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Podcast
The indispensable right to water
The fight to make water a human right

ENVIRONMENT

Cristy Clark

In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Council recognised the existence of a human right to water, guaranteeing access for everyone to 'sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses'.

Eight years on, it is past time that Australia incorporated this right into domestic law. Nonetheless, any push to do so will face an uphill battle, due to the awkward position occupied by human rights within our culture.

Surveys of the Australian population have found a significant gap between those who believe our human rights are sufficiently well protected, and those more disadvantaged groups who experience a very different reality. Our political class also has a history of ambivalence, or even hostility, to providing more comprehensive protection for human rights, and has been especially reluctant to legally recognise socioeconomic rights.

Numerous groups report falling through the gaps of our existing patchwork of human rights protections, particularly in relation to 'survival rights' such as housing, health and water. But many in the broader community remain unaware of their plight.

Events in the Hunter, in the Northern Territory mining town of Borroloola, and in Western Australia's remote Indigenous communities evidence these issues in relation to water, while reports of imminent ecosystem collapse in Victoria's central highlands raise the question of whether a larger section of the population will soon face the consequences of our long history of human rights complacency.

Radio 2UE is reporting that residents living near Dungog in the NSW Hunter region were recently asked by Hunter Water to sign a legal document saying they won't sue if they become ill after drinking their household water. Meanwhile, Indigenous residents of the Northern Territory mining town of Borroloola have been notified by the NT government
that their drinking water was contaminated with lead, likely due to Glencore's nearby McArthur River lead-zinc mine (pictured).

Such issues would be familiar to many Indigenous communities living in remote areas of Western Australia, whose water supplies have been repeatedly contaminated with E.coli, Naegleria, nitrates and uranium.

"We can no longer afford to remain complacent about our human rights, especially those, like water, that depend on our environment."

These reports all raise human rights concerns, particularly around the right to safe drinking water and the right of non-discrimination in relation to access, but these events are rarely viewed through a human rights lens in Australia. Worse still, when such events affect Indigenous communities, there are reports of them being ignored altogether.

These cases reflect the existing dynamic under which certain sections of the community experience repeated breaches of their human rights, while the rest of us remain blasé - content with the status quo.

But, apparently, there are now threats to the water supply of our major cities. For example, ANU researchers have reported that the ecosystem of the mountain ash forests in Victoria's central highlands is at imminent risk of collapse. The implications of such a collapse for Melbourne's water supply would be disastrous, and yet the government continues to permit logging in this vital catchment area.

While the long term environmental and economic cost of such a risk should be argument enough to take serious action to protect Melbourne's water catchment, a legally protected human right to water would provide another angle for residents to protect their water supply from the threat of unsustainable logging. It would also provide protection for less powerful communities, such as those in the Hunter, in Borroloola, and WA's remote Indigenous communities.

Without legal protection, the rights of our most vulnerable communities are too easily sacrificed to vested interests. Ideally, the broader community would have been alert to these human rights issues long before now, but perhaps these new threats to urban centres will serve as a wakeup call.

We can no longer afford to remain complacent about our human rights - especially those, like water, that depend on our environment.

Dr Cristy Clark is a lecturer at the Southern Cross University School of Law
and Justice. Her research focuses on the intersection of human rights, neoliberalism, activism and the environment, and particularly on the human right to water.
Brown on the inside, white on the out

ARTS AND CULTURE

Amber Dauzat

They say

I remember holding your hand, brown against white.

Holding it so tight, so the waves of dirty looks and hushed giggles didn't wash my tiny body away.

They asked what a 'wet back' was doing with a little white girl.

They asked what it was like to have a dad that talked so funny.

They asked what it was like, to be brown on the inside and white on the out.

They asked things I didn't know the answers to. What was it like?

I thought it was the same as everyone else.

Until one day I realised that the other kids didn't have 'abuelas', they had Grandmas.

They didn't have a 'Tio', they had uncles.

They didn't dance every night to Spanish music with their brothers,

Or pray to 'Esupristo' in the morning before Escuela.

They didn't wear big hoops in middle school that their family passed down.

They didn't dress colorful in the winter air.

They didn't feel so deeply, sometimes, it seemed.

So. What was it like? To be a 'burrito'?

It was eating salsa at my cousin's wedding. It was having so many family members that I couldn't even keep up with their names but we hugged like our blood line depended on
it when we saw each other.

It was waking up to tamales on Christmas morning. It was talking shit with your Mexican friends at school. It was getting drunk at a Quinceanera when you were 15.

It was watching Novellas until you fell asleep every night.

But it was also being lonely.

It was being called white by Mexicans, but not being able to go to your white friend’s houses because their parents were scared of your dad.

It was getting mocked when your Spanish wasn’t good enough. But shaping a new accent so the English speakers wouldn’t make fun of the one you picked up from your dad as a kid.

It was ordering food in Spanish and being asked how you learned the language.

It was not knowing what box to check in the race section of standardised tests.

It was being told you were 'too mean' for a white girl.

It was either bleaching your hair or dying it darker so you could at least TRY to look like only one race.

It was explaining to everyone the complexity of your heritage and watching them roll their eyes. 'It's complicated.'

It was fighting off white men who call you 'exotic' and warding off brown ones who saw you as a white skin-ticket.

It was carefully treading on racial comments because white people can’t say shit like that and getting called a ‘Beaner’ your whole life doesn’t change it.

They say it won't affect you. But it does.

A life on your own. The feeling you get when you see a brown person being treated unfairly. Prejudice.

The frustration of being unable to comply with the rules they once gave you because rules don't really apply to mixed-kids.
Because my blood isn't just red.

It's also white and it's green.
It's dancing Reggaeton until your feet hurt to walk on. Till the sweat drips down your back and you can feel the heat of motion from the bodies all around you - That's when you know.

That even when they said it wouldn't affect you, because your skin is light;
It definitely, definitely did.
Hell and high profits

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Subverting idolatry in churches and banks

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

Even after three weeks, the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry has come to resemble the earlier Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

We have seen the same initial resistance to a public enquiry, the same insistence that revelations of sexual or financial abuse reflected a few bad apples and not a bad culture, the same endorsement when the royal commission was called, and the same shaming as the public questioning of hapless senior officials followed damning evidence of abuse and of the failure to address it.

We have also seen evidence of the same incompetent management, whose very incompetence perpetuated abuse, diffused responsibility for it, and deepened the harm done by it. There was the same failure to maintain adequate systems of reporting; the same quiet moving on or transferring officers guilty of financial or sexual abuse; the same unwillingness to find out about the extent of abuse and the same slowness to offer redress.

We have seen evidence, too, of the same reluctance of senior management to know about the abuse; the same priority given to preserving the reputation of financial or church institutions; the same muted complaints of unfairness and of ignoring the contribution to society of the respective institutions; the same assistance in cover-up by regulating officers, whether in government departments, police or ASIC, effectively leaving the institutions a free hand to ignore the abuse.

We have seen the same reluctance to admit to a culture in which abuse, sexual or financial, flourishes; the same public scepticism whether the institutions will ever reform themselves; and perhaps the same lull in conversation and the same inquisitorial gaze when one admits to being either a Catholic priest or a senior bank executive.
No doubt these claimed similarities could be expanded on or questioned in detail. But to observers who share a personal and public-spirited interest in the decent functioning and trustworthiness both of financial institutions and of churches, they surely raise larger questions beyond structures of governance, remuneration, legal penalties and compensation. They invite reflection on why two apparently different forms of institution should behave in such similar ways.

