved from the Tampa refugees by the SAS.

Since then, others who have been unlawfully detained and later compensated include Cornelia Rau and Vivian Solon-Alvarez. However neither of these people were asylum seekers - Ms Rau was a permanent resident and Ms Solon-Alvarez a citizen. They were rightly compensated; asylum seekers were not.

Given the tough-guy position of Australia, it is possible that rather than properly compensating those who were unlawfully detained, our government will prefer to spend millions of dollars on finding other poor countries to accept those who we have vilified for coming across the seas seeking protection.

Labor did this to the Cambodians, and I cannot imagine the Coalition wanting to be seen as less hardline. Government will readily pay millions to multinational companies to manage the detention centres, but will be reluctant to make any payments to the asylum seekers for unlawful detention.

The default position of both the Coalition and Labor is always to say that the hardline policies must be maintained or people will again be dying at sea. Having played their
perceived trump card, no other discussion or debate seems to be needed. But clearly it is.

This week we saw on 4 Corners how bureaucrats were delaying lifesaving medical treatment because they were not satisfied it was warranted. This was despite the opinions of medical experts. Then an Iranian self-immolated on Nauru, a terrible act of despair.

The system reactivated under Labor and reinforced under the Coalition is not only coming undone, but inflicting serious harm on those who are seeking protection.

While I do not think that someone is entitled to stay just because they arrive by boat, I do think that asylum seekers are entitled to a fair and transparent assessment of their cases without being vilified and punished.

Maybe we can learn from the PNG Supreme Court which stated: 'The human rights and dignity of the detainees or the asylum seekers which are guaranteed by the relevant provisions of the Constitution need to be respected.' Sadly we have no such protections in our Constitution. The former colony of PNG has better constitutional protections of human rights than that of their former colonial master.

Kerry Murphy is a partner with the specialist immigration law firm D'Ambra Murphy Lawyers and member of the boards of the IARC and JRS.
Cheque book solution on asylum is unconstitutional

INTERNATIONAL

Frank Brennan

A bench of five justices of the Supreme Court of Justice, the highest court in Papua New Guinea, has unanimously ruled that the detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island is unconstitutional.

The successful applicant in the case was Belden Norman Namah, the PNG Leader of the Opposition. Unlike the Australian Constitution, the PNG Constitution contains a list of basic human rights including section 42 which deals with 'liberty of the person'. That provision states that 'No person will be deprived of his personal liberty' except in specific circumstances.

Back in 2001 when John Howard's government instituted the first Pacific solution, there was only one exception which came even close to dealing with the deprivation of liberty of asylum seekers being brought to PNG and detained there. That was section 42(1)(g) which permitted deprivation of liberty 'for the purpose of preventing unlawful entry' into PNG.

But it was a long stretch of the bow to argue that this provision could cover the entry into PNG of persons brought there with the PNG government's agreement on receipt of a cheque from Australia.

The Australian government and its lawyers have been on notice about this illegality for 14 years.

When the now grandfather of the House of Representatives Philip Ruddock was Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, he made a habit of criticising Australian judges whom he thought too soft on asylum seekers wanting to vindicate their legal rights in
court.

At the same time, he had gone ahead instituting Australia's first edition of the 'Pacific Strategy' for warehousing asylum seekers offshore. I wrote to him on 9 June 2002 saying:

'Despite your recent adverse comments about the Australian judiciary, I note that you have not refuted my concerns about the legality of the Pacific Solution preferring simply to observe that no court proceedings have been instituted in Nauru and that the action in PNG was struck out for non-appearance of counsel on 6 May 2002.

'I concede that the PNG government may well have issued conditional visas to the detainees on Manus Island but any visa with a condition amounting to detention would still be unconstitutional.'

Mr Ruddock replied on 22 August 2002:

'I note your continuing concerns about the legality of the government's Pacific Strategy. The constitutionality of the arrangements for accommodation of asylum seekers in Nauru and Papua New Guinea is a matter for the governments of the countries concerned. 'It is relevant to note, however, that to the extent that the asylum seekers in those countries are subject to restrictions on their freedom of movement, those restrictions were imposed by the legislation of Nauru and Papua New Guinea respectively.'

