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Raising boys amid Australia's 'masculinity of the frontier'

AUSTRALIA

Fatima Measham

If we had had a daughter, we would have had to create conditions that would make her sense of self impervious to gendered mistreatment. But we have a son, and the question of how to raise a man is never far from our minds. What on earth do we do with him?

It seemed simpler before he started school, when being honest, respectful and responsible sufficed. He only had himself to become. But he is lately sensing that this involves resistance on his part against social expectations about how he is supposed to behave and what to enjoy.

At nine years old, he understands that people expect boys to suck it up, to be tough. He thinks twice about telling friends about things he likes, or has learned to rationalise them against exclamations that 'that's a girl thing!'

He is having to navigate these binaries, and it seems so unfair, so smothering. He knows there is nothing at all wrong with girls and things that are 'girlish', and that it doesn't make him any less of a boy to treat girls kindly.

We may not have a daughter, over whom we would have worried about the countless ways the world can hurt her. Yet the work does not seem to be any less difficult, raising sons, especially in Australian context.

I've wondered at the things we have come to associate with masculinity in this country. When the NSW government devised lockout laws in central Sydney in 2014, part of me wondered about other factors in late-night assaults.

I had to wonder because the men I saw get drunk, when I was a kid and later at university, never got violent. It can't be that Filipino men are more virtuous, but that alcohol had a different effect. It made my dad more likely to break into song or dance. My uncles got louder about politics. The college boys became increasingly sentimental and confessional (and always made sure the girls got back to the dorm intact).

"Those of us from other backgrounds recognise that other cultures of masculinity are possible and in fact exist. Ones in which men hug each other, women leaders are common, and clothes are just clothes."

It struck me as incomplete, this idea that inebriated Australian men have to take a swing. Last March, a report into the lockout laws found that assaults had been merely displaced to surrounding suburbs.

When we look at other forms of violence and abuse in Australian life - against women, children, Indigenous peoples and refugees - it is hard to escape the masculine character
of that violence.

It doesn't matter where it occurs, whether at home, in the sacristy, on the street, in detention or at the club. It is a masculinity of the frontier: aggressive, self-entitled and territorial.

Those of us from other backgrounds recognise this because we know that other cultures of masculinity are possible and in fact exist. Ones in which men hug each other, women leaders are common, and clothes are just clothes. Ones in which men share in care-work, and laws are made to support them in this. Ones in which restraint, not force, is the mark of a man.

This is not what we have in Australia. There is instead a hyper-sensitivity to emasculation, grounded in gender binaries, which has led to a lot of hurt.

We see traces of it in homophobia, which recoils at 'soft' men and 'butch' women. We see traces of it in the doctrine of male headship, which traps Christian women in abusive relationships. We see traces of it in grievance movements which target prominent feminists.

Having a son means that I think about such things differently than if I had a daughter. How do I make sure he doesn't hurt others, especially women?

To begin with, it seems important to decouple masculinity from violence. He gets this, at least. The harder thing, especially given his broader environment, is to help him learn how to be himself in a way that doesn't rest on being a man.

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Australia's tepid Rohingya response fails the region

INTERNATIONAL

Erin Cook

Australia's incoherent urge to 'lead' in the Asia Pacific while refusing to meaningfully reflect on the responsibilities this would require has left us floundering in the face of what the United Nations has called the 'ethnic cleansing' of Myanmar's minority Rohingya population.

The current crisis is just the latest in a decades long string of violent crackdowns which have sent thousands of Rohingya people fleeing across the region. A crisis in May 2015 saw 130,000 leave the northern Rakhine State with at least 8000 Rohingya boarding rickety boats - only to float aimlessly in the Andaman Sea before an agreement brokered between Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia allowed them to land in the Indonesian province of Aceh.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop later that month pledged an additional $6 million in humanitarian aid to be administered in Rakhine State: $2 million to the UNHCR, $3 million to the World Food Program and $1 million to the Burma Emergency Response Fund. Of course, this is not even a quarter of what the government had cut from the Myanmar program after slashing $11 billion from overall aid spending in the 2015 budget, leading to admonishment from Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young and eye-rolls from the development community across the region.

The salt in that wound came from then-prime minister Tony Abbott, whose 'stop the boats' refrain proved what Singaporean founding father Lee Kuan Yew already knew - Australia is doomed to be the 'white trash of Asia'. As wire agencies compiled photo essays of malnourished, partially-clothed elderly men sitting atop wooden boats in scorching heat and young hijab-wearing mothers fishing limp, dead children from the ocean, Abbott thought then the time to spruik his favourite policy.

Push factors forcing entire Rohingya communities to up and leave were irrelevant to Abbott, it was all about people smuggling. 'I don't apologise in any way for the action that Australia has taken to preserve safety at sea by turning boats around where necessary. And if other countries choose to do that, frankly that is almost certainly absolutely necessary if the scourge of people smuggling is to be beaten,' he said, as reported by SBS.

The comments weren't all that out there for a man who has the eloquence of a child's Furby toy banished to the back of a cupboard, but it was one of those frightening moments in which Australia's toxic domestic politics leaks out to be judged by the rest of the world.

Well, now what? This current flare up has sent half a million Rohingya people - both Muslim and the minority-within-a-minority Rohingya Hindus - across the border into Bangladesh where they face food and healthcare shortages, as well as uncertainty as Bangladesh struggles to respond adequately. Horrifying accounts of mass rapes and the murder of children and infants continue to dominate regional headlines. But the
Australian response has, once again, been lacking.

"Successive governments' insistence that Australia must take a leading role in the Asia Pacific would surely imply Australia's response would be more than 'what's in it for us?'"

Last month, the Guardian reported the government was planning to pay off an estimated seven Rohingya refugees who are currently incarcerated in Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, to return to Myanmar as part of efforts to shut down the camp.

'I don't want to die in PNG. I prefer to die in Myanmar. Probably Buddhist people are going to kill me as soon as I arrive in Myanmar ... Australia doesn't care if we live or we die,' 32-year-old detainee Yahya Tabani told the Guardian.

This was quickly followed by a Fairfax report which found the Australian delegation to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva at the end of September had forced the 'softening' of language in a resolution meant to condemn the worsening atrocities. Meanwhile, a $300,000 'cooperation program' between our military and the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's military behind most of the violence, will continue despite criticisms. For comparison, the UK suspended operations mid-September.

Burmese activists and human rights watchers agree the chasm between the minority Rohingya and Buddhist majority is insurmountable, at least for the foreseeable future, and no domestic government is likely to push for change. The Rohingya crisis is not one which will be solved, it needs to be managed.

Almost two decades into the 'Asian century,' Australia still uses 'Asia' as a shorthand for East Asia and meaningful engagement in Southeast Asia trails as a result. The fact that this is one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent memory in the region should alone be enough motivation to react accordingly, but, failing that, successive governments' insistence that Australia must take a leading role in the Asia Pacific would surely imply Australia's response would be more than 'what's in it for us?'

Erin Cook is a Jakarta-based journalist with a focus on South East Asia, and editor of the SEA news digest Dari Mulut ke Mulut.
Towards an economy that works for all

ECONOMICS

Frank Brennan

Twenty-five years ago, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference published Common Wealth for the Common Good: A Statement on the Distribution of Wealth in Australia. Published in the early days of neoliberalism, that document was primarily focused on the distribution of wealth. Part of the critique of that document, as of much church teaching of the time, was that the church did not take seriously enough what was required for the creation of wealth, or what was to be done in the use of wealth once it was distributed.

A quarter of a century later, the Catholic bishops' 2017 Social Justice Statement Everyone’s Business: Developing an inclusive and sustainable economy focuses not just on the distribution of wealth, but also on its creation and its use. Creation, distribution and use of wealth are assessed against the principles of Catholic social teaching. These principles have universal application even in a neoliberal environment that gives precedence to markets and competition as the preferred means of creating economic growth and utilising the fruits of that growth for individual wellbeing and the common good.

The Australian bishops agree with Pope Francis that the 'trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world' have not been proved. Every year since the publication of Common Wealth for the Common Good, the Australian economy has grown. Our GDP has more than doubled; so too have average wages. But our bishops are convinced that inequality has increased. Even 26 years of successive economic growth has been insufficient to assure the poorest Australians a dignified though frugal existence. For example, Australians reliant on Newstart or the Youth Allowance simply do not have enough to live on.

It's now five years since the Business Council of Australia told the Parliament: 'The rate of the Newstart Allowance for jobseekers no longer meets a reasonable community standard of adequacy and may now be so low as to represent a barrier to employment.' And still there has been no increase to Newstart, and a government looking for a narrative has decided to demonise the recipients. As the bishops point out in Everyone’s Business, Newstart recipients are $110 per week below the poverty line, and youth allowance recipients are $159 below the poverty line.

In an age of 'budget repair', steady five-plus per cent unemployment, high underemployment, and sluggish or non-existent wage growth for most workers, it is difficult for any unemployed person to find a job. There are ten applicants for every job on offer. No matter how job ready you make the unemployed, their prospects of finding work are not going to be greatly enhanced in the present economic climate. Meanwhile, housing is becoming less affordable, particularly for young people in the big cities. The future prospects of young Australians are becoming more dependent on the wealth, property and disposable income of their parents.
Australia's leaders must decide whether to continue down a path of growing inequality and exclusion or to harness the good of free enterprise to better serve the society as a whole. This morning I am delighted to launch the latest paper from Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) entitled An Economy That Works for All. And I pay tribute to Joe Zabar, CSSA's senior director, strategic operations and economic policy, the principal author of the paper. It's great that Joe's wife Poppy and daughter Madeline are here with us proudly saluting Joe's industry and passion for social justice.

At Catholic Social Services we know that too many people have been left behind, denied access to economic prosperity and the opportunity and the hope it brings. The Catholic Church has a role to play in encouraging action from those in power to deliver an economy that serves all in our community, particularly the most vulnerable, because it is one of the organisations who help the poor and vulnerable people who have been left behind. Rather than continually trying to help these people to play catch up, we want to help bring about change to ensure they are not left behind in the first place. Individuals don't choose poverty. Poverty is a choice we make as a society.