An unsophisticated observer might respond that churches, banks, financial institutions and big corporations - which so far have avoided Royal Commissions - are all in fact religious organisations. Behind the metrics, the microeconomic analyses and the organisational complexity of financial institutions, as well as of churches, lies the worship of a divinity which shapes their ends.

"When the church is made into an idol, the values of its founder are inevitably compromised. This leads to the corruption and consequent loss of a good name."

In the case of financial institutions it is wealth - national, institutional and individual. Adherents of the cult see their ultimate end as the profitability of their institution, which - because wealth is one and undivided - is ipso facto the salvation also of the nation. The sign of individual election is to share in that wealth by promotion, by the high salaries, bonuses and status that go with them.

In Christian preaching, the cult of wealth is called idolatry, defined as the worship of images instead of the living God of Jesus Christ. Idolatry can inspire great dedication and self-sacrifice in its adherents. Its weakness is that the claim of its deity to be the highest value for society, institution and individual must inevitably override such other values as honesty, truthfulness, faithfulness and accountability. The corruption that inevitably ensues reveals the idols to be false gods, not worthy of human worship.

The same unsophisticated observer might also remark the same recurrent idolatry in the Catholic Church. The church of God comes to be worshipped instead of the God of the church. The living God of Jesus Christ is identified with the interests of the church, and self-sacrificing service of the church is identified with protecting the reputation of the church and its ministers. The signs of God’s favour are then to be found in the approval of one’s superiors and by promotion based on loyalty.

When the church is made into an idol, the values of its founder - transparency to the truth, unconditional love of others and especially the most disregarded, and attentiveness to the voice of God in the messy daily reality of human society and the world - are inevitably compromised. This leads to the corruption and consequent loss of a good name.

The wise and prudent of this world will no doubt accuse the unsophisticated observer of naivety in claiming that Catholics should be more concerned about idolatry than about unbelief, and that financial institutions should be more concerned about greed than about diminished profitability. But the unsophisticated observer may observe that the track record of the wise and prudent of this world is not great in recognising and calling out idols.
Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of *Eureka Street*. 
Newstart needs a new start

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan

Over the next couple of weeks, we'll be hearing a lot about company and personal income tax cuts. The Turnbull government holds the view that tax relief for companies and middle-income earners is necessary to improve the economic prosperity of Australia, offering a financial hand up to households struggling to pay their bills.

For those on Newstart, though, those same increased costs of living are being all but ignored. It is time to discuss the development of a transparent, consistent process to determine welfare payments like Newstart.

Ken Henry's 2009 report to the Treasurer on Australia's future tax system presented 'a vision of a future tax and transfer system that would position Australia to deal with the demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges of the 21st century and would enhance community wellbeing'.

The Henry review, the most comprehensive analysis of Australia's tax and transfer system in recent times, looked at 'the relationships of the tax system with the transfer payments system and other social support payments, rules and concessions, with a view to improving incentives to work, reducing complexity and maintaining cohesion'.

Henry proposed three types of income support payment: pensions, participation payments and student assistance.

Pensions would be set at an appropriate level for people not expected to work - that level being what would be needed for an adequate standard of living. Participation payments would be less than the pension rate, because government has a legitimate policy objective of encouraging participation in the workplace using both the carrot and the stick.
Student assistance would be less again because students could be expected to engage in some part-time work without too much interference with their studies; and where need be, they could take out a low-interest loan in the expectation that their studies would ultimately contribute to the capacity to earn a higher income.

"It's not as if there is a large cohort of unemployed persons who are without work simply because they do not want to work and because they are in receipt of sufficient welfare payments to live comfortably but frugally."

It is legitimate to provide positive and negative incentives for people to access the labour market, including social security payments lower than those payable to persons who have no prospect of accessing the labour market whether because of age or disability. But it is just plain wrong for governments to keep payments such as Newstart and the Youth Allowance at abysmally low levels, in the name of 'budget repair', when there are insufficient jobs available and no realistic prospect of employment, training or education.

The threefold classification of payments is fine in theory. But since the Henry review, no government - Labor or Liberal - has addressed how to design a process that is fair and transparent for determining the participation payments and deciding how best to offset what is needed for an adequate standard of living with a discount to provide sufficient incentive for participation in the workforce.

The problem is highlighted with the unacceptably low Newstart payment, which is set at the whim of the government of the day with no transparent process and no criteria for determining a fair and workable payment.

Back in 2012, when the Senate conducted an inquiry into the level of payments, the Business Council of Australia acknowledged Newstart 'no longer meets a reasonable community standard of adequacy and may now be so low as to represent a barrier to employment'. If anything, it is now worse.

Despite the modest increase to Newstart in recent months, it still falls woefully short of what is needed for a motivated unemployed person to survive with dignity while setting about to find a real job.

It's not as if there is a large cohort of unemployed persons who are without work simply because they do not want to work and because they are in receipt of sufficient welfare payments to live comfortably but frugally.

The latest unemployment figures sit at 5.6 per cent - roughly the same as when the Coalition first came to power. And that's before we consider the significant issue of underemployment.

All this is occurring at a time when both productivity and profits are going up, but wages and employment rates are static. There is something wrong with our economic policy settings, which provide for increases in profit in the order of 21 per cent last year while delivering wages growth of only 2.1 per cent, on average, with many workers receiving smaller (or no) increases.

When there is no obvious prospect of the government's budget settings reducing unemployment and underemployment and when wages are static, government should
not punish the unemployed by paying welfare payments that are inadequate. This places too much burden for 'budget repair' on the shoulders of those who can least afford it.

By all means, reduce the welfare payment by a factor calculated to provide motivation for participation in the workforce. But tell us how that factor is calculated and according to what criteria.

If employment for less than the minimum wage is prohibited (as it is in Australia, and for good reason), then we need to provide welfare payments commensurate with the individual's capacity to survive frugally and with dignity while participating in the lottery for a scarce job that pays the minimum wage or more.

It's time for our major political parties to commit to the establishment of an independent commission to set evidence-based benchmarks, ensuring adequate income support payments for those Australians unable to get full-time employment through no fault of their own.

The setting of the minimum wage, which is carried out in isolation from any 'budget repair' conversation, provides the blueprint for a transparent, consistent approach that can allow those who are seeking work to live - and try to find a job - with greater dignity.

Frank Brennan SJ is the CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia.
History taints Turnbull's fight against corruption

AUSTRALIA

Brendan Byrne

While it is a matter of public record that the Turnbull government blocked attempts to establish a royal commission into the financial services sector on multiple occasions, the question as to why the government has been so recalcitrant on this issue - especially when it expeditiously facilitated a similar inquiry into corruption within the union movement - is of more than academic interest.

Aside from the usual motivations of political partisanship, it would appear the Coalition has, ironically, learned the lessons of history and sought to put them into practice. This attempt, unsuccessful though it may have been, nonetheless reveals something important about the impact of historical memory.