Needless to say, the constitutionality of arrangements was not the province of the governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea. The thing about constitutions is that they bind governments and even parliaments, and they are definitively interpreted not by governments but by courts. Legislative restrictions have to comply with constitutional constraints.

In 2003, I published the first edition of my book *Tampering With Asylum*. I wrote: 'The detention of asylum seekers is contrary to the constitutions of Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Imagine if every first-world country decided to engage in this sort of unlawful people trading.'

After Kevin Rudd revived the Pacific Solution on 19 July 2013 and once Tony Abbott perfected it on his election as prime minister, the PNG government decided to amend its Constitution to try and legalise the detention second time around.

In 2014, the PNG parliament purported to amend the Constitution by adding a further exception to section 42, thereby permitting deprivation of liberty 'for the purpose of holding a foreign national under arrangements made by Papua New Guinea with another country'.

"Just because Australia does not have a constitutional bill of rights, that is no excuse for our governments exporting their cavalier disregard for human rights to our mendicant neighbours."

Unlike the Australian Constitution, the PNG Constitution permits the parliament to amend the Constitution without the need for a referendum of the people. But the PNG Constitution does specify that amendments to the Constitution paring back constitutional rights can only be made subject to strict conditions in relation both to the content and
form of the new law.

In relation to the content, a new restriction on an existing constitutional right can be legislated only if it is necessary to advance defence, public safety, public order, public welfare or public health, or if it is necessary to protect the rights of others, or if it is necessary to resolve a conflict of rights.

In all these cases, there is a need to establish that the proposed law 'is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society having a proper respect for the rights and dignity of mankind'. The proposed law legalising detention of asylum seekers sent from Australia did not get to first base according to the judges.

The judges, having quoted UNHCR's adverse report on the Manus Island Processing Centre, agreed with the Leader of the Opposition's contention 'that treating those required to remain in the relocation centre as prisoners irrespective of their circumstances or their status save only as asylum seekers, is to offend against their rights and freedoms as guaranteed by the various conventions on human rights at international law and under the PNG Constitution'.

In relation to the form of the new law, it needed to state the purpose for which it was made and to 'specify the right or freedom that it regulates or restricts'. The court ruled that the new law 'did not specify the purpose of the amendment or the right which it purported to limit. On that ground alone the amendment is invalid and should be declared so.'

So the law aimed at legalising long term detention of the asylum seekers being held in the Manus Island Processing Centre was struck down. It's unconstitutional.

Yet again, Australia has been complicit in its Pacific neighbours (PNG and Nauru) prostituting their Constitutions and undermining the rule of law in exchange for a fistful of dollars, with hapless asylum seekers, most of whom are ultimately proved to be refugees, being left to languish.

Just because Australia does not have a constitutional bill of rights, that is no excuse for our governments exporting their cavalier disregard for human rights to our mendicant neighbours. The PNG judges thought their legal reasoning would be even more compelling 'if the conditions of detention are such as to damage the rights and dignity of the detainees or, worse, cause physical or mental suffering'.

"So the spiral of abuse continues until ultimately Australia convenes a royal commission to get to the bottom of our complicity in the abuse of asylum seekers and trashing of the rule of law in our region."

These asylum seekers now have a claim for damages for wrongful detention. The PNG court has ordered that 'both the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments shall forthwith take all steps necessary to cease and prevent the continued unconstitutional and illegal detention of the asylum seekers'.

No doubt we will hear unctuous pleas from Australian ministers that Australia was not even a party to the court proceedings. Our government was no more involved in the unconstitutional detention of these asylum seekers than was Channel 9 in the attempted
abduction of the children in Lebanon last fortnight. So the spiral of abuse continues until ultimately Australia convenes a royal commission to get to the bottom of our complicity in the abuse of asylum seekers and trashing of the rule of law in our region.