"We Australians need to focus more on how our unprecedented wealth gives us a one off and unprecedented opportunity to break the cycle of poverty, through education and lifelong support, which we must take."

We need our leaders to acknowledge that our economic system has lost its way, giving preference to the purity of the market without due regard to the society in which it operates. Under the neoliberal paradigm, markets are supposed to create economic prosperity and growth, which will then 'trickle down' to all those participating in the economy. After more than four decades of this paradigm, there can be no doubt that 'trickle-down' economics has been of great benefit to those at the top of the pyramid. However, the promise of riches from the trickle-down effect is at best patchy for many Australians, and non-existent for others.

Continuing with the same economic and social policy settings will exacerbate the already growing divide between the rich and the poor and eventually damage the economy to such an extent that it has a detrimental effect on everyone. Remaining on this path is both morally and economically fraught. Australia needs to take concrete action to arrest inequality now. In this paper, we call on our elected leaders to act decisively. They should:

**Establish an independent commission** to develop evidence-based benchmarks to ensure that income support payments are adequate for people to live a frugal yet dignified life, and have realistic opportunity of securing a job. Our politicians don't set wages on Budget night. Neither should they set welfare payments.

**Strengthen our tax and transfer system.** For Australia's tax and transfer system to work effectively, we must, prioritise the needs of society first and then work out the best way to fund those needs. We must put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

**Establish a new national accord** between government, civil society and business. This accord would outline the responsibilities of each sector in building a fair, flourishing and just society.
Deliver greater transparency, through the public release of government economic modelling of all budgetary measures that affect the economic wellbeing of Australians, especially the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.

Create a new position on the RBA Board. Appoint a preeminent Australian who has knowledge and experience of the consequences of monetary policy on the poor and marginalised to reinforce the inter-connectedness of economic and social policy and acknowledge the role the RBA can play in using monetary policy to improve the lives of the poorest and most marginalised in our society. For too long, we have overlooked that the Reserve Bank board is charged by statute not only to look to the stability of the Australian currency and to the maintenance of full employment but also to the economic prosperity and welfare of all Australians.

We Australians need to focus more on how our unprecedented wealth gives us a one off and unprecedented opportunity to break the cycle of poverty, through education and lifelong support, which we must take, not only in justice but also because we cannot afford to leave anyone behind who is able and willing to contribute. We need economic policies that are based on, and build on, the aspirations of the marginalised and excluded who yearn for the opportunity to access the market, sharing the fruits of Australia's prosperity.

All Australians of good will should take to heart Pope Francis' insight in Evangelii Gaudium, applying it to our own political and economic context: 'As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills. The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies.'

Taking up widening income inequality as what the IMF has identified as 'the defining challenge of our time', Zabar provides a blueprint for future reform when he outlines the contours of An Economy That Works for All. There can be no sustainable ‘budget repair’ without ensuring a robust safety net and an assured leg up for those missing out through no fault of their own.

Frank Brennan SJ is the CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia. This text is from his launch of CSSA’s paper An Economy that Works for All at Parliament House, Canberra, on 18 October 2017. See video
Creating a consent culture beyond 'no means no'

AUSTRALIA

Neve Mahoney

There seems to be a lot of misinformation about what constitutes sexual violence. When we talk about sexual violence, the conversation inevitably turns into perpetuating rape culture myths, like how men will be the targets of witch hunts (never mind that statistically men are more likely to be the victims of sexual assault than falsely accused) or policing victims' clothing or lifestyle choices.

So how do we start to chip away at this confusion? One of the best ways is to go back to that old debating principle: define your terms. We don't live in a world of 'blurred lines', but we do live in a world that is undereducated in the way we talk about consent.

The phrase 'no means no' has been bandied about for so long that it has become almost cliché. For many years, it was a great tool for explaining the basics of consent. If someone says no to something, don't do it.

But 'no means no' is a tagline, not the start and end of the conversation. Because when you think about it, there are obvious gaps in a 'no means no' framework. It doesn't cover the myriad circumstances that can mitigate consent. Age and mental capacity are the obvious ones.

Then there are people who aren't in a position to say no, because they are unconscious, intoxicated or (to the point of the recent Weinstein scandal) threatened or coerced, especially by those in a position of power. That's not even going into trickier topics like how the majority of sexual offences occur within an intimate relationship or newer and disgusting methods of sexual assault like steathing.

This is why in recent years the conversation in legal and activist circles has shifted from using 'no means no' to 'yes means yes', otherwise known as affirmative consent. Affirmative consent makes the conversation not about one person necessarily saying no, but to both parties actively communicating with each other. In this model consent can be as simple as saying the word yes or affirming your agreement through enthusiastic participation, while silence or lack of resistance is not consent. Framed this way, consent is the presence of a yes, rather than the absence of a no.

If affirmative consent seems like an overreaction to you, consider the words of Jaclyn Friedman, editor of Yes means Yes: Visions of female sexual power and a world without rape. In a piece for the Washington Post, she writes that affirmative consent makes up her 'core response' to many of her students' anxieties and in her teaching about sexuality in college campuses. Nothing she says 'seems to give [students] more clarity and comfort than explaining the basics of affirmative consent'.

"If we want narrative to change from teaching girls about how to avoid rape to teaching everyone how to respect each other's boundaries, we should be having these types of
discussions early on."

It's obvious from the existence of organisations like The Line that people want to understand where the boundaries of consent are. Given the fact that young people, young women in particular, are the most targeted group for sexual harassment and violence, and that according to the Australian Institute of Criminology, 70 per cent of sexual offences are not reported, giving young people the space and language to negotiate their own experiences becomes a pressing issue.

If we want narrative to change from teaching girls about how to avoid rape to teaching everyone how to respect each other's boundaries, we should be having these types of discussions early on.

People don't need to be versed in every legal technicality, but why not bring structures to clarify and communicate into the mainstream when they already exist? It shouldn't have to take scandals like Weinstein's or victims reliving their trauma in hashtags to be talking about this. Issues of consent run deeper than 'no means no' and our conversation should reflect that. Consent isn't just a topic of the law courts, but an ongoing conversation to have with each other.

Neve Mahoney is a student at RMIT university. She has also contributed to Australian Catholics and The Big Issue.
Conservatives and conservation

ENVIRONMENT

Tim Beshara

I'm a conservationist because of Rex Hunt. You know that 1970s Australian Rules footballer who later made a career as a fishing guru and with his over-the-top shouty footy commentary.

When I was a kid of eight or nine, weekends would involve being dragged out of bed pre-dawn by my dad to put the boat in the water of Port Phillip Bay. I enjoyed the fishing for the sport and got a thrill out of seeing what fish was on the end of the line on the rare occasion we got one to the surface. On weekends I would pore over Hunt's Fishing Port Phillip Bay and from it I would learn the behaviour of all the fish that were fit to eat, where to catch them and what tactics to use.

Reading this guide and others like it was my introduction to ecology. They filled me with a sense of wonder for what lived under the surface, but also a sense of anger and loss for what once was. They would often mention what sorts of fish you used to be able to catch in a particular location and how much bigger and more common they used to be. They documented the decline of our rivers, bays and oceans. It didn't feel right that we had impacted our environment so much that I couldn't catch huge snapper or salmon like the old blokes used to.

It's fair to say this was not a radical entry into conservation - it's a pretty conservative position to not want to stuff up your environment so that you can still catch fish. Theodore Roosevelt, one of the earliest exponents of conservation from a conservative point of view put it like this: 'Of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us.'

The most prominent self-described conservative in Australia, former prime minister Tony Abbott, has expressed many views on conservation and on the merits of addressing climate change, but none of these views could be argued as coming from a position of conservatism that Teddy Roosevelt could agree with.

In echoes of his effort while prime minister to establish a global coalition of like-minded countries against climate change action, Abbott recently addressed a UK forum where he questioned not whether climate change was real, but whether it was actually doing more good for the world than bad.

This sort of perspective isn't consistent with how previous conservative Australian political figures have dealt with issues such as climate change and the environment. Robert Menzies had enormous faith in scientists and grew CSIRO funding year-on-year. Liberal prime minister John Gorton stood up to the Queensland premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen when he tried to give oil companies free reign to drill on the Great Barrier Reef. In 1990, Liberal shadow minister Chris Puplick developed a detailed and ambitious climate change and environment policy that would be derided as a greenie-plot if it was...
"There are significant overlaps in relation to conservative values and conservation but we are in an era where political figures that self-identify as conservative are compelled to take an anti-conservation position."

When he was environment minister, Liberal Senator Robert Hill essentially took the elements that Australia had agreed to at the Rio Earth Summit and turned them into a comprehensive set of laws and policies that are substantively still in place today, including the National Heritage Trust, the National Reserve System, marine reserves, and the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. Another Howard-era environment minister, Senator Ian Campbell, developed such a love of whales that he joined the advisory board of radical activists Sea Shepherd.

There are significant overlaps in relation to conservative values and conservation but it appears we are in an era where political figures that self-identify as conservative are compelled to take an anti-conservation position.

The value of self-reliance is incredibly well-aligned with conservation and climate action. Australians have managed to embrace the notion of water conservation with great success, through government interventions and through personal actions such as installing water tanks. Yet somehow, the notion of energy or electricity conservation hasn't been as successful, though individuals installing solar panels have been one of the better results. Self-reliance implies both that we can deal with whatever the world throws us through our resilience and ingenuity, and that we are better off by getting on with it, rather than waiting for solutions to appear from elsewhere. Former NSW Liberal MP Michael Richardson was an exponent of this approach and authored a number of books on the subject.

Like me with my fishing guidebooks, many conservationists have been driven to act through a sense of nostalgia for what once was, combined with a sense of civic duty. After I got my fix of fishing guides, I joined the youth-focused conservation group, the Gould League, to get my dose of nature. I loved getting the stickers and books, posters and badges, and hearing about all the great activities that were being done to save our wildlife.