In the present context, it is often - and suggestively - recalled that Malcolm Turnbull was once a merchant banker. However, what is less frequently recalled is that Turnbull was also once a lawyer - specifically, the lawyer for Australia's then richest individual, Kerry Packer.

It was in this capacity that Turnbull called for the Costigan Royal Commission to be shut down. The Costigan commission, which began life investigating criminality within the Ship Painters and Dockers Union, ended up exposing criminality within corporate Australia's boardrooms.

This exposure demonstrated not only that corruption was endemic within the corporate sector, but that this corruption often arose out of the links between criminally-minded business people and criminally-minded union officials.

The historical lesson of the Costigan commission is this: corruption within the union movement does not occur in a vacuum - it occurs within the context of, and often in
partnership with, corruption in the corporate sector.

Tellingly, Turnbull’s call for the Costigan inquiry to be shut down occurred, not while it was exposing the criminal activities of the SPDU, but once it started asking awkward questions about what was going on in the big end of town. Turnbull was no doubt acting under instruction from his client; but the historical lesson of the inquiry would nonetheless have remained with him once he entered politics.

"Inquiries into corruption and criminality cannot be the plaything of political partisanship, nor can the historical memory of past scandals be allowed to distort the manner in which future investigations are conducted."

The narrow, union-focused terms of the Heydon Royal Commission can be put down to former prime minister Tony Abbott's ideological determination to destroy unions as a feature of Australia's economic landscape.

But the fact that the resistance to a commission of inquiry into the finance industry has been so marked under Turnbull's watch as PM is undoubtedly a product of the historical memory shared by Turnbull and many of his Coalition colleagues: recalling what Costigan exposed about the corporate sector, the last thing they wanted was another royal commission doing just the same.

There is no suggestion that Turnbull - or anyone else - is seeking to protect corrupt individuals. Rather, what the present situation demonstrates is the capacity for historical memory to facilitate partisan politics and thereby distort public policy.

Australia is at present at a profound economic crossroad. Never has the union movement been weaker. Never has the influence of corporations been more pervasive. Never has the reality of work been more fragmented, insecure, and stressful. It is in this milieu that the Coalition has sought to persuade Australians that unions, collective bargaining, and even some employment entitlements are relics of an outmoded past that need to be dispensed with; and, conversely, that the future of our nation ought to be handed over to 'market forces'.

However, the Turnbull government is also aware of the 'kickback', especially among educated and disenchanted millennials. They are aware that any exposure of malfeasance by the corporate sector will undermine their ideological argument and hand the initiative to their political opponents.

Informed by its historical memory of the Costigan commission and its outcomes, the government's calling of the Heydon Inquiry, and subsequent reluctance to initiate a royal commission into the finance sector, is as much about protecting their ideological claims and political position as it is about anything else.

It is in this context that the need for an independent anti-corruption commission arises. Inquiries into corruption and criminality cannot be the plaything of political partisanship, nor can the historical memory of past scandals be allowed to distort the manner in which future investigations are conducted.

Far more than the rise and fall of governments depends on whether or not we learn the
lessons of history and take the fight against corruption out of politicians' hands.

Prior to being ordained as a Minister in the Uniting Church in 2011, Brendan Byrne spent 20 years working in the finance industry and as an official for blue and white collar trade unions. He is presently in congregational ministry in Melbourne, Australia.
The rosella's last walk (an eco parable)

ENVIRONMENT

Julie Perrin

On the Monday evening following Easter Sunday we go for a walk along a clifftop above the Ninety Mile Beach in East Gippsland, Victoria. This stretch of land is deeply familiar to my husband, a place where remnant bush edges up to domestic house blocks and stretches down to the beach below.

The ti tree and banksia bushland forms part of the scant wild space remaining in coastland slowly eroded by development.

Only two days before, we had stopped in our tracks, mouths agape, before a barren wasteland of house blocks cleared for sale. Standing under an amputated canopy of green we gazed at empty sky and bare ground. The bulldozers had left nothing to chance; shattered sticks lay across churned dirt.

The first section of the walk we regularly take passes the front yards of a mixture of holiday houses and permanent dwellings. Public access along the clifftop passes their balconies and glassed frontages; windows stare blankly out to the saltwater. Any tree that impedes the view here is summarily topped.

Hurrying across the mown cooch grass verges, I always feel a little exposed, as if I am intruding on private views of the vast ocean. A viewing deck for whale spotting reminds me this is indeed public land.

Andy, my husband, walks not far ahead of me. At the threshold of the bushland he ducks under a ti tree branch. As I stoop to follow him, a small movement on the grass catches my eye. At the corner of the house block on the cusp of the bushland are two brightly coloured birds.

A vibrant lime green bird with blue and red markings at its throat lies prone and unmoving on the grass. The other bird, in the familiar reds and blues of the crimson
rosella, is scrabbling along the ground, some inches from its companion.

"As Andy and I stand up from stooping towards the birds our arms brush. We are reluctant to leave. Shyly we ask one another, 'Did that just happen?"

I speak my husband’s name. He stops and turns. 'Look,' I whisper. His eyes follow my hand and take in the birds on the grass, one probably dead, the other twisted with injury. Andy steps out of the ti tree and lifts his eyes, scanning the house and yard.

No obvious cause of injury is visible. The birds are not close to the windows of the house where they may have stunned themselves flying into the glass. The house is dark with the forlorn shadow that shrouds unused holiday houses. There are no tell-tale scattered feathers from a cat attack, no obvious predators, and the dogs of the neighbouring house are lazing on the upstairs balcony behind a glass wall.

The bright green bird lies utterly still in the late afternoon light, showing no signs of life. But the rosella keeps lifting its right wing, then its tail, fanning the blue feathers and collapsing them. It scrabbles with its right claw grabbing at the grass, propelling itself towards its companion. My husband and I glance at each other and down at the birds again.

As the rosella convulsively fans its tail up and out, we see the symmetry of the underside - light blue feathers with a dark blue outline, packed neatly and splayed evenly. The tail repeatedly bursts up and fans open and closes and drops down - beauty and desperation in one awkward rearing motion.

We stand close and unmoving. Everything stops except the bird on the ground. The rosella finishes traversing those few inches of grass and reaches its companion. It rests its craning head on the ground, beak to beak with the other bird. There is no more heaving, the rosella lifts its wing and lays it along the prone body of the bright bird. The open wing lies like a mantle over the dead bird, covering all but its head and tail.

Once in this position the crimson bird raises and releases its tail in a frail salute. After this the only movement is a little shudder of air, the last breath of the rosella.

As Andy and I stand up from stooping towards the birds, our arms brush. We are reluctant to leave. Shyly we ask one another, 'Did that just happen?’ We walk silently into the tunnel of ti tree towards gnarled and ageing banksias then back along the beach below.

The next morning we return to find the birds where we last saw them. We photograph them from above in beak-to-beak intimacy. Checking the tattered bird identification book, we learn that the bright green bird is a juvenile rosella.

When we leave them, the two birds remain together, undisturbed on the grass at the clifftop, the wind riffling the wing feathers of the adult bird.
Julie Perrin is a Melbourne writer, oral storyteller and Associate Teacher at Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity.
Cities are people too

ARTS AND CULTURE

David Ishaya Osu

In January this year I posted on my Facebook page asking: 'Who are your five favourite cities in the world?' Responses came en masse: Lagos, London, Mumbai, New York, Havana, Florence, Paris, Calabar, Dublin, San Francisco, Budapest, Venice, Delhi, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Barcelona, Ibadan, Chicago, Maputo, Perth ...

