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Lessons for Australia in Malaysia election shock

INTERNATIONAL

Erin Cook

Malaysia, a country ruled by the same party since independence was won six decades ago, has never been looked to as a regional leader in democracy. This changed on 9 May when a historical opposition win shocked Southeast Asia to a grinding halt.

Former prime minister Najib Razak and Barisan Nasional did not want to take any chances this year and every effort to stem a fair fight was rolled out. Cynical redelineation of electorate borders meant previously competitive seats were tightened up to be solid wins for the government. A law forced through the legislature at the 11th hour aimed at stamping out 'fake news' effectively made reporting on the massive 1MDB corruption case illegal and further tightened media restrictions.

Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, the political party that current Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (pictured) created, was briefly deregistered and his face was not allowed to appear on election material. The very date of the election was blatantly planned to disenfranchise as many voters as possible by being on a weekday. In a country where voters must return to their home states to vote, for many working in Kuala Lumpur or elsewhere this became a near impossible feat.

If the intention was to strongarm Malaysians into complacency it clearly failed. The story has become the triumph of Mahathir Mohamad, himself part of the political elite as a former prime minister for two decades, and his opposition coalition. This is wrong. The real story of the historical change of government isn't the endorsement of the now governing Pakatan Harapan coalition, it is the mass-mobilisation of Malaysia's civil society in the face of anti-democratic moves at suppression.

Malaysia’s formal politics is not something Australia should replicate. A focus on ethnicity within parties is a feature which, thankfully, Australian politics is moving away from. But the movement, from anti-corruption groups, community organisations and particularly millennial and Gen Z activists, ought to be a lesson to democracies across the world.
Australia has a lot to learn from the month of flurried, self-motivated organising within the country and by the diaspora.

Before the vote, much of this organising focused on ensuring voters were able to return home for poll day. Malaysians took to crowdfunding online for plane and bus tickets for working class voters, successfully pressuring airlines to lower prices and suspend fees for flight changes, and organising diaspora to meet up abroad in departure terminals for postal votes to make it back before the cut-off.

In this respect, Australia's electoral institution is a world leader and something of which all Australians ought to be extremely proud. Still, despite best efforts to bring the vote directly to older Australians, open pre-polling to ensure those who can't make the date can still vote, and postal votes for all who request, some Australians still find themselves disenfranchised. Each election is followed by reports of regional communities unable to access their ballots.

"Malaysia has shown the world what a bloodless and effective people's movement looks like and is an example to the rest of us."

We must take this lesson from Malaysia, where the question of voting intentions never even arose. As Malaysia has shown us, the duty to vote is not just to show up and mark off a name, it is also to make sure every eligible voter is enfranchised.

As reams of opinion pieces over the last few months have shown us, Malaysian voting motivations resemble that of swing voters in Australia. The 'lesser of two evils' thinking prevailed. In Australia, this invites a degree of apathy and a guarantee that once the governing side is seen to be sufficiently 'evil' the opposition will regain government. In Malaysia, however, an excitement of the first ever 'lesser evil' to win has created a vocally critical electorate from the outset.

Election promises that were forgotten as soon as government was won, such as Mahathir indicating he would take a position within the cabinet in addition to the leadership, have been met with fierce criticism and immediately dropped. Failures to ensure enough women MPs in high profile positions has prompted campaigns both online and off. Much of this is in part to a sensation of freedom not previously seen. Politicians seen as too vocal of the Barisan Nasional governments had been blacklisted from media and are now taking to television and newspaper profiles with enthusiasm to meet these criticisms.

The predictability in Australian political life has meant accountability is forced to the sidelines, something to be championed only by minority parties and activists. With few notable exceptions, mainstream mass movements are uncommon and often ineffective. Malaysia’s ability to create critical mass while acknowledging that different motivations will see disputes further down the road of how to address key issues has piled the agenda with questions long ignored; particularly difficult, existential questions about the place of Islam in politics and the role of women in public life.