Through the Gould League I felt a connection with kids like me who participated in similar activities almost a century earlier. Others have developed a connection to nature and a willingness to help through groups such as cubs, scouts and guides. This similar spirit can be seen in landcare groups and bushcare groups across the country, largely found in Liberal and National Party voting electorates.

Australia's environment is unequivocally in decline. Our climate is changing for the worse and it is impacting our natural environment and our way of life. Yet self-described conservative politicians have increasingly and aggressively opposed any policies that would address these issues.

It's hard to see whether the current anti-science, anti-environment phase of right-wing politics in Australia will be an aberration or become the norm. However I don't believe these views are as unanimous among those with conservative values as is currently on display from the current crop of right-wing politicians. Australia would be well-served if
some conservative leaders in Australia stood up for climate change action and conservation. If they did, I think they would find they weren't alone.

Tim Beshara is nature conservation professional currently working in politics as a media adviser for a Greens Senator. You can find him on twitter as @tim_beshara
Power politics

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Ending poverty is a human challenge, not a technical one

INTERNATIONAL

Andrew Hamilton

Poverty is an uncomfortable subject for conversation, partly because for most people with leisure to reflect on it, poverty is not their own condition but someone else's. It is difficult to do justice to the experienced reality of poverty and to acknowledge our responsibilities to people whose lives are blighted by poverty.

The complexity and awkwardness of the conversation about poverty are evident in the United Nations Day for the Eradication of Poverty. It embodies a metaphor in which poverty is seen as like a weed or a microorganism that is alien to a crop, and can be extirpated or poisoned without affecting the harvest. The metaphor suggests that dealing with poverty is a technical challenge that requires attention, ingenuity and determination. The Day for the Eradication of Poverty encourages these qualities.

Such a vision seems to have inspired Bob Hawke's pledge to end child poverty. He is said later to have regretted his commitment, not simply because his failure to deliver on it reflected badly on him but also because the alleviation of poverty required more than attention, planning and appropriate execution. The pledge drew attention away from the real achievements of good policy and effective administration. But the eradication of poverty was a more utopian goal.

The difficulty inherent in the metaphor of eradication is that it sees poverty as a discrete object that exists independently of the people whom it affects, and that can be dealt with by devising technical solutions. The image certainly has merit in that it avoids blaming poor people for their poverty and so reducing them to objects to be manipulated when dealing with it.

The Victorian Poor Laws, with their institution of work houses, and the refusal to intervene in Ireland during the potato famine because it would interfere with the workings of the market, are examples of how impoverished people are objectified The harsh conditions imposed on impoverished young people in Australia and the demonisation that they ritually suffer when they are periodically stripped of their benefits are more up to date examples of objectifying the poor. Compared to these practices the metaphor of eradication is harmless.

But like them it still ignores the complex sets of relationships that constitute poverty as a human reality. These include the family relationships that affect people's life chances, so encouraging or undermining self-respect, confidence, affection, trust, curiosity, articulacy and initiative in childhood.

They also include the relationships with neighbours, with child care, with employers, police, schools and hospitals that help shape the way in which people relate to society. They include relationships with alcohol and drugs and with those who profit from their sale and promotion, and the relationship to domestic and social violence. They may also include the contemptuous social attitudes shaped by media and by public leaders, and
the way that negative images are internalised by society and by the people who are poor.

"Poverty is not something to be eradicated like a cancer or a pest. It refers to an incompleteness that must be supplied for and complemented by enriched human relationships."

This argues that poverty should not be objectified as a negative quality detached from human beings, and still less as a group of persons who are a threat to good human living and accordingly to be firmly dealt with. Poverty, like happiness or good fortune, is expressed in a pattern of relationships that constitute human lives. These relationships themselves always have an element of gift. But where poverty marks a human life, they are also marked by a deficit. For a child who grows up in an abusive family, the deficit in the affection, predictability, self-respect and other qualities that help people build a productive life is very high. But as stories of even the most deprived childhoods tell us, some aspects and memories often prove central to building hope. They are a gift to be built upon.

From this human perspective poverty is not something to be eradicated like a cancer or a pest. It refers to an incompleteness that must be supplied for and complemented by enriched human relationships. To transcend poverty requires us to affirm what is good, to supply for what is distorted or inadequate, and to build what is strong. It is about enrichment, not about stripping.

Good policy and targeted intervention can enrich people's lives. But they will not eradicate poverty once and for all. Relationships always need mending, celebrating and complementing. This is a continuing human and not a technical challenge.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street. 17 October is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Main image: A boy sits outside his house in Cite L'Eternel, a poor neighborhood of Port au Prince, Haiti. UN Photo/Marco Dormino
Nobel winners amplify Aboriginal anti-nuclear stories

ENVIRONMENT

Michele Madigan

In 1964, upon accepting the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the non-violent US civil rights movement, Martin Luther King took pains to point out the struggle was far from won: 'only yesterday in Birmingham Alabama, our children, crying out for brotherhood, were answered with fire hoses, snarling dogs and even death'. Why, he asked, award a movement which 'has not yet won the very peace and brotherhood which is the essence of the Nobel Prize?'

Similar questions have been raised following the awarding this month of the Nobel Peace Prize to ICAN - the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Why award this movement, many international journalists present at the announcement wondered, given the unsatisfactory incompleteness of the work of disarmament? Some went so far as to look for a hidden agenda, though this was strongly refuted by the Nobel committee.

One of the naysayers in Australia is the columnist Andrew Bolt. Given his ideological leanings Bolt's severe displeasure was perhaps predictable. What was shameful however, was his insulting of one of Australia's own 'nuclear survivors', the late Yankunytjatjara Elder Yami Lester. Lester, an anti-nuclear and Aboriginal rights advocate who died in July this year, was left blind following British nuclear tests in the South Australian outback in the 1950s.

Bolt refuses to believe that the life of the young stockman from Wallatina Station in South Australia's far northwest (now the APY Lands) was irrevocably changed on 'the day the earth shook'. He quoted the opinion presented to the 1984-1985 McClelland Royal Commission into British nuclear tests in Australia by eye specialist Dr David Tonkin that Lester's blindness was 'more likely' caused by 'trachoma, measles and poor nutrition'.

This opinion remains contrary to that held by the internationally renowned eye specialist Dr Fred Hollows, whose own examination of Lester led to a total conviction that Lester's blindness was due to radiation. Even though, as Bolt points out, Lester was 175km from the nuclear epicentre, desert winds and the force of the explosion meant both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal station people and others as far away as Coober Pedy were severely affected.

Out of all the Aboriginal witnesses at the exhaustive McClelland royal commission, only a handful of them were awarded individual compensation. Edie Milpuddle, about whom the late journalist Bob Ellis wrote so movingly, was one. Yami Lester was another.

ICAN is a movement of Australian origin. It began in 2007 as a response to the difficulties in progress in disarmament by more official organisations. While indeed the work of disarmament might be 'incomplete', on 7 July this year ICAN secured a significant victory when 122 nations adopted a UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons; despite the nuclear weapons states and some unquestioning allies, including
Australia, not participating.

"Though we live in remote Australia, we now know that everywhere they have been used world wide, nuclear weapons have devastated peoples and their lands." - Susan Coleman-Haseldine

In their exultant reply to the Nobel Prize announcement, ICAN paid tribute firstly to the survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - the hibakusha - and then 'to victims of nuclear test explosions around the world ... whose searing testimonies and unstinting advocacy were instrumental in securing this landmark agreement'.

As part of their campaign to present evidence to world nations, earlier this year ICAN Australia sponsored modern day Aboriginal nuclear survivors to address the UN. Among those who spoke were Karina Lester, Yami's younger daughter, and Susan Coleman-Haseldine, whose testimony in March stated:

'I was born in 1951 on Koonibba Mission. I was a small child when the British and Australian governments tested nuclear weapons in the South Australian desert near my birthplace ... Though we live in remote Australia, we now know that everywhere they have been used world wide, nuclear weapons have devastated peoples and their lands.'

That same month, 52 faith based organisations - Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim - sent their plea to 'the Australian government to support and participate in the upcoming (UN) negotiations. Let us stand together to build peace and outlaw nuclear weapons.' The Australian government failed to even attend.

So as ICAN executive director Beatrice Fihn acknowledges, 'We're not done yet ... Nuclear weapons have the risk of literally ending the world ... As long as they exist, the risk will be there, and eventually our luck will run out.' But there's encouragement to be gained from the 1964 Nobel prizewinner's speech: 'I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.'

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.

Main image: Susan Coleman-Haseldine at the UN: ICAN. Yami Lester's full name used with permission.
Lament for the powerless

ARTS AND CULTURE

John Cranmer

Selected poems

For Astrid

Astrid
There come times
For us to confront
The uncertainty
Of moving-on -
We who are yet
To make that leap
Walk with you
To that edge of wonder -
We tell each other Story
Of life beyond life
And the grace
Of ultimate mystery
Making 'All things NEW'

Astrid
Here for you
Is the opening-up
Of journey's end
Moving us all
Towards intimate discovery -
Towards a knowing
Where spoken-out words
Dissolve into amazement
Beyond comprehending

Astrid
We celebrate
What you have received
Through your searching out
The Jesus Story -
Immensely thankful
That you have walked
This Journey
Amongst remarkable people
Here on the edge
Of this ancient mountain
Sharing Words
Exploring mystery
Searching possibilities
That dovetail into Life

Astrid
With you
may we
Have the courage
To delve and discover
Our journey of wonder
A travelling Mindfully
Into deep-dreaming
Beyond time
Making our quantum leap
Into the strongly real

**Finding Gabriel's oboe**

I am recovering
something strongly alive
Something deeply rooted
Ready to jump out again
From a resonating memory
Renewed this morning
Through a 'chance' tuning
Into ABC FM
Here a 'thank you' is also due
For the immediacy and diversity
Of listening and a life-remaking
Courtesy You-Tube and Wikipedia
To name but two such transforming hosts
Through them
Ennio Morricone and his 'Gabriel's Oboe'
Resound with stunning amazement
Through that complexity of being
Which is emmerging in the experience
Of one slowly-becoming human
Encountering a numinous musicality
Edging an eternal-grace