An interesting response came from Kabura Zakama; he mentioned his favourite cities as: Safiya, Aliyu, Ibrahim, Amina and Thlama. The names Kabura gave were not names of physical locations but of people - apparently these are loved ones.

What Kabura did was to connect to the intent of my question: that vision that cities are not mere settings, they are as well tangible and are at once personifications.

The responses didn't end there; a friend messaged me to say, 'David, cities are not "who".' It was easy to see that he meant a case for my grammatical use of 'who'. I replied: 'I chose "who" intentionally. For me, cities are people.'

The design, the functioning of a city has shown that a city becomes the fear and fantasy of its makers, users and dwellers. So it is important what understanding we make for places of birth, work, worship, food, fun, art, green and blue spaces, etc.

Whatever city development process is to be adopted, the spirit of community is key - landscape to networks to streets to public spaces to buildings. The approach ought to center on the fact that human needs and behaviours vary, and so cities automatically take the shape of the sensibilities of people.

This idea of cities as people is simply to widen development and its control into a participatory process, where every member of a city feels a sense of belonging. It is the creation of a lively, safe, sustainable and inclusive society - a society where bridges and buildings, closed and open spaces, goods and services altogether cater to all classes of
flora and fauna.

"Jacob's favourite cities are peace, rainbow, jazz, cherubim and home. The deduction from this is that the making of peace and love is the same as the making of a city."

Back to the question I put: there was an interesting response from Jacob Jagaba. His favourite cities are peace, rainbow, jazz, cherubim and home. One immediately sees the symbols Jacob's seeking to making.

The deduction from this is that the making of peace and love is the same as the making of a city. Consequently, a city is no place for living or work if there are no possibilities for communication, coexistence, compassion and celebration.

I see this hypothesis of cities as people as a strong and sustainable intervention for the adverse conditions of our cities in Nigeria, where both government and citizens take towns as objects unimportant to the collective progress of the nation. Arguably, the wealth of a nation is in its unity. As crucial is the health of a people, and so the overall state of a city.

In the same way that there is time for everything, there is a place for everything and everyone - a living place, both social and structural. And just as Kabura mentioned his loved ones as cities, we would mention that our loved ones are those places that inspire us and stimulate our senses of self, imagination and security.

It was Jan Gehl who said: 'A good city is like a good party. People don't want to leave early.' So there, we can make very good parties in Nigeria.

The rewards of reviving languages

AUSTRALIA

Sheila Ngoc Pham

On the train ride from Anglesea to Llandudno in northern Wales, some unexpected sounds arose from the seats in front of ours. On the face of it, it was nothing out of the ordinary, just three teenagers talking to each other and laughing. But I was surprised because the language they were using was Welsh.

Of course, we were in Wales, and if I was going to hear Welsh spoken anywhere then this was the right part of the country. But to actually hear the language used by young people in such a natural way demonstrated how Welsh language revival was in full swing. Leaning back in my seat and listening to their lilting speech, I felt an enormous sense of hope.

As someone who has a language background which will in all likelihood not make it past one more generation in my family here in Australia - and even that will require a huge effort on my part since my children will have mixed heritage - I've long understood the way language loss can occur as a result of migration, to say nothing of acts like colonisation. These are great forces that are difficult to resist - but not impossible.

For many centuries under English rule, Welsh was banned from official use and stigmatised. Over much of the 20th century its use continued to decline but, through the efforts of generations of activists, the situation eventually turned around. Now it's a thriving language and shares official co-language status with English in Wales, with concerted efforts to continue the push into schools, among other formal settings.

A few years later, as I was travelling throughout regional NSW, Welsh came back to my mind in an unexpected way.

In 2016 I was managing a statewide project for Sydney Story Factory (SSF) called State of Mind, which involved us travelling to different parts of rural and regional NSW to conduct creative writing workshops. Spending time in these parts of the country was an enriching and eye-opening experience. Up until my time with SSF I'd had limited contact
with non-urban Aboriginal populations, though I’d worked on some Aboriginal health projects since my first job out of university.

Chief among the inspirations I took away from those trips was learning about the Aboriginal language programs. At Gilgandra High School, for example, I recall walking into a classroom one day and seeing a list of words written on the whiteboard. It was Wiradjuri using Romanised script, and a language I’d never encountered much of in any form.

"There are many developmental and social benefits to learning additional languages, but in the case of Aboriginal languages it’s also an act of social justice and reparation, as well as healing."

When I passed around the sign-on sheet soon after, most of the students wrote 'yes' in the column asking 'Language Background Other Than English'. It wasn't quite what we were asking, but it was affirming to see so many identify with the language they were learning.

I often think about Australia from the perspective of language, and what existed before my family arrived here in 1980 as resettled refugees. Prior to colonisation, this continent was home to over 250 Indigenous Australian language groups; we've already lost more than half of those, with many others in danger of extinction. There are, however, still languages native to young people growing up, particularly those living in more remote communities.

At SSF I was also a volunteer tutor to students who visited us in Redfern via the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy. During one particular creative writing workshop, I met two boys from Papunya in the Northern Territory. On our table was a printed aerial view of their town so they could point out to me where they lived. But the real revelation for me was learning that English was just one of a few languages they spoke, and the one they used the least in their day-to-day lives.

It's been heartening in Australia to see more inclusion of Aboriginal languages in the arts, like in the TV series Cleverman and the celebrated music of Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, sung in Yolngu. In the media, there's ABC's Word Up podcast and SBS's My Grandmother's Lingo website, among others. Not to mention the tireless work of passionate educators and activists elevating Indigenous languages.

Schools continue to play a fundamental role in teaching Aboriginal languages, though it can be a challenge to sustain programs. In Bourke I heard about the Wangkumara language program that had been developed and taught at the local high school for five years. But by the time we visited it was no longer the language offered. One of the local radio stations (2CUZ FM) does, however, broadcast some programs in Wangkumara, as well as Barkindji and various other languages.

The many languages that have been and are still spoken in Bourke are an unintended consequence of the large-scale displacement of Aboriginal people into the missions. But the multilingual situation in Bourke may also be an asset for language revival, particularly in light of research suggesting that all Aboriginal languages descend from one common language. This means being able to fill in the gaps through borrowings from
neighbouring languages.

Promoting Aboriginal languages is not only possible but vital work, with ongoing investment required at every level of government. Just look at how much it's taken to get Welsh to where it is - and that's just one language in a relatively small country, compared to the vastness and complexity of Australia. There are many developmental and social benefits to learning additional languages, but in the case of Aboriginal languages it's also an act of social justice and reparation, as well as healing.

As artist Beth Sometimes told the Alice Springs News, 'Everyone living here should have some knowledge of the language of this place. Australia has a very monolingual culture and we take a lot for granted about what is being understood. '

I dream of a future that is as far from monolingual as possible; where my children will speak not just the languages they've inherited but the languages of the land where they've been born.