Of course, Peter Dutton, the Australian Immigration Minister says these asylum seekers and proven refugees being detained on Manus Island 'won't be coming to Australia'. For months now he has been insisting that the 263 asylum seekers here in Australia awaiting return to Nauru after medical treatment must be sent for fear that their remaining in Australia might send a message to people smugglers.

That cry is starting to ring hollow. The boats have stopped, and they will stay stopped. And those 263 are still here.

Not only should those 263 be allowed to remain; those 850 held in detention on Manus Island should be brought to Australia under an agreement whereby they receive prompt processing and resettlement in exchange for their agreeing to drop their substantial damages claims for unlawful, unconstitutional detention in unconscionable conditions on Manus Island.

It's time to close the Manus Island Processing Centre and to allow PNG to return to the rule of law. It's better that Australia cut its losses now, rather than waiting for the inevitable royal commission which will lay bare the long term cost of what has been done in our name.

And have no fear, the boats will stay stopped provided only that our defence and intelligence services do their job in cooperation with Indonesian authorities.

Frank Brennan SJ is professor of law at Australian Catholic University and Adjunct Professor at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.
Negative gearing is the end of the Australian Dream

ECONOMICS

Kate Galloway

Last week the Prime Minister announced that negative gearing would remain 'untouched' under a Coalition government.

Negative gearing is a tax concession allowing a taxpayer to offset the cost of an investment property against their other income. It encourages people to buy houses as investments.

It does nothing, however, to help housing affordability - and this is becoming a major problem, especially for younger Australians.

The government's argument in favour of negative gearing focuses on protecting investment opportunities for 'mum and dad investors'. In other words, the government would like us to believe that the policy protects 'ordinary' Australians.

Indeed the PM and treasurer assert that it is teachers, electricians and nurses who use negative gearing, much more so than finance managers - who presumably earn more.

Although some 'ordinary' Australians may be able to afford investment properties, it is most commonly used in the wealthiest electorates. Indeed in response to the government's claims, the Grattan Institute has found that wealthy Australians are the most likely to use negative gearing.

Not only is less likely to be used by 'ordinary' Australians, but one effect of negative gearing is to push up house prices, putting home ownership out of reach for the
'ordinary' Australians the government says it is trying to help.

The PM tacitly acknowledged the impossibility of home ownership for so many younger people when he introduced us to a young 'mum and dad', Kim and Julian, who had purchased an investment property while living with their parents. They could not afford to buy a family home and say that the only way they could enter the property market at all is through negative gearing.

"Negative gearing in the current economic environment promotes a significant wealth gap between existing investors and future generations."

People like Kim and Julian, and the others who cannot afford any property at all, still need somewhere to live. So, they become lodgers or they rent from the investors who own the housing stock. The result is that Australians' homes are being divorced from what has been the principal source of wealth for ordinary Australians: property.

**Home as wealth**

Since World War II Australia has had a largely egalitarian distribution of wealth through the Australian Dream of home ownership. Home ownership rates have been at around 70 per cent for decades.

Historically, having a largely home-owning population has ensured both the social benefit of housing, and an economic benefit through enforced saving with long-term capital growth. And home ownership became a cultural institution.

In contrast, the current negative gearing push splits the cultural and economic meaning of home ownership. It does so first because it focuses on investment. Negative gearing promotes property ownership but not home ownership. Thus the social benefits of home ownership that we have come to expect give way to bare economic indicators - how much investment is occurring.

The resulting reduction in owning our homes will mean a large shift to rental. This need not of itself be a bad thing - but there is no policy to support a widespread increase in home rental.

Apart from being a homeowner or taking the more precarious option of short-term private rental, there are few alternative, secure, housing tenures. Residential tenancy in Australia occurs largely in a private rental market with fairly weak tenant protection. A lifetime of home rental is for many an insecure and expensive prospect.

Secondly, negative gearing in the current economic environment promotes a significant wealth gap between existing investors and future generations - starting with Millenials who are at the life stage when they would expect to enter the housing market.