It's early days for Malaysia. Fears still linger that Mahathir will resume his old ways or that change won't come quickly enough. But no matter what happens from here on out, Malaysia has shown the world what a bloodless and effective people's movement looks
like and is an example to the rest of 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*.
Ted Kennedy's darkest hour

ARTS AND CULTURE

Tim Kroenert

Chappaquiddick (M). Director: John Curran. Starring: Jason Clarke, Ed Helms, Kate Mara, Bruce Dern. 106 minutes

In a certain light, Chappaquiddick can be viewed as a pair, even an honorary sequel, to Pablo Larraín's excellent 2016 film Jackie. That film about the assassination of John F. Kennedy and its aftermath, from the perspective of Jackie Kennedy, constituted both a critique and a further act of American mythmaking regarding that most mythologised of 20th century American families.

Chappaquiddick on the other hand scrutinises the implications and consequences of such mythmaking. It is an account of the event that on 18 July 1969 ended the life of former Robert Kennedy staffer Mary Jo Kopechne, when a car driven by Senator Ted Kennedy drove off a bridge into a lake on Chappaquiddick Island. Kennedy left the scene of the accident and did not notify authorities for ten hours.

The facts of the incident remain contested; at the time Kennedy received a two-month suspended jail sentence after pleading guilty to a charge of leaving the scene of a crash causing personal injury. Despite the tragedy of Kopechne's death and the attendant media scandal, Kennedy of course barely faltered, as he went on to become the fourth-longest continuously serving senator in US history.

Chappaquiddick weaves established facts, accepted truths and poetic license into a political fable that's both thoughtful and iconoclastic. It sets the incident against the backdrop of the Apollo 11 moon landing, the triumphant realisation of the late JFK's space race posturing. Following Bobby's death the previous year, Ted (Clarke), the last surviving bother, has been left with a hell of a legacy to maintain.

As a force in Ted's life these expectations are given personal embodiment in the aging Joseph P. Kennedy Sr (Dern), who is able to wither his youngest son with a mute glare
from the seat of his wheelchair. In the aftermath of the accident, Ted's craving for fatherly approval proves a more potent influence than the voice of conscience represented by his cousin and confidante, Joseph Gargan (Helms).

The film appreciates the effects of these public and family expectations on Ted's actions, without ever really sympathising with him. 'I'm not going to be president,' he murmurs, by way of announcing Kopechne's death to Gargan. Ultimately, he comes off as more pathetic than Machiavellian, the future Liberal Lion inept in his attempts to spin the situation, and rarely having the courage of his convictions.

"We are never allowed to forget just what it is that Ted and the family lawyers are trying to spin; the human collateral to the maintaining of the myth."

As such Chappaquiddick amounts to part dark satire, part American nightmare. The final, excruciating moments in the life of Kopechne - one of the highly intelligent, politically astute 'boiler room girls' of Robert Kennedy's campaign - recur vividly. We are never allowed to forget just what it is that Ted and the family lawyers are trying to spin; the human collateral to the maintaining of the myth.

Tim Kroenert is the editor of Eureka Street.
Vatican pointers for banks royal commission

RELIGION

Andrew Hamilton

As the royal commission prepared to resume its hearings into financial services the Vatican released Oeconomicae et pecuniariae quaestiones (OPQ), a clunkily translated document (reviewed here in detail), on the ethics of markets. Although written quite independently, passages of the document could have been mistaken for factual reporting of the royal commission. It speaks, for example, of financial advisers:

'Among the morally questionable activities of financial advisers in the management of savings, the following are to be taken into account: an excessive movement of the investment portfolio commonly aimed at increasing the revenues deriving from the commission for the bank or other financial intermediary; a failure from a due impartiality in offering instruments of saving, which, compared with some banks, the product of others would suit better the needs of the clients; the scarcity of an adequate diligence or even a malicious negligence on the part of financial advisers regarding the protection of related interests to the portfolio of their clients; and the concession of financing on the part of the banking intermediary in a subordinate manner to the contextual subscription of other financial products issued by the same, but not convenient to the client.'

The significance of this and other judgments of OPQ is precisely that they are not descriptions of individual crimes but flow logically from a defective understanding of the economy shared by its actors. They are not aberrations but natural consequences of a shared ideology.