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Main image: Sydney Story Factory creative writing workshop at Gilgandra High with storytellers John Blair and Richard Short (Sheila Ngoc Pham)
A parent's guide to pop culture diversity

ARTS AND CULTURE

Fatima Measham

I still remember the moment during the Ninja Storm season of Power Rangers, when I looked at my son's face and sensed, in that wispy way that mothers sense things, what it meant for the geeky offside, Cam Watanabe (pictured), to turn into the Green Samurai. It was an unexpected arc. My kid had, as usual, gravitated toward the character who resembled him in some way, even if not the strongest or fastest one. It must have blown his mind.

Maybe it is nothing more than vanity: pop culture as mirror. But then imagine what it is like for those who are used to seeing other faces in that mirror, to suddenly recognise their own.

Some of this potency is captured by the maxim, 'you can't be what you don't see'. Perhaps more accurately, it is much harder to imagine what else we can become when what we are is all we know.

This can be heavy stuff, especially when accounting for the sort of jobs that get stratified by class and gender, and the way members of certain families end up in similar jobs through generations.

The drama series LA Law, which was associated with a boom in law school applications in the late 1980s, had an attorney named Victor Sifuentes, played by Jimmy Smits. It goes without saying that a multidimensional Puerto Rican professional was a novelty on American television at the time. For years afterward, Latinx lawyers and politicians would tell Smits that his character had inspired their career.

From memories of my own childhood, and having once been a high school teacher, I know that pop culture provides both a language and a map for figuring out who we are and what we want to be, at a time when limited life experience leaves us inarticulate.
about such things.

"Girl-power pop culture is good for boys, too, because it configures a mental world where women are fully realised beings, who can think and act on their own."

There are reasons why black American music, specifically rap and hip-hop, is popular among Aboriginal, Maori and Sudanese teenagers. It resonates with their inner and outer worlds: frustration and defiance suddenly materialising in lyric and beat.

Sometimes it is about recognition of value. At pre-release screenings in Samoa for the Disney animated feature *Moana*, tears were shed at a vision of Pacific culture that spoke for itself. *Coco* was similarly distinct in its approach to Dia de los Muertos and was embraced by Mexicans for it.

Neither of these films escaped critique entirely, but they are noteworthy for centring traditions that are usually taken as peripheral or even downright strange. It was great to take my son to see them, not just as entertainment, but because they made unfamiliar things recognisably human.

He has also benefited from recent pop culture output in which women get to be badass (to borrow his description): films like *Wonder Woman*, cartoons like *Wakfu*, comics like *Lumberjanes*.

The primary audiences for such material are women and girls, and it is only right that complex narratives about them are taking hold. There is still some catching up to do in this area, in which men and boys have long been the standard heroes and geniuses.

But girl-power pop culture is good for boys, too, because it configures a mental world where women are fully realised beings, who can think and act on their own. I felt something fall into place for my son, just as it had with Cam Watanabe, when a fully pregnant Eva in *Wakfu* took an arrow to an impostor and engaged in combat.

With *Lumberjanes*, which has girls of every shape, colour and personality, he gets to follow characters who solve mysteries and fight monsters while being distinctly themselves. (These were initially comics that I would buy for myself, which he now beats me to reading when a new trade edition comes out.)

Pop culture validates or marginalises, depending on who is in the frame. Who gets to be seen and heard, and the circumstances in which they are seen and heard - these decisions are inherently political, whether they are made consciously or not.

It can be hard to tell whether pop culture thus reflects societal shifts, or whether such shifts push the boundaries of culture. It is probably more organic and unpredictable than that. All I can tell is that my son seems to thrive on stories where the full spectrum of humanity and relationships, including his own, is made manifest.
Fatima Measham is a *Eureka Street* consulting editor. She co-hosts the ChatterSquare podcast, tweets as @foomeister and blogs on Medium.
Random landings

INTERNATIONAL

Catherine Marshall

We're about to land, but I don't know where in the world I'm going. The landscape spread below me is a tableau of muddy waters and tin-roofed houses poking out from palm groves. As we sink earthwards I see dark-skinned men picking through fallow fields, planting new seeds perhaps, though the soil's bone dry.

Such contrast from a few hours earlier, when I'd taken off from Bangkok: the sun was rising over the Gulf of Thailand, turning the sodden rice paddies stitched along its shoreline to glass. I thought I'd be flying direct to Paro, in Bhutan, but discovered once airborne that this Royal Bhutan Airways flight would be landing first at a place I'd never heard of.

I can't see it spelled anywhere - neither in the airline magazine, nor on my ticket - so I'm relying on the flight attendant's pronunciation for clues. 'Gawati,' she says, and I strain to hear the syllables and decipher this unfamiliar destination.

I conjure the world map in my mind's eye: are we landing in an eastern corner of Bhutan? A city in Myanmar's northwest? Somewhere in northern Bangladesh, perhaps? My geographical aptitude fails me.

We touch down and pull up to a small, flaking terminal with the words 'LGB International Airport, Guwahati' helpfully spelled out for me. A row of IndiGo aircraft lines up alongside us, and a tanker sails past bearing another clue: India Oil Corporation, it reads. And then it comes to me: we're in Assam, that part of India cut adrift from the motherland during partition. Bangladesh lies to the south and, beyond it, the subcontinent. This state's disjointedness mirrors my own.

People disembark, others climb aboard. The plane takes off. We arrive in Paro, via a circuitous and world-enlarging route. On the way back to Bangkok I know exactly where
we are when we stop to offload passengers at once-mysterious Guwahati.

Soon I'm on my way to Africa's tiny, ravaged heart, Rwanda. But to get there I must first land in another unfamiliar city, Entebbe. I've requested a window seat so that I can see where I'm going; a house-speckled swatch of greenery rises up to meet me, and then the vast bowl of Lake Victoria, glorious in the late afternoon glow. I've seen this lake once before, from its eastern shore near the border between Kenya and Tanzania. But up here I'm afforded a fresh perspective, one which helps to reorganise the map - incomplete as an ancient explorer's - stored in my brain.

"When I was a child, I thought it was a fictional place; if I disembarked now I could jump on a bus and be there by morning."

We land. People get off, people get on. The plane takes off again, glides above the earth and descends into Kigali with its just-swept streets and harrowing history. Soon I'm back in the air, chasing the sun towards the Republic of Congo. Its capital city, Brazzaville, speckles the shoreline of the fat-as-a-slug Congo River. On the opposite bank I can make out the smudged skyline of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. How odd to have seen a country but to never have been there.

A month later I'm back on another unscheduled tour of Africa. The plane lands in Addis Ababa, a jumble of city streets flying past my window. I spend hours in the airport, take off again, land in Bamako, capital of Mali. I imagine the fabled city of Timbuktu, northeast of here. When I was a child, I thought it was a fictional place; if I disembarked now I could jump on a bus and be there by morning.

But I stay put. People get off; others get on. They are Africans, mostly, dressed in bright wax-cloth dresses and head-ties, kaftans and kufi caps. French tumbles effortlessly yet incongruously from their mouths. I feel foreign and bland beside them.

The plane takes off. Bamako shrinks beneath us and disappears. Later, Dakar materialises from the anonymous landscape scrolling out below. It's a place that has stamped itself into my consciousness by the time I set off for home a week later: I can locate Dakar's port and Djifer in the Saloum Delta; I have stood on the tiny island capital of Banjul in The Gambia, and have sailed upriver to islands where slaves were corralled before being shipped to the Americas.