"What would benefit 'ordinary' Australians instead, is a comprehensive policy that addresses housing affordability, and secure housing more generally, in the current
economic climate."

The 'haves' are those who are already homeowners or investors. These people can almost certainly count on long-term capital growth - a good return on their investment.

In contrast, the 'have-nots' are those who are not yet homeowners, and who may never become so. They are likely to remain excluded from home ownership through a convergence of economic factors including low wages, precarious work, increasing university debt, and an inflated property market.

Negative gearing does not provide these people with an economic benefit. For government to suggest that these are 'mums and dads' who will benefit from negative gearing fails to understand the economic conditions they face.

The conclusion about the government's announcement is that negative gearing supports structural inequality. The policy is at odds with intergenerational equity in the distribution of wealth, and also in distribution of the social good of secure housing.

What would benefit 'ordinary' Australians instead, is a comprehensive policy that addresses housing affordability, and secure housing more generally, in the current economic climate. Failing to do so means that older generations will have lived the Australian Dream to the exclusion of their children.

Kate Galloway is a legal academic with an interest in social justice.

Original artwork by Greg Foyster
No moral mystery to 60 minutes child snatch disaster

MEDIA

Ray Cassin

The mystery of the 60 Minutes child snatch that went so disastrously wrong is that there is no mystery, although some people want to contrive one.

Ethically there are no shades of grey here. We know what happened, and we know that what 60 Minutes and TCN Nine agreed to do by helping Sally Faulkner abduct her children in Beirut violated a fundamental tenet of journalism.

That tenet can be simply expressed: don't make yourself a player in the story, especially not by paying other players in the story. Because if you do, your audience has no reason to trust your account of what the story is.

That's it. It's as basic as that, and it is what 60 Minutes did. No amount of obfuscation and special pleading will change that.

But the obfuscators are emerging nonetheless, unctuously intent on mystifying the story after all.

Not least among them is Tara Brown (pictured), the reporter 60 Minutes sent to Beirut.

After Brown, her producer Stephen Rice, camera operator Ben Williamson and sound recordist David Ballment had returned to Australia from their two-week stint in a Beirut jail, she insisted that they 'were just journalists doing their job'.

Apparently this is why Brown felt confident that she and her colleagues would quickly be
The 'mistakes and failings' narrative evades the truth, too. It is another attempt to mystify what is not mysterious, because it replaces a moral evaluation of the events with a technical one.

'I really thought, we're journalists, we're doing our job, they will see reason, they'll understand that,' she said. 'That we are here just to do a story on a very desperate mother.'

Except that 60 Minutes' involvement in the story went way beyond following Sally Faulkner to Beirut to see whether she could reclaim her children Lahela, five, and Noah, three, from their father, her former partner Ali Elamine.

Lawyers acting for Adam Whittington and his euphemistically named 'child recovery team', who are all still in custody in Beirut, have tendered in court a document indicating that Nine paid Whittington nearly $70,000 for his work.

Nine has not officially admitted funding the abductors, but in the circumstances the network's refusal to comment comes about as close to exemplifying the maxim that silence gives consent as can be imagined.

The reason for the disclosure of the payment to Whittington's company, Child Abduction Recovery International, is obvious enough.

Whittington's lawyer, Joe Karam, said that he wished his client and the three contractors who worked with him had been included in the settlement that allowed Faulkner and the 60 Minutes team to be released from jail.

Nothing brings out the truth like pique at being left behind.

Nine is reported to have paid Ali Elamine $US500,000 to drop abduction charges against Faulkner and the 60 Minutes crew. In return, Faulkner waived her right to custody of the children, which had been granted by the Family Court in Australia.

She might never see them again, unless their father, who was given custody by a Shia court in Lebanon, allows her to visit them in Beirut - in which case she could still be at risk of criminal charges.

So 'doing a story on a very desperate mother' involved paying a team of international kidnappers to abduct the children, then paying their father an eye-poppingly large amount of money to allow their mother and the journalists to walk free.