The naivety of conventional economic wisdom, in the view of OPQ, is that it regards economics as a science independent of ethics. It abstracts economic transactions from their full human context, seeing them simply as directed to profit-making by competitive individuals. It holds that a market as free as possible from regulation will benefit society
as a whole.

OPQ sees a sophisticated market as beneficial to society provided that it is seen as composed by human decisions and so serves human goals that go far beyond individual wealth making. Money is a means not an end. The market will serve society as a whole only if it is governed by ethical reflection:

'In principle, all the endowments and means that the markets employ in order to strengthen their distributive capacity are morally permissible, provided they do not turn against the dignity of the person and are not indifferent to the common good.

"In each of these areas, OPQ focuses on the human qualities that should be reflected in the transactions involved."

'At the same time, it is clear that markets, as powerful propellers of the economy, are not capable of governing themselves. In fact, the markets know neither how to make the assumptions that allow their smooth running (social coexistence, honesty, trust, safety and security, laws, and so on) nor how to correct those effects and forces that are harmful to human society (inequality, asymmetries, environmental damage, social insecurity, and fraud).'

The ethical framework developed in the document asserts the non-negotiable value of each human being, their freedom, the interdependence of human beings in society, and their consequent responsibility for recognising this in all individual choices. In all transactions, as in all human actions, we need to take into account the other relationships which are involved, including those to society as a whole.

From this perspective the document identifies what it sees as current defects. It discusses the pursuit of profit at any price, the cosy relationships between regulators and institutions, the denial of responsibility to the wider community, the greed built into remuneration, the venal and deceitful behaviour of financial advisers and the confinement of ethical responsibility to the minimal observance of laws that cannot be evaded without prosecution.

The practical issues discussed in the document include: the need for coordination of regulation at an international level and for ethics committees in financial institutions; lines of credit; speculation that destroys social value for private profit; manipulation of exchange rates; derivatives; credit default swaps; the need to demand compliance to moral as well as legal demands; and the regulation of offshore transactions to avoid tax.

In each of these areas, OPQ focuses on the human qualities that should be reflected in the transactions involved. In its treatment of derivatives and CDS, for example, it sees a lack of the transparency that should characterise any transaction, particularly on the part of the more powerful partner. This lack of transparency meant that when the transactions unravelled, profits stayed with speculators while society bore the costs.

The lessons the royal commission might draw from this analysis are sobering. Regulation, prosecution of executives, shaming of board members and effective systems of accountability may deal with the indecent and rapacious behaviour revealed in the hearings. But they will not touch the self-serving ideology subscribed to by economists, politicians, financial executives and journalists. That demands more than compliance. It
requires conversion.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street. Main image: Pope Francis at the general audience in St Peter's Square on 23 May 2018. (Daniel Ibáñez/CNA)
A stringent critique of financial abuse

RELIGION

Bruce Duncan

The Vatican has launched a stringent critique of widespread abuses in global economies, abuses that are driving astonishing inequality, threatening ecological sustainability and unleashing powerful reactionary political forces.

The title of the Vatican document *Oeconomicae et pecuniariae questiones* can be translated as 'On Economic and Financial Matters'. It was written by the newly formed Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development together with the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. Approved by Pope Francis on 6 January, it was not released till 17 May with a clumsy last-minute English translation.

It reiterates the call by Francis in *Laudato Si’* for an urgent dialogue between politics and economics to advance human life and wellbeing. 'Money must serve, not rule!' (#6).

The 10,000-word document encapsulates the strong critiques of forms of economics most responsible for current social and economic crises, drawing strongly from the documents of Francis and his predecessors. Informed by the thinking of many leading scientists and economists advising the Vatican agencies, it warns urgently to reduce extreme inequalities and address climate issues before they become truly catastrophic.

The critique in *Oeconomicae* centres on the growing influence of economic thinking that exaggerated the role of free markets, believing that markets of themselves, without adequate regulation, produce the best results, while ignoring concerns about liberty, social equity and human wellbeing.