**An ode for Valentine's Day**

There are moments in outside time
When all things come together
In a sense of 'rightness'

All things in their place
All thing knowing their place
All things not so much in stasis
As in harmony with themselves

Here is deep looking
Into the nature of things
Looking from the inside
Building sound taste touch smell
Into an overwhelming symphony
Seeing into the roots of all being
With an infinity of knowing
Life lived with a quality
That may last an eternity
On the inside - and the outside?
It becomes endowed
With that sense of quality
Which can always potently linger
Pulling you back into its embrace
As we respond to its evocation

And in such an ambience of wonder
We come to know beyond doubt
That love is the centre of all we are

**Lament for the powerless**

Powerless ones
Innocent ones
Called to live timelessly
An ongoing liminality of terror

You destroyed ones
Who have come to be in places
Of age-long contention and hate
In place since the first sensing of empire
Through the long remembered Nimrod
Akkadian - Assyrian - Babylonian - Persian

The names and uniforms change

The oppression simply grows in depth and heaviness

Perhaps ironically resilient ones

It has been the imposition of empire

That has given refuge-space for your clan-family

within your tightly squeezed survival-place

There to find a semblance of holding to life

Born into a world that knows how to hate

That holds sweet vendetta through the generations

Relying on the local functionaries of a faraway Shah

To maintain a semblance of festering order

But never heart-reconciliation

But such possibilities of imperial balance

Are fragile and cannot hold

Days of chaos and anarchy are foretold

And come to be like the collapsing house of cards

That has been denied foundation

Except to hate and thus to survive

The powerless lose their fiction of hope

And are naked in the presence of seething oppression

And you the god
In whom these powerless pawns of history
Place their trust and receding hope?
Who are you? - where are you?
In their hope against intangible hope
Where is your comfort for this age-long affliction?

What can you find nameless one
In those stories of the naked become divine
So iconed in the crucified Christ
And in the flagellation for the murdered Imam
And in the haunting faces and broken bodies
Of those dead before their natural time
Still living in their awake nightmare fixations
Until they arrive at their final grieving
Their last memories of a world
So at odds with itself

John Cranmer lives in the morning shadow of the Dandenongs; more prosaically in Boronia on the outer edge of Melbourne. One of his commitments to life is as a Uniting Church Minister (somewhat retired). John in collaboration with Denham Grierson have recently produced a collection of poems *Walking on Bones* published by Morning Star Publishing.
How to be civil in an uncivil world

AUSTRALIA

Barry Gittins

On 23 October 42 BCE, Marcus Junius Brutus killed himself. His action followed that of his mate, Gaius Cassius Longinus, on 3 October that same year.

Brutus and Cassius were among the scores of assassins (or tyrannicides, take your pick) who had dispatched Rome's leader two years prior to their deaths. Both had been soundly beaten in battles by avenging generals Octavian (later Emperor Augustus) and Marc Antony, who duly went on to prolong their own uncivil civil war.

The demise of the Roman Republic and the growth of the Roman Empire is one of the most documented historical transitions; largely it stems from the death of one man. The lessons for us today are still salutary.

As you'll recall, when Julius Caesar wandered in to start senate proceedings, in the Curia of Pompey back in 44 BCE, the dictator was met with a wide selection of very sharp daggers. There were many motivations behind the assassins' numerous thrusts. Jealousy. Ambition. Kinship and patron/client obligation. Political ideology and partisan adherence to tradition and accepted practice. Cuckolded husbands, shamed brothers, lovers and others. Resentful sons of some of Julius' mistresses.

Thwarted career paths. Resentment. Patriotism. Old, old scores to settle. There was undoubtedly deep anger at Caesar's ego and perpetual defying of convention, exhibited by gallivanting around in royal purple, a series of grandiose titles and statues and (unprecedented for a live Roman) coins minted bearing his likeness.

Perhaps the strangest factor in the mix, however, was the hatred that many of his assassins harboured at Caesar's famed policy of clemency. Key assassins, such as the aforementioned Brutus and Cassius, had been spared and forgiven by Caesar years beforehand; their benefactor had gone from the first man in Rome to reign as the
republic of Rome's seemingly permanent dictator, and their bitter anger grew with each breath they took.

As William Blake described in A Poison Tree: 'I was angry with my friend/I told my wrath, my wrath did end/I was angry with my foe/I told it not, my wrath did grow. And I watered it in fears/Night & morning with my tears/And I sunned it with smiles/And with soft deceitful wiles ...'

"As my children put the doctrine, ever so eloquently, we can all choose not to be a dick."

As two-faced as the Roman god, Janus, the god of beginnings and endings, powerplayers and decisionmakers still walk the land. Thankfully words, rather than jagged metal, are the contemporary weapons of choice.

The political football that is the ABC, the demise of large industries, the abandoning of any genuine climate policy, the misadventures of dual citizenship, the ambitions of the powerful and once powerful ... all these and other issues, for all intents and purposes, are overshadowed by the hideously uncivil debate about whether LGBTIQ Australians deserve to be seen and treated as equal to heterosexual Australians under Australian law; entitled to be legally wed.

In 2017, we have had one of the most uncivil years in living memory, with verbal and physical assaults against politicians, against institutions, against entire demographics. The postal survey on same sex marriage, an affront on many fronts, will be finalised next month and may or may not be followed by legislation and decisive action.

What can Australian punters learn from antiquity? The obvious lesson from Rome's post-Caesar civil wars is that internecine conflict is inevitably punctuated by further conflict and wrestling for power. You may kill someone's primacy - cast them down from their lofty heights as first man in Rome - but the shadow of their revenge will still cast a funeral pall over proceedings.

Cast whomsoever you wish as Julius, or as Brutus or Cassius, Octavian or Marc Antony etc. The metaphorical daggers are close at hand, and more than one potentate may still fall on their political swords.

I am inclined to pay due heed to Edward Gibbon, whose six-volume The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire pointed the finger at the loss of civility (civic virtue), and the ensuing success of barbarians at the gate and in the very entrails of empire. Gibbon thought Christianity with its subsequently elusive notion of pacifism also played a crucial part. Pax Christi overtook Pax Romana.

That's where, I would hope, many churches still have some relevance and role to play, if they can find the strength of character and political, corporate will to venture past moribund adherence to literalism and join those churches and faiths that are supportive of the yes movement for equality under the law.

The guiding light not present in Australian politics could be the acquisition and sharing of empathy. The golden rule to treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated - found in so many traditions before and after Christ - would go a long way to promoting civil dialogue and, even better, revive that long-lost notion of forbearance. Forbearing:
choosing not to speak when to do so would only reveal ignorance and inflict pain on those spoken of ... As my children put the doctrine, ever so eloquently, we can all choose not to be a dick.

Barry Gittins is a Melbourne writer.
Don't turn doctors into killers

AUSTRALIA

Josephine Samuel-King

I am a doctor. I work with homeless people, street sex workers, injecting drug users. The suffering many of my patients endure is beyond many of our worst nightmares. The idea of suicide is something many struggle with every day. The suffering involved in their living is far greater than the suffering they endure in dying.

It is my job to not just attempt to ease their suffering (which is often very difficult) but to assist them in finding within themselves ways of living with their suffering; finding courage to endure and find meaning in their lives. It is not my job to kill them or to assist them to take their own life because they 'suffer too much'. Nor ought it ever to be
the job of any doctor.

I am working with a young woman who, 18 months ago, was raped and set on fire by her boyfriend. The burns she sustained are disfiguring and give her a daily reminder of the trauma. She is suffering from major depression as well as post-traumatic stress disorder.

She awakes from nightmares in a cold sweat and relives the memories of the rape and attempted murder, where it is as if she is out of her body, watching it happen again, powerless to do anything to stop it. Her suffering is as severe as any I have seen and while there is much I can do to assist, I cannot eliminate her pain.

Another of my patients is an old lady with severe, intractable back pain. She is addicted to pain killers and they have stopped working. She has tried all the other alternative medications and therapies and they have failed. She has been to the chronic pain clinics, seen the surgeons - you name it, she has done it.

There is little that can be done. Her suffering is just as severe as any of my dying patients endured. From time to time she contemplates suicide. I cannot assist her to take her own life and it is important that I cannot.

My role, when all else fails, is to sit with her, to understand her powerlessness and mine in the face of her suffering, and help her find a way through.

"I am often struck by my patients' resilience and courage. Their darkest times do pass, as does the desire to end their lives."

The kind of suffering I see is extreme. However, all of us suffer, to a greater or lesser extent. One of life's great challenges is to accept this suffering.

So too, at the end of life, there is often suffering, loss and pain. We, as doctors, can assist with easing that pain, but we cannot eliminate it. This is no reason to assist patients to take their own lives, any more than it would be an argument for assisting my patients to suicide simply because they face what, on the face of it, appears to be intolerable suffering.

I am often struck by my patients' resilience and courage. Their darkest times do pass, as does the desire to end their lives. Both the patients mentioned above no longer want to die, though at times they would have willingly taken their own lives if they had had the means.

All of a doctors' work is based on the principle that patients' lives have value. It is absolutely essential that patients know that when they turn their doctor for help, we are there to help them live, not to help them die, no matter what their stage of life or how severe their pain.

Josephine Samuel-King is a Melbourne doctor.
In the 'climate wars' Tony Abbott is Hiroo Onoda

ENVIRONMENT

Greg Foyster

With the Coalition's flagged rejection of the Clean Energy Target and former PM Tony Abbott's recent speech spreading climate denial myths, the media is once again talking about Australia's 'climate wars'.

But war is no longer an appropriate metaphor because former 'enemies' of action on climate change - the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Industry Group, and the big three energy retailers - have crossed the trenches. All year they've been calling for effective climate policy, such as an emissions intensity scheme or clean energy target, to bring investment certainty and reduce emissions. Only the Minerals Council and the Institute of Public Affairs are left slogging it out in defence of coal.

So rather than a war, what we have is a classic 'holdout' situation. The conflict has finished, but a stubborn and deluded band of stragglers don't want to believe it, so they've barricaded themselves in the hills to keep the fantasy alive. I'm referring, of course, to the small rump of conservative MPs in the Coalition led by their belligerent...
General, Tony Abbott.