The release of the 60 Minutes team had nothing to do with them being 'just journalists doing their job', and after this grubby set of payments the very desperate mother is worse off than she was before.

All of this amounts to what Brown's 60 Minutes colleague Michael Usher has described as 'mistakes and failings' in the handling of the story, which is now subject to an internal
review at Nine.

Mistakes there certainly were. The Lebanese police were able to find the children, their abductors, Faulkner and the 60 Minutes team because Ben Williamson asked Faulkner if he could film her calling Elamine to tell him she had the children.

When she rang off, Elamine reported the call to the police. They checked the number and found that the phone Faulkner used belonged to Whittington, who astonishingly had registered under his own name in a Beirut hotel. His arrest led to the arrest of everyone else involved.

Yep, it was massive bungle piled upon gross ineptitude. But the 'mistakes and failings' narrative evades the truth, too. It is another attempt to mystify what is not mysterious, because it replaces a moral evaluation of the events with a technical one.

"Whatever 60 Minutes might say in their defence now, it is almost inconceivable that they would have acted as they did in Australia or any other Western country."

There have been attempts by some in the media to mount a moral justification of 60 Minutes' actions. The usual defence is that at least they were trying to do the right thing, by helping a mother who would not have been denied custody in Australia.

But that opens another, distinctly slimy, can of worms. Do we think 60 Minutes would have funded a child abduction in Australia, however much the parent they were purporting to help might seem to have been denied custody unfairly?

Almost certainly not. But it's different, of course, if the children have been taken to another country, especially a Muslim country with religious courts, the very mention of which can be guaranteed to raise the hackles of 60 Minutes viewers.

Whatever 60 Minutes might say in their defence now, it is almost inconceivable that they would have acted as they did in Australia or any other Western country.

What will be the ultimate consequence of their actions? It is not clear, although Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has said that the $500,000 payment to Ali Elamine could be investigated by the corporate regulator, the Australian Securities and Exchange Commission (ASIC): 'Nobody is above the law, and if you break the law in other parts of the world you may well be breaking Australian law as well.'

Maybe. ASIC might investigate, and Nine might even be prosecuted. But I'm betting that if this saga deters news organisations from following 60 Minutes' example, it will only be because shareholders and corporate boards don't want to pay the cost.

The gap between principle and practice in journalism won't close anytime soon.
Ray Cassin is former *Age* journalist and a longstanding contributor to *Eureka Street*.
Little 'bull

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas
Domestic violence is more than an attitude problem

CREATIVE

Kristin Natalier

The federal government's new ad aims to 'stop violence from the start'. It sends a strong message that violence is never acceptable. But it firmly positions domestic violence as a problem of individual attitudes of perpetrators, not the social and economic vulnerability of victims.

The title and the message of the ad is 'Respect'. It is premised on an increasingly influential idea of domestic violence as an expression of individual and cultural devaluing of women. It aims to raise awareness of the potential long-term consequences of seemingly minor acts of disrespect.

Even in the recent history of domestic violence debate, this message is an important step forward. But envisaging an end of domestic violence achieved through 'starting conversations about respect with boys and girls' sidesteps the need for the material resources necessary to stop violence when it happens.

Physical violence is the obvious and most derided act of violence in intimate relationships. But it is an expression not only of disrespect, but of power disparities between partners. Violent partners can control women's access to jobs, money and social supports. When women leave, they need meaningful financial support to rebuild their lives.

The funding failures of the Turnbull government are legion. The $100 million in funding announced in September last year does not come close to replacing funding lost in earlier cuts, nor can it address the service gaps in the sector. Emergency shelters are essential in keeping women and their families safe when they initially leave violent situations but
there is a real shortage of beds and related supports.

Community legal centres are one of the few accessible sources of legal advice for domestic violence victims. But with funding cuts, victims will continue to be turned away because of a lack of staffing and resources.

The gap between the federal government's shiny rhetoric and the needs of domestic violence survivors is evident in policy domains that impact on the wellbeing of victims. Domestic violence is the primary reason for homelessness among women. Housing affordability is a key step in addressing long-term homelessness, but is absent from the government's agenda in any meaningful way.