I'm headed in the opposite direction myself, to Nairobi in East Africa via Abidjan on the continent's Ivory Coast, to Abu Dhabi in the Middle East and Australia at the very ends of the earth. The world is arranging itself below me as I sail over it, slotting itself into place, locating new cities, redrawing borders on the imperfect map I carry around in my head.
Catherine Marshall is a Sydney-based journalist and travel writer.
Remembering my friend Beverley Farmer

ARTS AND CULTURE

Gillian Bouras

We learn, in the normal run of things, that we have to part from our parents and their generation, whether early or late in our own lives. But somehow we nourish the belief that our friends are going to be with us until a kind of joint ending occurs.

It's a deluded, dream-like state, this, and all too often we are forced, joltingly, to wake up and cope with what we consider to be an unnatural death. It has been written that our losses are like worm-casts, growing beside us and accumulating for as long as we ourselves live. But I think losses are more often like looming mountains.

Writer Beverley Farmer died on 16 April. She and I had been friends, albeit usually long-distance ones, for more than 30 years. It seems to me now that we had so much in common that friendship was almost inevitable: it was just a matter of timing that first meeting.

Much of an age, we had been brought up in a similar way, I deduced; we attended the same university college, although not at the same time, and her most influential teacher became my university mentor. We married Greek men, and Beverley's son is the same age as my eldest son; eventually we both, to our great joy, acquired granddaughters. As well, we were both published by that trail-blazing firm McPhee Gribble. And we were letter-writers.

Significantly, each of us had experience of village in life in Greece, although Beverley lived here long before I arrived, and her village is in the north of the country, while mine is almost as far south as it is possible to go on the Balkan Peninsula. For that reason we never met in Greece, although there were phone calls, and there were always letters; we met instead in Melbourne, Geelong, Point Lonsdale, London, Oxford, and Canterbury.

The memories come rushing back. A day in Oxford, among the dreaming spires, where Beverley, a gifted photographer, took a great many pictures. A visit to Canterbury
Cathedral where, used to free and easy Orthodox services, during which people stroll in and out of church, we were startled to be met, once a heavy door was opened, by a figure clad in deep black, cadaverous of mien, and sepulchral of voice.

'Vensong is in progress,' he intoned, and there was no invitation to enter the hallowed space. 'Straight out of Trollope,' remarked Beverley, making me laugh. (We laughed a lot during our times together, I recall.) We waited outside, and eventually toured the Cathedral, standing silently at the scene of the martyrdom of St Thomas a Becket. And Beverley took more photographs.

"In a letter I have just re-read, Beverley refers to Greece as 'that bitter place that matters so much'. How accurate such a description is." 

Wherever and whenever we met, we talked about Greece, about which country we felt deeply ambivalent, despite our shared love of its landscape, lore, and history. In a letter I have just re-read, Beverley refers to Greece as 'that bitter place that matters so much'. How accurate such a description is. Greece was, however, an early inspiration and source of creativity for her: her early stories often centred on young Greek-Australians and the shock of the old that they experienced in their harsh ancestral villages where there are still few filters.

Beverley herself was a deeply private person, one of shining intelligence, dignity and grace, who was passionate about writing, and a perfectionist in the practice of it. She was also a mighty reader, reading about 250 books a year.

Always interested in the whole business of creativity, she explored the various forms of it in A Body of Water, which is a writer's notebook studded with short stories. This volume was published in 1990, and such exploration continued: 15 years later The Bone House consisted of three long essays (supported by a dauntingly long bibliography) that are a meditation on the life of the body and the life of the mind. One of the questions that emerges from the work is: What does art know that we do not?

Beverley matured into a great prose stylist, which may be one reason she never received the wide attention she so much deserved. The mainstream reader, most often wanting page-turning action, does not always appreciate nuance, subtle manipulation of language, and the expansion of prose into poetry.

Her peers, however, appreciated Beverley and her writing: she won the NSW Premier's Award for Fiction in 1984, The House in the Light was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 1996, and she won the Patrick White Award in 2009. Beverley's last book was This Water; Five Tales, written during the last phase of her long illness. Her prose style has been praised as being even more precise in this book, which consists of a re-working of archetypal legends about women. It was long-listed for the Stella Prize.

Lyn Jacobs of Flinders University wrote recently that Beverley's death means that Australian literature has lost a remarkable voice. How absolutely true. And I have lost a friend.
Gillian Bouras is an expatriate Australian writer who has written several books, stories and articles, many of them dealing with her experiences as an Australian woman in Greece.
Imperfect score for Gold Coast's 'equality' games

AUSTRALIA

John Warhurst

The Gold Coast Commonwealth Games put on public display the best and the worst of our social values. The final scorecard was largely positive with the major exception being the unnecessarily nationalistic approach of our media coverage.

Our leaders were unusually cooperative. The Prime Minister, the Queensland Premier and the Gold Coast Mayor each took pride in their role in funding or supporting the games. Their relationship was probably much less easy beneath the surface and some leaders demanded their personal time in the sun, which explained the interminable speeches at the closing ceremony. These were later the subject of an apology. But the federal-state-local relations effort did seem to be largely collaborative.

The games' sporting competitions themselves illustrated a healthy mix between collective and individual effort. It takes a village to raise an elite sportsman or sportswoman. We praise the talent and sheer hard work of individuals. But competitors in individual sports acknowledged that they don’t succeed through their own efforts alone, but always rely on support by family, schoolteachers, coaches and communities.

In team sports the collective spirit was even more visible. Such teamwork often demands the sacrifice of the individual to the larger good. Each team member is given a specified role. Not to be a team player can mean failure no matter how talented an individual is. In these team sports each member gets recognition when medals are won. Everyone wins together.

An even better illustration of selfless teamwork occurs when teams work together in individual sports like cycling. In the longer bike races the team members, each with a role specified by the coach, sacrificed themselves so that one member of the team would ultimately be successful. This is team work at its best.
The games were also a positive model for Australian society in other ways, illustrating values in which sport is often well ahead of society.

The first was in the equal recognition of the rights and skills of men and women. There was a commitment to an equal gender balance still not practised in wider society. The balance wasn't perfect, but it was pretty good. The number of medals available to men and women was equal. In this respect the games were better than the cultural norms of some of the competing countries. Sports men and women emerged as leaders for gender equality in public life generally.

"Wheelchair racer Kurt Fearnley, one of the stars of the whole program, believed that the games were a model for society and a driver of wider social change in workplaces."

The second was in the much greater integration within the sporting program of disabled athletes alongside able-bodied fellow competitors. Para-competitions were not always televised live, but they generally got a pretty good run. Wheelchair racer Kurt Fearnley, one of the stars of the whole program, believed that the games were a model for society and a driver of wider social change in workplaces.

The third was Indigenous inclusion. The opening ceremony set an appropriate standard by emphasising Indigenous culture, and Indigenous athletes were afforded positive recognition as role models. The Indigenous rights' protest made an impact but it used the games as a suitable vehicle for campaigning rather than being against the games as such.

The fourth was in the frequent examples of generosity towards fellow competitors which occurred alongside fierce competition. Female athletes in the 10,000 metres waited at the finish line for less talented athletes to finish. Large fields were encouraged to compete in swimming and athletics sprint races even though most competitors had no chance of victory. Participation was valued alongside success.