There's an historical analogy here. Abbott is behaving like the infamous Imperial Japanese officer Hiroo Onoda, who refused to accept his country's surrender in 1945 and spent a further 29 years fighting phantom enemies in a remote tropical jungle.

Stationed on Lubang Island in the Philippines, Onoda was one of thousands of Japanese soldiers scattered around the Pacific when World War II ended. While most were captured or went home, some guerilla holdouts continued to fight and pillage villages for years, posing a problem for rebuilding war-torn regions.

The US military, with the support of the defeated Japanese, dropped leaflets explaining that the war was over. Some soldiers accepted the information and gave up arms, but Onoda and his three enlisted men thought it was enemy propaganda, a trick to flush them out of hiding.

And so they continued to serve their beloved god-Emperor, murdering about 30 innocent islanders, who they considered enemy agents, over the next quarter century. Onoda only accepted the new reality in 1974 when his former commanding officer visited in person to relieve him of his duties.

"Abbott wants to reject the Clean Energy Target not because he's analysed it closely and discovered fatal flaws, but because adopting it positions the Liberals too close to Labor. It's all selfish, short-term politics."

Like Onoda's band of soldiers thwarting efforts to rebuild local villages in peacetime, Tony Abbott's skirmishes into climate policy are undermining everyone's attempts to cease hostilities and reach a bipartisan agreement. And like Onoda's refusal to believe new information that didn't conform with his worldview, Abbott and co. are rejecting evidence that the economics of clean energy and reducing pollution have shifted dramatically.

It's not a choice between renewable energy and power prices, if it ever was. The Finkel Report, and many studies since, have shown that more clean energy in the grid will reduce electricity prices. That's why the big energy retailers, who previously tried to undermine the Renewable Energy Target, have switched sides. In the last few days, AGL, Origin Energy and Energy Australia have all said the government needs to adopt a clean energy target in order to lower power prices.

But as Abbott admitted in a radio interview, he didn't even read the Finkel Report before rejecting its core proposal in the media. His ideology is untroubled by new evidence because he considers anything contrary to be part of some deep-green conspiracy. It's all enemy propaganda, right?

Perhaps, like Onoda, Abbott just doesn't want to stop fighting. His recent speech to a London global warming denialist group included these statements: 'Of course, we're all nostalgic for the days when governments and oppositions could agree on the big issues; but pleading for bipartisanship won't create it ... The modern world, after all, is not the product of a successful search for consensus. It's what's emerged from centuries of critical enquiry and hard clash.'
Hard clash. Throughout his career, this has been Abbott’s only strategy. As Judith Brett observed in a recent column for The Monthly: ‘His major preoccupation has always been product differentiation, drawing up the battlelines between the Liberal Party and its major enemy the Labor Party and winning the fight.' He’s a political brawler, nothing more.

Thus Abbott wants to reject the Clean Energy Target not because he's analysed it closely and discovered fatal flaws, but because adopting it positions the Liberals too close to Labor. It's all selfish, short-term politics. His speech highlighted this too: 'After a net gain of 25 seats at the previous two elections, when we had campaigned on power prices, we had a net loss of 14 when we didn't.' What he really wants is Carbon Tax, Round 2: a nostalgic rerun of his knockout slogans.

Onoda's story has a sad ending. He returned to Japan a celebrity in the 1970s, but the modern country left him feeling disillusioned, overwhelmed by all the changes. 'There are so many tall buildings and automobiles in Tokyo,' he complained. For a while he used his sudden fame to espouse the values and traditions of Old Japan, but he was little more than a curious relic, not someone to be taken seriously. The world had moved on. Tony Abbott should heed the lesson, but he won't.

Greg Foyster is a Melbourne writer and the author of the book Changing Gears. Main image: Norio Suzuki poses with Onoda and his rifle after finding him in the jungles of Lubang Island.
Existentialism and sexism in Blade Runner's future

ARTS AND CULTURE

Tim Kroenert

Blade Runner 2049 (MA). Director: Denis Villeneuve. Starring: Ryan Gosling, Harrison Ford, Robin Wright, Jared Leto, Ana de Armas. 163 minutes

Ridley Scott's Blade Runner (1982), about a veteran cop in 2019 LA tasked with hunting and executing rogue androids known as replicants, is legitimately hailed as a masterpiece. A visionary tour de force, it delivered high-concept science fiction with the tone and structure of a hardboiled noir detective story. It also tackled, with piquant Judeo-Christian religious overtones, such heady philosophical themes as what it means to be human and the nature of memory, skewering humankind's perception of itself as the
pinnacle of sentient existence.

Viewed with a critical rather than merely adulatory eye however, the film has its problems. And I'm not referring only about its at-times muddled story, which was muddled further by Scott's penchant for periodically meddling with it (there have been no fewer than five official cuts of the film from 1982 to 2007). *Blade Runner*’s sidelining of the experiences of women and non-white characters, in favour of the experiences of white men, has been widely noted - including, recently and pithily, by feminist pop culture commentator Anita Sarkeesian.

Sarkeesian noted in particular the forceful manner in which the film's replicant-hunting hero Deckard (Ford) ’seduces' Rachael (Sean Young), herself an evolved model of replicant. The moment undermines what commentary the film otherwise makes on the place of women in this dystopian patriarchal society, notably through the characters Pris (Daryl Hannah) and Zhora (Joanna Cassidy), both replicants who have been put to the service of male sexuality, with whom we are asked to sympathise and who die agonisingly at Deckard's hand.

Fast-forward to 2017 and the latter-day sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*, replicates many of the achievements of its predecessor, but also its problems. Original screenwriter Hampton Francher returns, with directing duties filled by Quebecois filmmaker Villeneuve, whose 2016 film *Arrival* evidenced a nous for thoughtful science fiction. Here he brings to bear his skills at balancing detailed characterisation, heady ideas and compelling story with stunning visuals to create a rare sequel that expands upon the original in every conceivable way.

That includes the running time, which outdoes the original by some 45 minutes. But *2049* puts every one of those minutes to use, opening up new corners of this dilapidated and overcrowded Los Angeles in physical, technological and sociological terms. Visually it's as visionary today as *Blade Runner* was in 1982, not only in its sublime but story-serving special effects but also in the work of genius cinematographer Roger Deakins, who lights and frames to perfection both the vastness and claustrophobia of the world Villeneuve has built.

"The themes of class and power, of an advanced society that rests on fundamentals of division and oppression, not to mention environmental degradation, were key concerns of *Blade Runner* and remain so here."

Preview screenings of *2049* were accompanied by corporate pleas to critics to not give away too much of the story. I'll adhere to that, not out of any particular concern for the studios' coffers, but because *2049* really is best enjoyed with its sense of mystery as much as possible in tact. Suffice it to say that it centres on an investigation by K (Gosling) - who, like Deckard is a 'blade runner' tasked with hunting down rogue replicants - that doubles as an existential pilgrimage.

The twist here is that K himself is a replicant; a newer model than those he hunts, upgraded for obedience. K's status as a blade runner who is also a replicant reflects the much-debated question - Was Deckard, too, a replicant? - that has constituted its own layer of mythology ever since the arrival of Scott's 1992 director's cut. That question is either the original’s thematic coup de grâce or a red herring thrown in by an all-too-clever director, depending which version of the film you favour. *2049* capitalises on
this mystery by maintaining it.

K's and Deckard's paths do cross (that's no spoiler, Ford's in the trailer) but not until deep into the film. Until that point, 2049 feels like the kind of elegiac extended epilogue that is the only sequel Blade Runner ever called for. K quietly accumulates clues about the aftermath of the previous film's events; which turns out to be vitally important for humans and replicants alike. Meanwhile 2049 explores his experiences as an 'other' (he is dubbed 'skin-job' by colleagues at the LAPD) who has been integrated into society but remains on its margins.

We see, for example, the test to which he is subjected each time he 'retires' a target, designed to detect any deviation from his compliant replicant programming - 2049 is as interested in the tension between free will and predetermination as its predecessor. His superior at the LAPD, Lieut Joshi (a wonderful but underused Wright), is fond of K but remains aloof; he is her inferior, both by rank and by species. He crosses paths too with replicant manufacturer Niander Wallace (Leto), in a macabre variation on the 'meeting your maker' motif of the original.

The themes of class and power, of an advanced society that rests on fundamentals of division and oppression, not to mention environmental degradation, were key concerns of Blade Runner and remain so here; 2049 explores them in various ways, both visually (for example LA's climate has changed palpably since the time of the original) and in its story. These are real-world concerns that give the film plenty of contemporary currency. Yet at the same time, like its predecessor, its unreconstructed treatment of gender roles goes a long way to scupper this.

Primarily this is seen in K's relationship with Joi (de Armas), an artificially intelligent hologram manufactured by Wallace's company who exists as a companion for him, catering to his emotional needs. In truth this relationship is touchingly portrayed; it is all the more poignant due to the unspoken question of which of them is more 'real' (that evergreen preoccupation of the Blade Runner mythos); both are manufactured, yet the emotional content of their relationship scans as authentic, and both possess a genuine desire to exist, in their own way.

At the same time there is no escaping the fact that Joi is someone who has been constructed to serve the needs of her white male owner: a chaste variation of the 'pleasure model' Pris in the original, or a more ephemeral rendition of the oppressed and subservient Rachael. This is beyond unfortunate. So considerable are its strengths that Blade Runner 2049 is a future classic, to be discussed and dissected for decades. That it will become so while blithely reinforcing the primacy of the white male gaze in popular culture is to be regretted.

Tim Kroenert is the editor of Eureka Street.
The joys and terrors of a mum left home alone

ARTS AND CULTURE

Jen Vuk

Last week an unfamiliar stillness entered our house. The house remained weirdly neat and tidy. It seemed bigger, somehow, definitely more capacious. The reason? My family had skipped town. It was just me and the silence. Not even the cat for company.
When my husband first mentioned that he might take the kids away for the first week of school holidays, I had a gut reaction. Literally. My stomach lurched dangerously before tripping over something large and hulking (my anxiety perhaps?).