Many women need money when they leave abusers. The dynamics of control that underpin much family violence increase the likelihood that women will not be financially independent when they leave a violent partner. The parenting payments that are a necessary source of income for many women when they leave relationships is not enough to live with any modicum of comfort or financial security.

"Systematic underfunding of the service and community sectors erodes the collective advocacy of organisations that support women and argue for social, political and economic change."

The approach to Newstart is punishing. As the recent (currently shelved) Social Security Legislation Amendment (Further Strengthening Job Seeker Compliance) Bill 2015 highlights, the government will support the withholding of payments not only for behaviours, but attitudes that do not conform to the stringent activity, reporting and surveillance requirements placed on job seekers.

The place of child support in abused women's financial lives is ambiguous. Women are required to seek child support in order to receive their full entitlements to Family Tax Benefits, but may find themselves subject to ongoing financial abuse. Exemptions from seeking child support are available, but not well advertised.

Despite the rhetoric of gender equality and respect for women, the federal government responds to domestic violence as a problem of individual attitudes, to be addressed by responsible individuals.

Systematic underfunding of the service and community sectors erodes the collective voice and advocacy of organisations that both support women and argue for social, political and economic change.

It denies women who have left their partners the resources needed for social, economic and emotional wellbeing. When women leave a violent situation, they are almost immediately positioned as 'leaners', through the practical effects of government policy.

The message in this new ad echoes Turnbull's 'game changing' comments about respect for women. But there is nothing game changing about demanding respect without funding the resources needed to protect women when that respect goes missing, as it so often seems to do.
Kristin Natalier is an associate professor in sociology at Flinders University.
No wonder the warrior-dead still weep

CREATIVE

Peter Gebhardt

Anzac Day and corporate Australia

On a small marble plinth in the park,
Names are inscribed on a plaque.
Let us remember them.
We will remember them
At the going down of the sun
and in the morning.
Bugles will blast, old cannons shudder.
And the jalopy planes buzz above.
Lest we forget.
They did not fight for profit,
They did not fight for gain,
A balance sheet was wholly foreign.
They were not insured against the pain,
No need to fudge the files.
You wouldn't find their names,
You wouldn't find their conditions,
You wouldn't find the definitions,
The language of futility, failure and falsity.
Dressed like mutton in duty and dedication,
in pride and sadness.

You cannot insure against lies,
Even when you're blind and out of mind,
Even when you cannot walk or talk.
They had a moral sense, their own brand,
Which we cannot now seem to understand.
It was shot and lost in the valleys and gullies,
In the waters and on the slopes.
Let us remember them
Faithful in our fidelity
to them as they were
and thus, perhaps,
to us as we might be.

The children are in the park today
Running, skipping and laughing,
They slide down the cannon, polishing the past
With freshly-pressed pants, a mother's delight.
'Always tell the truth,' the mother says,
'If you lie, you'll burn.'

The day is closing,
patient and gentle in its suffering, but the great lies will not lie down. lies breed lies like flies on dead sheep and the masquerade of maggots makes its creep it’s no wonder the warrior-dead still weep.

Rainbows

Really it is not surprising, the enchantment When all the photo albums are unboxed, And memory has to fashion a quickstep To revive the wonders of visitations, Which are now so distant, but so close.

Once we flew under a rainbow In a small plane, you wouldn’t see it In one of those terrestrial target-mongers Which hug their idea of heaven to tightly.

We know, sadly, we cannot make rainbows, Even soap-bubbles blown skywards Are no match, pale illusion, just bubbles, Bursting, they billet in the distance.

The photos have their signposts And we can walk where we walked before, And the rainbow is a victory arch Through which we go and face the bounty of entrances And the sure exits off-stage to the green rooms.

We have to trust that rainbows will keep coming, For we need them, they have their feet in the earth.