'At stake is the authentic wellbeing of a majority of men and women of our planet who are at risk of being excluded and marginalised' while a rich minority, 'indifferent to the condition of the majority, exploits and reserves for itself substantial resources and
wealth'.

The document does not attempt to adjudicate between rival economic theories, and does not use the term neoliberalism, though that is implied, but insists that economics must not abandon the profoundly moral task of promoting the human wellbeing of everyone, especially those in need.

"Never has this call to protect the common good been so dramatic and immediate."

The Vatican document recognises the value of markets in coordinating production of abundant goods to serve human needs, but argues that public authorities need to regulate financial markets to curtail malpractice. Experience has shown 'how naivum;ve is the belief in a presumed self-sufficiency of the markets, independent of any ethics', and how necessary is 'appropriate regulation' to protect all involved, especially the vulnerable. (#21).

**Financial manipulation**

It warns that 'massive deregulation' has opened the way for moral risk and embezzlement, as well as 'the rise of the irrational exuberance of the markets, followed first by speculative bubbles, and then by sudden, destructive collapse, and systemic crises'. (#21).

Without mentioning the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act that the US used to separate savings banks from investment banks, the document calls for a clear separation of investment banking from that of 'mere business', in order to increase financial stability.

Following the royal commission into banking, Australians will with the document deplore 'the questionable activities of financial advisers' who mislead investors with hidden commissions, failing to act in the interests of their clients and even with 'malicious negligence'. (#22).

In Australia seeking profit at any cost has become commonplace, not just in finance but across whole sectors of business including fast food and petrol franchises, fashion and retail. As the Vatican document comments, 'the objective of mere profit' creates perverse incentives for the 'greedy and unscrupulous'. (#23).

*Oeconomicae* highlights the manipulation of markets, as in the subprime mortgages that helped precipitate the recent financial crises, along with problems with the rating agencies and inter-bank lending arrangements that can create a 'dangerous oligopoly' over credit markets. (#25). Fanciful products, including the 'economic cannibalism' in credit default swaps, became 'a ticking time bomb ready sooner or later to explode'.

The document laments 'how fragile and exposed to fraud is a financial system not sufficiently controlled by regulations, and lacking proportionate sanctions for the violations'. (#27).

The authors of *Oeconomicae* deplore the growth of the so-called shadow banking system, resulting in a loss of control by national authorities. Despite its legitimate roles, offshore finance thrives through mechanisms of tax avoidance and money laundering from international crime networks. There has also been an 'enormous outflow of capital' from
many low-income countries. The document attacks the 'hypocrisy' of states that profit from such operations.

*Oeconomicae* supports calls for 'a minimum tax' on offshore transactions, as well as transparency and public accountability on multinational companies so they pay appropriate taxes in the countries in which they operate (#31).

The document notes that 'the accumulated private wealth of some elites in the fiscal havens is almost equal to the public debt of the respective countries.' This debt then falls on millions of very poor people. (#32).

**Buy ethically: 'vote with your wallet'**

The authors urge consumers to 'vote with your wallet', choosing goods that are ethically responsible, without exploitation in supply chains or damaging the environment. 'Today, as never before we are all called, as sentinels, to watch over genuine life and to make ourselves catalysts of a new social behavior' for the good of all and for the planet (#34).

*Oeconomicae* reiterates the focus of Francis on issues of global poverty and inequality, now exacerbated by global warming and environmental issues. He considers these of overriding moral urgency in the face of looming catastrophic threats to whole populations and indeed the entire planetary life support systems. Never has this call to protect the common good been so dramatic and immediate.

Bruce Duncan is a lecturer in history and social ethics in Melbourne's University of Divinity and director of the Yarra Institute for Religion and Social Policy.

Main image: Pope Francis at the general audience in St Peter's Square on 23 May 2018 (Daniel Ibáñez/CNA)
The fear factor

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Racism is real. What are you doing about it?

AUSTRALIA

Tseen Khoo

'For a country that has no racism, racism seems to make the news a lot.' So says Jacqueline Maley in a recent opinion piece for the Sydney Morning Herald.