'What? A holiday? Without me?' The idea seemed beyond absurd. But since I'd started a new job, and hadn't yet worked long enough to earn annual leave, the options were pretty limited. Besides, my husband was clearly in need of a break and, unlike me, he had ample leave to draw from.

'Okay,' I thought. 'Why not?' After all, the kids had had many school holidays with me so it was only fair that their father had his turn. And perhaps it wasn't such a bad idea for their dad to realise how much work was involved in entertaining a ten- and seven-year-old, which included playing referee when they tried killing each other.

Still an idea is one thing. The reality is another. On the day of their departure I covered their sad little faces with kisses. A heavy dark cloud seemed to settle on the space left behind by my husband's ute. It wasn't just that the sun had beaten a hasty retreat. For the last ten years, I'd been a mother and, before that, a wife. With them not here with me, my very identity seemed in peril. What was I without them?

My first impulse was to get busy filling in my social calendar. But something stopped me. Somehow I knew that I was just trying to stave off the inevitable: having to spend time with myself. Frankly, the thought terrified me. And with good reason, as author Helen Garner reminds us: 'A woman on her own can easily get in the habit of standing at the open fridge door ...'

Fridge or no fridge it was beyond time to rectify this, and the funny thing was that once I'd reached this conclusion I found myself defending my privacy with all the conviction of
"Solitude is seminal in challenging the established belief that interpersonal relationships of an intimate kind are the chief, if not the only, source of human happiness." - Anthony Storr

It helped that my job kept me so busy that I couldn't wait to get home and relax. As it turned out Garner's tongue-in-cheek warning went unheeded, but I did enjoy taking my dinner plate and glass of red wine, and sitting in front of the TV with the remote control within reach. The joy of these simple pleasures was so great I was almost drunk with them. Later I would take myself to bed and read. And read.

But novelty always comes with an expiry date. As the days wore on, I felt myself guarding my time less and less. Going for an early morning walk before work (because I could) it seemed I walked past every little milestone of my children's childhood - the childcare centre they both went to, the playground I took them to, and the river that had soothed me when as a first-time mum in constant battle with herself all I wanted to do was run away.

What struck me was how fast it had all passed and suddenly their absence swelled around me.

The day they were due to arrive home I caught myself counting down, first the hours, then the minutes. It was like being a child again and waiting for Christmas to arrive. And then the very burst of them through the door. Having them in my arms again was beyond wonderful. It was sublime.

In his best-selling book Solitude: A Return to the Self the late UK author Anthony Storr writes that 'solitude is seminal in challenging the established belief that interpersonal relationships of an intimate kind are the chief, if not the only, source of human happiness'.

It was true that rather than test my love for my family, my week of solitude merely strengthened it by reminding me of what I had. But a far more surprising outcome was that it also gave me the room - and perhaps the licence - to remember who I was.

There was no question that the break left me calmer, more relaxed and less reactionary, which thankfully still hasn't worn off (although it's being sorely tested). The house is no longer still or silent, and definitely not tidy, but strangely, it feels so much more like home.

Jen Vuk is a freelance writer and editor.
The inherent rationality of gun laws and nuclear disarmament

INTERNATIONAL

Andrew Hamilton

Gun massacres occur so often in the United States that we can almost predict our response. First, we are horrified by the scale of the violence and by the efficiency of its planning and execution. Then we begin to feel for the people killed and wounded, their relatives and friends and the communities that will be lastingly marked by it.
We then ask why it happened, and move to anger that legislators do not limit access to weapons. Finally, this murder slips from memory to be replaced in due time by another even worse.

This cycle of horror, sympathy, outrage, curiosity and forgetfulness prompts reflection on why there is no circuit breaker. And particularly, why is not anger sufficiently focused to restrict access to the tools of murder?

The most common explanation appeals to the strength of the National Rifle Association and its capacity to threaten the election of politicians opposed to its policies. This is undoubtedly an important factor, but it is decisive only because people accept its premises: that Americans live in a world peopled with enemies, that they have a right to own weapons, and that they need more powerful weapons than the villains who threaten their lives and property. Guns are not the problem, but people. And bad people needed to be deterred. According to this logic gun massacres do not argue against the right of citizens to be heavily armed but confirm it.

The logic of deterrence is rational within a mechanical framework, but when applied to human dealings it becomes irrational. That becomes clearer when we set the stalemate in the United States over the right to possess weapons alongside the conflict with North Korea over the development of nuclear weapons. The argument made by the United States and other nuclear powers for the possession of nuclear weapons is that they are necessary to deter potential aggressors. The capacity to use them for mass destruction ensures that they will not be used in practice. Seen from this perspective they are peacemakers.

This argument is conceptually neat. But its logic leads to nuclear proliferation. It encourages nations that feel threatened by other states armed with nuclear weapons to develop their own capacity to wage nuclear war. It is not surprising that the rulers of North Korea, having seen the destruction visited on Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria by various nuclear powers, should believe that their own security and peace depends on the
development of nuclear weapons. To guarantee their peace all nations need to be armed to their nuclear teeth, just as in a peace loving society all citizens must be armed to the eyeballs.

In fact, of course, nations endowed with nuclear weapons promote a policy of nuclear non-proliferation, which restricts the possession of nuclear weapons to a few dominant powers. This is based on the non-rational assumption that nuclear nations are exceptional in looking benevolently to the interests of all and not simply to their own interests.

"All people who go recklessly to war or massacre people with guns believe they are exceptional and are good guys and that their actions are justifiable. The greater their murderousness, the greater their sense of exceptionality."

The regular gun massacres and the conflict over North Korea demonstrate that the conceptual rationality of nuclear deterrence and of free access to guns conceals a deep irrationality. It ignores the unpredictability of human behaviour and the influence of non-rational prejudices, such as attributing to our enemies self-interest, resentment and competitiveness while assuming that we are the exceptional good guys in a sea of bad guys.

The problem is that all people who go recklessly to war or massacre people with guns believe that they are exceptional and are good guys and that their actions are justifiable. The greater their murderousness, the greater their sense of exceptionality. If they possess nuclear weapons they will be more likely to use them to stop the bad guys developing them, regardless of the cost. If all citizens can own deadly weapons in order to deter their enemies from assaulting them, it is humanly inevitable that apparently good guys will use their cache of weapons on armed and unarmed alike. The human logic of deterrence will then require us to distribute even more powerful weapons to good guys to deter the bad guys, only to suffer the harm we wish to deter.

This is to say that the logic of deterrence, particularly when associated with exceptionalism, is self-defeating. A human rationality allows for the likelihood that national leaders and citizens will sometimes act irrationally out of an unjustified conviction of self-righteousness and entitlement. If they have triggers or nuclear buttons to hand the consequences can be catastrophic.

The rational policy to pursue both in gun laws and international relationships is one of disarmament. Human rationality also allows for the likelihood that conversation and negotiation will puncture self-righteousness and exceptionalism and will lead to a more peaceful society and world. It is heartening that the Nobel Peace Prize went to an Australian initiated group pressing for nuclear disarmament. It is disheartening, though unsurprising, that the Australian Government did not celebrate its achievement. Down under, deterrence is dogma.
Unconditional?

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

A few crumbs from a table of plenty

ARTS AND CULTURE

B. N. Oakman

Selected poems

Samuel

He's not difficult to find. Black men stand out in rich
barrios. He'll be standing outside the supermarket,

smiling, a self-appointed doorman selling a magazine
nobody buys. I've known him for a few weeks in each

of several years. His name is Samuel. He's from Ghana.

His father is dead. He sends what money he can to

his mother. He has no papers and no work because

he has no papers. Madrilenos offer small change after

shopping. Passersby sometimes approach with a euro

or two. Many dally to talk. He knows them, his clients,

various small and large details of their lives, what
to ask, friendly, without ever being thought a friend.
Before I fly home I hand him my leftover Euros and he always asks god to bless me. I don't belabour him with agnostic doubts for fear I'll debase his frangible currency of gratitude, He gives me all he has to give.

I give him a few crumbs swept from a table of plenty.

Mm

*So alive in death* is how Juan Ramon Jimenez described the poet Antonio Machado. We might say as much of Marilyn though it's not her words that inform the imaginings of admirers fifty years post mortem. A giant plaster statue in Rosalind Park models her scene in The Seven Year Itch, pleated white dress billowing in updraft from subway exhibiting legs and underwear while she blazes that ain't-this-wonderful grin. An image DiMaggio hated so violently, demeaning for any woman of his, far too much whore and no madonna whatsoever. Today they're shooting selfies between her legs. She's also strung from light poles in View Street wearing a gold lame halter neck gown plunging to her navel, her head tilted back just a little, her hands behind her back, eyelids ultra lashed, heavily mascaraed, lowered so you can barely see her eyes. Her lips scarcely part in an I-could-be-so-good-for-you smile. Somebody said when she entered a room with Miller every woman hated her - and every man hated him. With gratuitous nastiness to both the press labelled them *the egghead and the hourglass*. Hers is a made up kind of life. Neither
blonde nor Marilyn nor Monroe. Mother in and out of mental hospitals. Foster
care for Norma Jeane. Abused. Believed Clark Gable to be her father for most
of her life. Relationships tricky. Three divorces. Got mixed up with Sinatra, the
Kennedys and assorted trouble. Difficult on the set. Late, moody and unlearned
of lines. According to Wilder an endless puzzle without any solution. Years
later, Clive James sneered She was as good at playing abstract confusion in the
same way that a midget is good at being short. Method, psychiatry and drugs
accompanied her back and forth through the porous borders of reason. Dead
at 36, alone, naked, drowned in barbiturates and swiftly passed into the hands
of strangers. Monroe knew betrayal as giver and receiver. Strasberg never
distributed the contents of the box of her belongings to people she liked, maybe
unable to find an affective memory for friendship's obligations. His third wife
flogged the contents for millions at Christies in '99. But this show is not about
troubling details. Think a 'celebration' of a creation called Marilyn Monroe,
an invention of the studio and Norma Jeane - who spoke of MM in the third
person. You can inspect some of her belongings in the gallery, see her fingers'
impressions in old makeup, take an excursion to genteel necrophilia, visit
a reliquary of the woman the cruel cameras loved. A woman utterly fabulous
on the screen, said Wilder. A woman alive in death as surely as Don Antonio,
someone we're still making into whatever we want her to be, someone still
turning millions for people she never knew.