Peter Gebhardt is a retired school principal and judge. His most recent book is *Black and White Onyx: New and Selected Poems 1988-2011*. 
Anzac Day and just war scepticism go together

.RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Anzac Day this year falls shortly after a Vatican Conference on Non-Violence and Just Peace. The coincidence is intriguing. At their best both Anzac Day and conferences of this kind are about people and the cost war makes them pay.

Anzac Day invites us to remember the soldiers who have died in war, those who have survived with scars to their body and spirit, and those who have grieved the loss.

Conferences on war focus properly on the people and cultures that war damages. Both kinds of event at their best say, 'Never again'.

The contribution of the conference was to question the legitimacy of just war thinking as a Christian approach to war and peace, and to stress the priority of peaceful over violent ways of making peace.

Its reservations about the value of just war theory are well grounded. The classical arguments originated at a time when casualties were suffered mostly by soldiers.

In modern warfare, including in Syria and Iraq, civilians overwhelmingly suffer, largely at the hands of powers that are not defending their own people. It is increasingly difficult to justify any war by the principles of self-defence and proportionality, to name just two.

Just war theory, too, is largely used as spin to give specious justification to military campaigns in whose devising ethical considerations played no part. Wars that governments wage are always declared to be just; those waged by their enemies are
declared to be unjust.

By joining seriously in such meretricious debate churches would seem to be co-opted into playing an intellectual game designed to make legitimate killing and destruction.

"Modern war leaves no excuse for endorsing wars as divinely sanctioned or as a battle of good against evil. That line can safely be left for government spinners to cast."

When used among Christians, too, just war language diminishes the radical edge of the Gospel. The Gospel emphasises non-violence in relationships, the priority of the poor and vulnerable over those who wield power, and the value in God's eyes of each human being, especially of strangers.

When we enter into conversation about just wars we join the powerful in talking about what they can do to the weak. This draws the Gospel's teeth.

In the Catholic Church, which gives authority to its history, it is argued, the focus on the justice of wars conceals and dishonours an essential element of that tradition: the witness of those who suffered because they refused to violently engage in war. These conscientious objectors should be honoured together with martyrs and other witnesses to faith.

The conference commended the force of these arguments in its criticism of the use and validity of just war theory. Because it was held at the Vatican, and so seen as representing official Catholic thinking, it also attracted strong criticism from those who view war from the perspective of those who wage it and see it as a regrettable or laudable necessity. From this standpoint churches that refuse to endorse wars in which their nations are involved risk weakening national solidarity.

I agree with the conference's demand that in their internal conversation churches and their leaders should insist on the radical commitment of the Gospel to non-violence. In public conversation they should draw attention to the faces and lives of those made to suffer by war, including those whose suffering is inflicted by one's own nation.

Modern war leaves no excuse for endorsing wars as divinely sanctioned or as a battle of good against evil. That line can safely be left for government spinners to cast.

But I would argue that, although churches should insist that peace may properly be made only through non-violent means, the questions asked in just war theory have their place. They were first asked in a world where wars were regarded as an inevitable necessity. In that context, just war theory was really unjust war theory - it was a weapon for declaring particular wars to be unjustifiable.

The critical function of just war theory continues to have its place. It confronts supporters of war with compelling reasons why no war, including the one in which they have an interest, can be just. It gives Christians a public language in which to enter from their own radical perspective a secular conversation.

It also remains important to ask what actions are legitimate and illegitimate in the conduct of war (ius in bello). If we believe war is now unjustifiable, that cannot be the end of the discussion. For the harm war causes can be lessened if those who conduct it
adopt rules of engagement stipulating, for example, that civilian casualties are avoided, prisoners neither killed nor tortured, and punitive sanctions outlawed.

The conduct of missions in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the importance of these rules to minimise harm. Australian rules of engagement occasionally led their troops to withdraw from some missions initiated by the United States forces whose rules were not as strict. In Syria more indiscriminate Russian and government bombing caused massive civilian casualties.

Even if behaviour like sharing drugs, engaging in casual sex, holding up banks and making war are declared to be immoral, we still need to ask how they can be done in a way that least violates human dignity.