That is not to say that sport is invariably inclusive. By its nature elite sport is always somewhat exclusive in its search for high achievement. Equality for LGBTQI athletes is a goal only slowly being achieved against strong social opposition in some countries.

Against this generally positive background the media persisted in an approach to presentation and commentary which was needlessly one-eyed. Australian athletes often got the lions-share of the television coverage. Within events the cameras and commentary focused on Australians to the neglect of others. Swimming coverage was the most guilty of this bias. Athletics was better because Australians were not as dominant and the nature of the events, especially the more elongated field events, was different.

It is only a short step from this sort of media coverage to encouraging an ugly Australian approach to sport in which winning is everything. Unfortunately such an attitude is too familiar. Fortunately, the spirit of the games themselves demonstrated a much healthier side to our sporting culture.
John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and chairs Concerned Catholics Canberra-Goulburn.
Thirst for righteousness over Aboriginal deaths

AUSTRALIA

Michele Madigan

Commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, on 13 April, NITV re-screened Richard Frankland's 1993 documentary Who Killed Malcolm Smith?

Watching it, it became totally clear to me about Manus Island and Nauru.

That’s why. That’s why our nation, our government can torture with impunity. And why, despite this torture being almost common knowledge, we let it go on. Perhaps as a nation it - this violence, this contempt of the ‘other’ by mainstream Australian society - is in our DNA.

When Malcolm Smith became an incarcerated youth offender, nothing was allowed in his cell. Hours upon hours with simply nothing to do. Forced only to do nothing. Surely that’s a form of torture. During the day, both as a youth offender and later as an adult, there was only hard, useless labour to fill in the hours.

As an 11-year-old Aboriginal boy, Smith and his two younger brothers had taken other children's pushbikes, ridden them for a while and then abandoned them. Surely a childhood prank. Yet the wholehearted punishment was immediate. The welfare system immediately became prosecutor, judge and jury - the three brothers simply taken, their dwelling deemed unsuitable, the father not informed. Smith was sent to the Kinchela Children's Home. So many rules to obey: 'only rules and regulations, no love and affection'.

As a 15-year-old still under government 'care' he was sent to Sydney. Illiterate, despite years of 'schooling' in a government institution, the young country boy was seemingly abandoned in a huge city where he knew no one. How was he meant to survive?
Malcolm Smith didn't survive.

"Only later did I fully understand the rightness of Lilian Crombie's dance to the classic 'Brown Skin Baby', intertwining the two issues: the children of the Stolen Generation becoming many of the adult Black Deaths in Custody."

In one of his 1992 programs, national broadcaster Philip Adams saw Smith's death as 'inevitable - just the product of his life ... I have never seen or heard of a more appalling story."

In 1984, Charlotte Walker's brother died in custody. A South Australian, he died a violent death in Fremantle prison. Already there had been many calls for a royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody. In the Sydney Town Hall I witnessed, at her request, the first night of the national tour of the family members of victims, one of them being Charlotte herself. Following the extraordinary, sorrowful, puzzled and angry speeches of family members, came the never-to-be-forgotten finale: the solemn liturgy of the rolling screen and the accompanying slow and seemingly interminable spoken roll call. Smith's name must have been among them.

With the support of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, Charlotte and I became part of the Adelaide group planning our South Australian meeting with its aim of forcing the royal commission. Held on the fourth anniversary of the 16-year-old John Pat's violent death in Roebourne, WA, one thousand people came, over half Aboriginal. This gathering too was a kind of liturgy. Only later did I fully understand the rightness of Lilian Crombie's dance to the classic 'Brown Skin Baby' - intertwining the two issues: the children of the Stolen Generation becoming many of the adult Black Deaths in Custody.

The royal commission examined 99 Aboriginal deaths in custody and made 339 recommendations. Aboriginal people were completely over-represented in the Australian prison system - imprisoned at seven times the rate of the mainstream population.

In 2018 what has changed? Aboriginal long-term advocates like Tauto Sansbury have been warning for decades that 'Aboriginal Australians are the most disadvantaged, ostracised, criticised and victimised group in society'. Last month's *Pathways to Justice* report of the Australian Law Reform Commission confirmed that the imprisoned rate is now 14.7 times for men and 21.2 times for women. Three per cent of the population makes up an extraordinary 27 per cent of the adult prison population.

On 6 April, in article titled 'The latest report on Indigenous incarceration must be the last', the president of the Law Council of Australia Morry Bailes stated: 'As a nation, we must ask ourselves why we continue to tolerate these numbers and why our governments, despite numerous reports and recommendations, have failed to act.'

Tauto Sansbury has an answer: 'Government must understand that we as Aboriginal people have a right to be heard ... stop talking about us, start talking to us and act on what we tell you. Until this happens, nothing will change.'

In 1992 Philip Adams claimed that *Who Killed Malcolm Smith?* needed to be compulsory viewing for all Australians. Why? In 2018 Pope Francis names it as the beatitude, 'knowing how to mourn with others'. Maybe it's only this that will lead to the next: the
'hungering and thirsting for righteousness' so needed in today's world.

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: Still from Richard Frankland's 1993 documentary *Who Killed Malcolm Smith?*
Not quite what the Anzacs fought for

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Subverting your world with a handful of stories

ARTS AND CULTURE

Ellen Shelley, John Cranmer

Selected poems

Do you see what I see?

Do you see what I see?

Tales as thin as milk-skin
taller than the night.

A mother bares her child
to sky, to star,
blessings on our foreheads
a cross to scar our backs.

Holy water falls,
with textures of song & suffering,

a prayer to rinse our mouths in,
a room to box our sins.

Somewhere in the distance
a tomb breaks open,

we remain a voice,
to the past & all its failures.

Buried in our conscience
executed on our knees,

the flow of blood runs deep
on scriptures old and new.

Blessed lips pursed skyward
and down on flinty ground,

do you see what I see?
those lice on holy spine.

- Ellen Shelley
Subverting your world with a handful of stories

The telling of stories
is at the heart of making a new world
they have inherent within them
seeds of many possible futures
that take root in the most rocky of soils
and surprising places of uncertainty
creating strongly blooming imaginations
that have decided to live for ever

- John Cranmer

Words and wings

Words
are our climbing anchors
we bury them deep
into the rock-face
of every living moment

Word by word
lifting our heaviness
towards a possible summit

There to find the one
who has grown wings
and is moving on
towards an horizon
hidden in the cloud-haze
of what might yet be.

- John Cranmer
Remembering shared humanity on Anzac Day

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

My childhood was spent near Anzac Hostel, a repatriation centre for invalided soldiers, predominantly from the First World War. It was a towered white building on a large block of land surrounded by Moreton Bay figs, a gathering place for cicadas in summer.

I was torn between the desire to sneak into the property in the hope of being able to boast that I had seen greengrocers, orange drummers, redeyes and other colourfully named cicadas, and my fear of the men in the hostel, whom people described as shell-shocked or damaged. They, and the Western Australian flowering gums along the road, each of which bore the name of an Australian soldier killed in the war, were the physical reminders of war and of Anzac Day in particular.