One time friend

Once upon a time we were related, emerging biographies
enmeshed, edited by in-laws, each complementing the other, one brimming urbanity's assurance, one bashful and book bound. Nothing much to fight over, neither wed to dogma nor seared by acids of covetousness. After divorce sundered those biographies we stayed friends - until he contracted expedient amnesia, steeled his heart safe, scatheless, swore fealty to inviolable pride while I blundered, lacking pole star or compass, in outer darkness - and emerged changed. I never claim for the better. And yet I grieved when told he'd died. Many were our good times. Pity the last 20 years or so. He seemed a diffident revisionist, stroller of clean-swept pavements, companion for flood-lit avenues, not a man for the back streets where lesser cowards sometimes quaking go.

B. N. Oakman's poetry has been widely published in Australia and internationally. Recent collections include In Defence of Hawaiian Shirts and Second Thoughts. In 2016 the actor John Flaus recorded 25 of his poems for a CD titled What Did I Know?
Nick Xenophon's tantalising gambit

AUSTRALIA

John Warhurst

The decision by South Australian Senator Nick Xenophon came out of the blue but it has rattled the political elites in his state and stirred the pot nationally.
He has gambled on leaving the leadership of his three-member NXT Senate team plus one House of Representatives NXT MP to return to South Australian politics. He will stand for the Liberal-held House of Assembly seat of Hartley, leading a team of a dozen or more candidates for his new state party called SA Best.

This is a fresh gambit which is not about returning to the SA Legislative Council where he cut his political teeth for a decade before switching to the Senate ten years ago. He is not aiming to consolidate an upper house cross bench position but to forge a more powerful balance of power position at the next state election due early next year. He will be confronting the struggling long-term Labor government led by Jay Weatherill and the hopeful Liberal Opposition led by Steven Marshall.

Xenophon has electoral momentum behind him after the 2016 national election (22 per cent of the SA Senate vote), though he is troubled by Section 44 problems and has not been the force in the current federal parliamentary term that he was in the previous one. The NXT party has also suffered disunity and defections at the state level. The big question is whether he can repeat his barnstorming federal effort at the March 2018 state election.

Xenophon's gamble raises two immediate implications and suggests one bigger and more tantalising question for Australian politics.

One immediate implication is for SA politics. If NXT proves to be as popular as most commentators predict then neither of the major parties will be able to form a majority government in the 47-seat lower house.

This has happened several times to SA Labor under Mike Rann and Weatherill recently, and each time they have performed Houdini-like escapes to create stable coalition governments with a variety of unlikely partners. But the challenge is greater this time.
Xenophon may elect a large group of SA Best MPs somewhat like One Nation did when it broke through in Queensland in 1998.

"If Hanson did a Xenophon and flipped to state politics she would ensure that One Nation did even better in the state election and would become the kingmaker that Xenophon hopes to be."

Another implication is for federal politics. The NXT team will suddenly become very inexperienced without its leader. This further weakens the Senate cross-bench, following the resignations of Senator Bob Day and the two Green senators, Scott Ludlum and Larissa Waters. Experience is always difficult to factor into parliamentary negotiations, and Xenophon may still be a guiding presence as NXT party leader and founder, but his absence will still hurt the Senate.

The larger question for Australian politics is whether Xenophon is correct to rate a decisive lower house role in SA ahead of being an influential player on the Senate cross bench. If so it flies in the face of the usual presumption that federal politics is always more important than state politics and thus federal MPs are always more powerful than state MPs.

The attraction of a place in the Senate is that it offers a national role, but the weakness of Senate power is that it is located in the house of review not the house of government.

A good illustration of this contradiction can be found with the Greens party. The nine Greens Senators led by Richard di Natale certainly have greater national profile than their state counterparts. But at the state level the Greens can often participate in government in Tasmania and the ACT if they win lower house seats.

Perhaps even Pauline Hanson is pondering the question raised by Xenophon's gambit as her One Nation party threatens to win a swag of seats again in the forthcoming coming Queensland election. Does she wonder whether she would be better off as party leader in Queensland compared to her current place as team leader in the Senate?

If Hanson did a Xenophon and flipped to state politics she would ensure that One Nation did even better in the state election and would become the kingmaker that Xenophon hopes to be. In Queensland she might even become Deputy Premier in a LNP-ON Coalition government.

John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and chairs Concerned Catholics Canberra-Goulburn.
My Telstra Catch-22

ARTS AND CULTURE

Brian Matthews

On 23 August I wrote the following letter to Telstra for reasons that will become apparent:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have just received a phone bill and once again, for perhaps the fourth or fifth time, there is an overdue amount of $52.80 which was originally for something called 'purchases'.

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The first time this happened the amount for 'purchases' was $48. I didn't pay close enough attention to the bill and simply settled the phone account plus the $48 extra. I later realised we had purchased absolutely nothing and had received nothing. When I rang Telstra about this, one of your consultants explained that Telstra was merely the vehicle for this bill and I would need to talk to the billing firm whose name [let's call them Ozone Pty Ltd] and phone number he gave me.

When I rang Ozone and pointed out that neither my wife nor I had ever had any dealings with them, I was told that our mobile numbers would be removed from their files. On the next account, however, $48 had been replaced by $52.80 as 'overdue'.

So I rang them again. The person I spoke to said that Ozone would send me a cheque for $52.80. I didn't believe this but in any case I had to give precedence to coping with a very threatening communication from Telstra about payment 'overdue'. I rang and spoke unsuccessfully to one of your consultants so I asked to speak to a supervisor who assured me that there would be no further reference to the irrepresible 'overdue'.

A couple of weeks later both our phones suddenly ceased to operate. I immediately suspected that the ghost of overdue had come to life again. I rang the Telstra number - the only one on which either of our banned phones would now work - and I was able to establish that we were being punished for not having paid $52.80 still owing! Yet again I managed to fend off the threats temporarily so that our phones were alive once more. Meanwhile, a cheque for $52.80 from Ozone arrived in the mail.

"I presume this sort of demeaning shambles is not what they intend when they say 'It's how we connect'."

You may be familiar with the expression 'Catch-22'. It comes originally from the novel of that name by Joseph Heller: the title passed into and has remained in everyday language because it so accurately caught the popular understanding of being in a totally inescapable No-Win situation.

In the novel, which is about a World War Two American squadron whose airmen are being ruthlessly exploited by their superiors, Catch-22 works as follows. Orr is one of the pilots who are attempting to fly fewer missions over enemy territory. 'Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he were sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. [Such was] the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22.'

Now compare that with this: I am being charged for items I did not buy and have never heard of. The cost of these 'purchases' was added to my normal Telstra phone bill. When I protested, Telstra said it was not involved, it simply administered the charges. I would have to protest to the firm making the charges - known as Ozone.

One protest results in no change whatsoever and I find I have already paid about $48.00 as part of a normal phone bill. Bad luck! Next time, however, I refuse to pay a new charge of $52.80 added to my phone bill for phantom purchases. As a result, service to my mobile phone (and to my wife's) is twice cut off and I devote a great deal of time to
attempting to speak to someone in Telstra who will listen to the problem.

Meanwhile, I am reimbursed $52.80 which I in fact had never paid but which covers the original theft of $48 not to mention the hours of my time and the stress, anxiety and humiliation of being treated like a delinquent customer. Someone in Telstra says I should pay this $52.80 to Telstra and Telstra will then send it to Ozone! Catch-22! Entirely innocent from the start, I lose - no matter what happens. I presume this sort of demeaning shambles is not what you intend when you say 'It's how we connect'.

Yours sincerely ...

Within a day or so, there was a call from a senior consultant who assured me that the problem was solved, that she was wondering if I was a writer and that she would certainly read Catch-22. The next day a new bill arrived with the overdue $52.80 highlighted. I sent it back with another copy of my letter. A second call from a different consultant swiftly followed. He was reading Catch-22 and, he said amicably, everything would now be alright. And this time, after nearly six months of arm wrestling, it was.

Brian Matthews is honorary professor of English at Flinders University and an award winning columnist and biographer.
Inside Catalonia's cypherpunk referendum

INTERNATIONAL

Marta Poblet Balcell

The referendum for independence in Catalonia on 1 October opens up an uncertain era for both Catalonia and Spain - a new period that may also impact the future of the European Union.

Despite all the efforts by the Spanish government and the Constitutional Court to halt the poll, more than 2 million people were able to cast their votes. Yet, polling also came with a high cost. Nearly 900 Catalan voters were injured after national police forces stormed polling stations across the country to seize ballot boxes.
Two days later, crowds of citizens took the streets in peaceful and massive protest. So did scores of pro-referendum supporters on the internet. Blended activism at its fullest.

Protest movements turning to social media to voice their aspirations are no news. The Iranian green revolution of 2009 and the Arab Spring of 2011 famously leveraged social media for protest and coordination. In both cases, state governments reacted quickly by blocking access to social networks and shutting down the internet. Repression of bloggers and digital activists followed. The revolutions were tweeted, but the promise of technology-enabled liberation did not hold.

In Catalonia, events took an interesting turn days before the referendum. Pro-referendum websites were closed following judicial orders. Catalan President Carles Puigdemont took then to Twitter to recommend the use of proxies to access clone sites under the .eu domain.

As Spanish ISPs blocked access to the newly published domains, tech-savvy citizens picked up 30 new ones to create mirror sites: referendum.party, referendum.fun, referendum.ninja, and referendum.love made their way on social media.

As concerns over internet censorship in Catalonia increased, new supports came from abroad. Julian Assange offered expertise on virtual private networks, secured communications, and the use of apps such as Firechat or Signal. He also suggested Catalans bypass the seizure of regional finances by adopting Bitcoin, the flagship of the new cryptoeconomy.