The conference and Anzac Day are both about paying due respect to people. That respect forbids a romantic view of war and those who wage it. It also forbids simply condemning it and then turning our face away.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of *Eureka Street*.

Anzac Day photo: Chris Phutully, Flickr CC
The boat people from paradise lost

ENVIRONMENT

Lyn Bender

In rich countries we speak of climate change as a lifestyle choice or economic problem for some time in the future. For Pacific Islanders it is a life death and survival crisis happening right now, as they watch their islands drown.

I thought I knew the truth about climate change; but it was not deep knowledge. I hadn't seen its face and heard its voice, until I heard from an islander whose home is literally disappearing beneath the waters.

At an event sponsored by Friends of the Earth and Caritas, Ursula Rakova told how the sea that had been the friend of her people, was turning against them. It had crashed through and divided her island in two. Coconut palms were collapsing at the new shoreline.

Food gardens were lost, as the soil was increasingly rendered infertile by salty tides that washed over them. The land that had been handed from grandmother to daughter, would bequeath no legacy to the granddaughters. The homeland of generations was disappearing before their eyes.

Ursula spoke movingly of the collective loss. She is asking for the help of the rich countries whose fossil fuel based prosperity has been achieved at the cost of her people's survival. She represented the many poor and indigenous people who are suffering most from the warming of the planet.

Climate change and the danger it presents to our planet is something many claim to know. But do we feel it? Do we care enough? Do we comprehend the loss of displaced
people whose land has been washed away? Do we see that there but for the passage of
time, are all our futures?

The government continues to approve new coalmines and seemingly remains
lighthearted about the plight of those affected by climate change. Remember the one
about sinking Pacific islands? Caught on camera, the Minister for Immigration Peter
Dutton quipped to our since deposed prime minister, Tony Abbott, that 'Time doesn't
mean anything when you have water lapping at your doors.'

They chortled over that one.

"Do we comprehend the loss of displaced people whose land has been washed away? Do
we see that there but for the passage of time, are all our futures?"

Imagine that being said with compassion instead of in heartless jest.

Listening to Ursula Rakova, the audience at Melbourne University sat in stunned silence.
Ursula's task was to head the relocation of the inhabitants of the Carteret Islands and to
raise Australia's awareness of the need for climate action. She had been entrusted by the
elders to head the project Tulele Peisa, which translates as 'riding the waves on our own'.

The Catholic Church in Bougainville gifted the land of four former plantations for the
resettlement of Carteret Islanders. The German Lutheran Church and Protestant
Churches have also assisted them.

In preparation for the arrival of ten families, traditional homes were built and cocoa and
coco palms and traditional food gardens were being planted. They were now exporting
dried coco pods to chocolate makers in Hamburg. One hundred and thirty more Carteret
families were destined for re-settlement.

But all this is a drop in the rising oceans considering the thousands that would be
displaced from Tuvalu, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and more. Will we help these climate
refugees?

In 2001 John Howard refused the request by Tuvalu to resettle its climate refugees.
Instead, without any apparent sense of the irony, Howard proposed that Tuvalu become
part of his Pacific solution for asylum seekers. Meanwhile Immigration Minister Phillip
Ruddock declared that the people of Tuvalu did not fit the criteria for refugee
resettlement.

The Pacific Islanders are the new boat people. Not all of them have a mother island like
Bougainville.

So far ten Carteret families have travelled the 45 nautical miles to Bougainville in 19m
banana boats. Each house is built at a cost of $8500.

But in terms of making a contribution, Australia is missing in non-action. Someone in the
audience remarked rhetorically. 'How would Australia's coastal cities cope with
relocation?'
As I watched Ursula’s video, *Sisters on the Planet*, I was at once profoundly inspired and deeply saddened. I asked her a question. ‘How do you deal with your grief?’

Ursula responded. ‘We keep our values strong. We teach our children the culture. Even when our islands are gone we will continue to visit them.”

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

Pictured: Lyn Bender and Ursula Rakova (middle) with volunteers from Healthy Futures.