Even to children these things intimated a reality only later to be entered: the sadness of war. As did the Anzac Day celebrations, largely composed of fellow soldiers and those who had lost husbands, brothers, fathers and lovers in the war.

Today the celebration of Anzac Day has changed notably. Its participants encompass soldiers who have fought in a variety of wars since 1945, their relatives and descendants, and people who find the rituals of the day moving and encouraging. The focus of the day has switched from honouring and grieving the soldiers who died at Anzac Cove and in the trenches to honouring and celebrating the heroism of all those who have fought in the Australian armed forces.

Anzac Day has also been increasingly used as a commonplace by politicians for praising distinctively Australian values. They have accordingly spent heavily on facilities for remembering the war, focused on the site of the battle rather than on the hometowns of those who grieve, and often yielded to the temptation to glorify war.

The change of focus has not been universally accepted. The tension between remembering those who have died in battle and celebrating those who have fought in
battles makes the celebration of Anzac Day inherently controversial. It is seen by many to canonise military values.

I believe that the risk is less to glorify war than to sanitise it by allowing time and space to take away its physical reality, and with it the sadness of war. The relationships involved in it are reduced to those that link soldiers on the battlefield to one another and to those at home who support them faithfully.

"Anzac Day is an occasion for dwelling compassionately on the things that bind us together, not those that separate us into allies and enemies."

If we celebrate Anzac Day we should be drawn to reflect on the full range and power of relationships involved in war. That means keeping in mind the relatives and friends of those who fought, not simply at Anzac Cove but in all Australian military actions, and especially the families who lost husbands, sons and brothers. We should also hold these relationships in our imagination, not simply at the moment when people fought, were wounded, died or survived, but afterwards.

Our reflection should include the way in which soldiers who survived negotiated the changed relationships with families, friends and lovers when they returned. It should encompass also the way in which the lives of families were devastated by the loss of children, lovers or parents, were affected by fathers returning with symptoms of stress and addiction and by the violence which sometimes accompanied it.

It should include, too, the long, dependent lives of those at Anzac Hostel and elsewhere who were so affected by physical or mental illness as a result of their war service that they lived the rest of their life in institutions or home care.

If we hold in our imagination those Australians who fought in war and the complex relationships that frame their lives, we should remember also the young people, women and children today around the world who are drawn into suffering or inflicting the horrors of war by necessity and not by choice.

On Anzac Day we should celebrate, not the achievements, but the humanity of soldiers recently caught in war, and be encouraged to attend to their welfare, especially to the hardest affected among them.

In a society and world in which military metaphors and binary choices are extended increasingly to international relationships, immigration, customs, policing and welfare, Anzac Day is an occasion for dwelling compassionately on the things that bind us together, not those that separate us into allies and enemies. It is a time for children to visit boldly those who live in the Anzac Hostels of our day and for both together to delight in the variety and the sound of cicadas.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.
Main image: A ward for the totally and permanently incapacitated in an Anzac Hostel, 1919 (National Archives of Australia)
The big, bad business of America's war industry

ECONOMICS

David James

As the Western allies flirt with starting World War III in Syria, it is worth examining some of the financial and business dynamics behind the United States' 'military industrial complex'. War may not be good business, but it is certainly big business. And in contrast to Russia and China, the war industry in the US is heavily privatised, including the use of mercenaries.

First, some statistical context. America’s military spending, which will rise to US$716 billion in 2019, is almost half the total of the world's military spending. It is bigger than the next 15 biggest countries' combined outlays, four times China's level and ten times Russia's. And that is just military spending. As Alexander Nekrosov commented, the CIA's budget is $US44 billion a year, which is about two thirds of Russia's military budget. America is a warrior nation like no other: it has been at war 222 out of its 239 years.

Then there are the bases. Depending on how you count them, America has between 800 and 1000 military bases, giving it leverage, if not control, over 191 nations. Russia has only a handful, mainly across Central Asia, although it has been establishing new ones in Syria. China has almost none. The US bases are presented as being part of America’s investment in defence, but it looks much more like offence.

Then there are the munitions output and the body count - what we might call the business operations. In the past 16 years, the US has invaded, occupied and dropped 200,000 bombs and missiles on seven countries. If the overall impact is considered, and not just the immediate casualties from the combat (an epidemiological approach) the death toll is estimated to be more than two million (and maybe as high as five million).

Then there is the co-opting of public and political life. Military providers depend almost totally on sales to their governments, with of course America being the biggest buyer. This represents an extremely lucrative market, but to make sure that it will buy it is necessary to persuade politicians and the media that there is a constant threat that must
be met with ever higher spending.

This does not prove too difficult. Even basic logic is easily taken out. Thus we see the recent bombing of Syria justified as teaching Assad a lesson that goes something like this: 'Because Assad appears to have killed Syrians, we have to punish him by killing more Syrians.' Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts would thoroughly approve.

The spread of militarism does not just involve creating the specific apparatus of war. There is a huge parallel industry in false-fact creation and spin. This goes back decades, but a recent example was the revelation that in 2016 the Pentagon paid PR company Bell Pottinger to deliver propaganda during the Iraq war.

"Madeleine Albright's infamous comment that killing 500,000 Iraqi children was 'worth it' said it all. The word hypocrisy hardly seems to cover it."

That is only one instance of many. Some of the people involved with the infamous Cambridge Analytica seem to have been involved in various types of psyops. The Pentagon lists control of information as one of its core operational activities, which encompasses heavy influence over the media (along with intelligence agencies) and influence over Hollywood.

It is true that there are bigger industries. Military expenditure, plus spending on veterans, only accounts for about a quarter of the total US federal budget. Defence equates with about 3.5 per cent of the nation's GDP, smaller than finance and health.

But as a business, the military is distinct, and it has unusual effects. Economically, military investment is dead money. Unlike other industry sectors, there is no domestic multiplier effect, it does not stimulate further economic activity. Either the weaponry is used to destroy the economies of other countries, or it lies idle.

Because the business imperative is to fight wars, thus creating demand for its products and 'services', it has an incentive to corrupt the rest of the polity. It is necessary to sustain a sense of urgency about resorting to violence, which has in recent times meant destroying moral conscience. Thus we see the absurdity of action against the Assad government, because they have allegedly killed children, by a Western military that has specialised in killing children. Madeleine Albright's infamous comment that killing 500,000 Iraqi children was 'worth it' said it all. The word hypocrisy hardly seems to cover it.

Such ethical failure is a measure of the military's commercial effectiveness. The ultimate aim of the industry is to convince us that 'we' are the good guys and 'they' (the targets) are the bad guys. That way, no matter how illegal or unjustified the attack, it is always right.

To that extent, the military industry now represents the greatest threat to Western morality - a morality that is rendered meaningless if it is not also applied to our own actions.
David James is the managing editor of businessadvantagepng.com. He has a PhD in English Literature and is author of the musical comedy The Bard Bites Back, which is about Shakespeare's ghost.
The indispensable right to water

PODCAST

Podcast

Water is an indispensable resource, but also the site of many injustices around the world. In this episode we talk to Dr Cristy Clark, whose research on water rights in places like Manila, Michigan and Soweto, shows the effects of a distorted view of water. What leads to these distortions? How can they be remedied? And what happens when we don't act to protect the human right to water?

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