"In our digital world, those responsibilities should always extend to cyberspace, as this is the venue where fundamental rights are equally at stake."

Likewise, Pirate Bay founder Peter Sunde offered anonymous hosting to censored websites through his privacy-enhancing service Njalla. The hosting website explains that Njalla is 'the Sami word referring to the way of keeping the non-wanted beasts out of the stuff you care about'. Catalans got the point.

From another bay, the tech-savvy Catalan Pirate Party played a pivotal role by cloning referendum websites. The cloned sites used the Interplanetary File System (IPFS), an open source, distributed protocol inspired in Bitcoin and BitTorrent. The system allows users to view websites when the original server is down using peer-to-peer file transfer from other computers in the network. Contents use a cryptographic hash to guarantee authentication.

It is not that Arab spring activists did not receive support from hacker communities around the world. Quite the opposite, they came to the rescue in Egypt and Libya during internet blackouts and assisted with tools such as TOR to navigate the web anonymously. Anonymous hackers went on to put down government websites.

Yet, in Catalonia the Pirate Party took a different approach. When Josep Jover, one of the lawyers and party's candidate, contacted the international hacker communities for support, he just made one specific request: do not attack any web of the Spanish state. No web was taken down.
Pirates' efforts to protect webs from malicious attacks, regardless of their content, would later be followed by UN experts' reminder to the Spanish government of their responsibility to respect the fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, and public participation.

In our digital world, those responsibilities should always extend to cyberspace, as this is the venue where fundamental rights are equally at stake.

Eventually, a combination of secure hosting of the electoral roll and a last minute announcement of a ‘universal census’ (where voters were able to cast their vote at any polling station) circumvented the state's cyberspace tactics to block the votes on 1 October. Politically contested as it is, the 1 October vote will be remembered as the first cypherpunk referendum in history.

Throughout the unusually frantic days before and after the referendum, citizens in Catalonia coordinated their mobilisations on the streets via the widely popular WhatsApp, used by 70 per cent of internet users, and the fast-growing Telegram. Signal also became popular for secured communications. Recommendations, memes, and rumours travelled rapidly across platforms and went viral in minutes.

Activism advocating widespread use of encryption and privacy-enhancing technologies to bring political change in Catalonia is perhaps a sign of emerging trends on the internet: the horizontal, decentralised internet that Vint Cerf and Tim Berners-Lee, inventors of its core technologies, initially envisioned and are currently demanding.

There are many ways to enhance privacy in digital technologies, and encryption is one of them. Yet, when other fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of association are thwarted it takes a social movement, and not just technology, to defend them. 21st century activism comes with an interesting paradox: the more it will rely on secured and encrypted networks, they more open, inclusive, ethical, and transparent it will need to be.

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Facial recognition tech perpetuates injustice

AUSTRALIA

Fatima Measham

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has pushed state premiers to hand over their drivers’ licence database in order to enhance facial recognition systems, particularly at airports. COAG has agreed, with the ACT insisting that only perfect matches be used for non-counterterrorism purposes. It is hard to find this reassuring.

In something out of a British spy movie, and sounding as sinister, this biometric matching is called in some circles The Capability. It was introduced in 2015, using passport data. People who have recently travelled overseas might recall using
SmartGates.

It is worth recalling that data retention has also taken effect, despite sustained protest from legal and tech experts. A home-affairs super-department was created for Peter Dutton only months ago. The thrust is clear: expand powers in the name of security even without consensus on merit.

Apart from adding millions of images from drivers' licences to the database, the Turnbull government has also proposed detaining terrorism suspects without charge for up to two weeks. It is a monumental break from the pre-charge regime which allows detention of an additional seven days after the first day, via court process.

As terror law expert Dr Nicola McGarrity says: 'To the best of my knowledge, and based on previous inquiries, there are no situations in which it would have been necessary to hold someone in detention for more than those eight days.' No strong case has been made either about harvesting biometrics.

There is something shocking about our primary form of ID being captured like this, without the courtesy of having been asked, without having committed the slightest infraction.

In places where facial recognition has been deployed, such as the UK, US and Canada, it has not prevented mass murders. Some perpetrators were already known to police, a few for domestic violence. They were more likely to be locals. Their methods were incredibly low-tech - an ironic counterpoint to the massive resources funnelled toward sophisticated surveillance software.

"In western countries with vast inequities, particularly an over-incarceration of blacks and Indigenous, the sample base for algorithms may be skewed from the start."

This is not to argue that identification isn't critical to crime investigations, but it bears emphasising that it is only one part. Police still must build their case on evidence, and be able to link that evidence to a person. It is reasonable to be sceptical about claims that automatic facial recognition makes better cops and safer citizens.

That has not been the experience for minorities. Studies of facial recognition software developed in various countries show that there are racial differences in accuracy. In the US, blacks are more likely to be misidentified than other races - errors that could be life-shattering and devastating for communities of colour.

These inaccuracies do not necessarily mean that the tool or its developers are racist. But they do demonstrate how such technologies can perpetuate existing injustices. In western countries with vast inequities, particularly an over-incarceration of blacks and Indigenous, the sample base for algorithms may be skewed from the start.

The availability of sensitive data also lends itself to authoritarian excess. In Maryland, for example, facial recognition software was used to identify those involved in protests following the death of a black man in police custody.

We ought to have learned that oppressive practices that hurt minorities first and the most, affect everyone eventually - even if differently. Privacy advocates have pointed out
the possibility of such high-value systems being maliciously breached or disrupted, or even used inappropriately by those with official access.

Electronic Frontier Foundation analyst Jeremy Malcolm points out: 'When it's a password database that's breached, you can just change your password. When it's facial recognition, you can't change your face.' Australian Privacy Foundation chair David Vaile describes it as a potential lifelong liability.

Surveillance scholars have also pointed out the risk of feature creep, in which technologies are used for purposes beyond initial intent. Today, an argument is being made about terrorism. But databases or indices, once they exist, prove malleable to other contexts or agendas, such as civil suits and minor crimes or even entry into public buildings.

Are we really prepared for all this? How confident could anyone be that a future government would be less restrained, more benign when it is equipped with powerful capabilities like this? Do we even know if the current one has not got more in store, given how successfully it has been able to implement other policies?

Fatima Measham is a Eureka Street consulting editor. She co-hosts the ChatterSquare podcast, tweets as @foomeister and blogs on Medium.
Rights are a luxury in the age of national security

INTERNATIONAL

Justin Glyn

In this time of austerity I am pleased and proud that Our Glorious Leader has decided to curtail the luxuries which we had formerly enjoyed - for our own good, of course. I refer, of course, to our rapidly diminishing pool of civil liberties.

This is understandable and wise - the general lack of reaction by Australians to previous state intrusions such as the expansion of ASIO powers and terror laws, administrative removal of citizenship from certain criminal suspects, pre-trial detention expansion and curbs on reporting of ASIO abuses show that they weren't using their human rights anyway. There has certainly been no obvious appetite for a bill of rights which might put
them on a slightly firmer footing.

Away then with pesky details such as rights to privacy (to not having one's photo ID shared with anyone, private company or government agency, who wishes to see it) and to freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention (the new proposed laws allow 14 days pre-charge detention - more than enough time, as Dr Haneef will tell you, to ensure police can work out something to charge you with).

These are so passe; in an age of national security, where the citizen's first duty is to panic and surrender all to the state.

Our wise and benevolent rulers have also ensured that the new laws even come in family friendly versions - our justice minister has assured us that the new detention without charge provisions will apply to children as young as ten.

Undeterred by the campaigns of some social services agencies advocating to raise the age of criminal responsibility, the new laws ensure that tiny terrorists who seek to take away our freedoms (and thereby presumably compete with the state!) will be firmly put in their place.

Of course, it's not as though governments haven't been doing something similar in plain sight for quite a while. All those nasty queue-jumping asylum seekers have had all these rights taken from them and more over the last 30 years - both in onshore detention and, more recently, 'enjoying themselves outside ... by the beach and all the rest of it' in the offshore havens run for them by successive governments on Manus Island and Nauru.

"These rights are so passe; in an age of national security, where the citizen's first duty is to panic and surrender all to the state."

In general, these policies have been quite popular with large portions of the Australian public - after all, they weren't affected and had no reason to question the official line.

Another positive feature of our wise leaders' decision-making is that, like the mistreatment of asylum seekers, the ongoing steps towards the restriction in civil liberties of the general public have all been refreshingly bipartisan. While the major parties may have screamed and snarled across the aisle about trade unions or negative gearing, on major issues like protection of the most basic human rights, whether of the citizen or the refugee, the two major packs of pollies have spoken with one voice - 'they have to go'.

Island camps, turning back refugee boats to torture, the military intervention in Aboriginal communities, expanded definitions of terror, citizenship revocation, more ASIO powers ... none of these have been questioned by either party.

After all, while terrorism might be a less common cause of death in Australia than suicide, liver disease, accidental drowning or falling in the bath, only a fool would fail to see that it is absolutely imperative to protect Australians and 'keep them safe' (as the COAG communiqué says) from these dastardly acts.

Since September 2001 and the horrific attacks on the US, it is bad optics to appear to be weak on terror - even if what is being proposed has very little to do with terror at all.
Also, it is a cast iron rule of politics that once a government has given itself more power, a successor - whoever that may be - is unlikely to give up its powers. And, of course, once you have a power, it would be a crying shame not to use it …

All of that said, one can't be too cynical. In a way, the incessant focus on national security and terrorism is a vestigial version of the social contract. Once you have abandoned all pretence at an ideology, left the provision of services to the market and signed up for all the foreign wars you have to to keep your allies happy, about the only thing you can promise the proles is 'security'.

And all of this, of course, to protect your freedoms, dear public. After all, as Vladimir Lenin (who knew a thing or two about state repression and its uses) is supposed to have said, 'Liberty is so precious that it must be carefully rationed.'

Fr Justin Glyn SJ is studying canon law in Canada. Previously he practised law in South Africa and New Zealand and has a PhD in administrative and international law.