Maley's article adeptly sketches the recurring tropes of racist rhetoric and elision of racism through recent political events: Queensland LNP senator Ian Macdonald's (pictured) view that racism doesn't really exist (or is only very isolated) in Australia; the Institute of Public Affairs' (IPA) call for the Race Discrimination Commissioner role to not be renewed (indeed, they called for the abolition of the entire Human Rights Commission); and NSW Opposition Leader Luke Foley's 'white flight' comments.

As Maley points out, 'It shouldn't have to be said, but the best witnesses to racism are probably not going to be Anglo-Saxon "lifer" senators who live in largely white communities.' A part of me went 'hurrah!' that this appeared in a mainstream media outlet. Then I thought on this further.

While agreeing with Maley that they should not be our barometers for racism in Australia, it is precisely these 'lifers', who exist in bubbles of highly privileged and filtered experience, who get air-time in the media, are afforded gravitas, and seen to be representative of Australian sentiment. They have little idea of the 'everyday multiculturalism' that most urban and regional Australians live with.

Amanda Wise, a sociologist at Macquarie University, describes 'everyday multiculturalism' as exploring 'how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground in everyday situations such as neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces'.

The research being done in this area is valuable because it comes closest to what's really happening in our towns, suburbs and cities where communities of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds live side by side. While high-level political and policy shaping of national attitudes is important to track, it is as important to know what's happening and
being experienced in our literal backyards.

In response to Macdonald's comments and the IPA's call for his role's abolition, Tim Soutphommasane has been sharing parts of the Scanlon Foundation's 2017 report on social cohesion via Twitter. The Mayor of Subiaco in Western Australia, Penny Taylor, responded to one of these with: 'If you haven't experienced or witnessed racism, catch public transport more often.'

"If I was afforded the same status of truth-telling as someone like Ian Macdonald, my take on whether there was racism and why it exists would be rather different."

Taylor's comment resonated with me strongly. I've lived in Melbourne for more than ten years, and exist for the most part in my own bubbles of university campuses and middle-class suburban communities. I am a regular commuter, currently on trains or buses for about three hours a day travelling to and from work. The most vicious, blatant racial abuse incidents I have experienced, or witnessed, have been on public transport - every abuser has been a white person. Almost always, they are men. So, if I was afforded the same status of truth-telling as someone like Macdonald, my take on whether there was racism and why it exists would be rather different.

In various forums (this one included) when I have written about racism, I have been told to get over it, belittled for citing instances of discrimination and bigotry, told I'm ungrateful and/or too political, admonished for not being 'really' racially abused, or had my arguments deflected by the old 'Asians are racist, too!' manoeuvre.

If you don't think racism is an issue in Australia, you need to widen your experiences and the sources from which you read. I'm not being facetious here - if you really don't think racism happens, you need to read through something like the education resource Racism No Way. It's a good start, clarifies what racism is, and brings home the fact that it's not a 'personal opinion'; it can have violent consequences and does longer-term harm.

You don't actually need to be at the receiving end of abuse to understand that racism is damaging and tends to happen to vulnerable groups. The question is not whether there is racism in Australia, it's what are you going to do about it?

Tseen Khoo is a lecturer at La Trobe University and founding
convenor (2006-2017) of the Asian Australian Studies Research Network, a network for academics, community researchers, and cultural workers who are interested in the area of Asian Australian Studies. She tweets as @tseenster
Emerging Indigenous Writers Fellowship

MARGARET DOOLEY AWARD

Staff

The annual Margaret Dooley Young Writers Fellowship is offered to support the development of young Australian writers.

In 2018 Eureka Street is partnering with IndigenousX to offer the fellowship to an Emerging Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Writer.

The Fellowship will provide a unique opportunity for an emerging Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander writer with an interest in current events, ethics and social justice to work with the editors of Eureka Street and IndigenousX, to produce 12 columns (six per platform), paid upon publication at $200 per article.

At the end of the fellowship, there will be opportunities to contribute to Eureka Street and IndigenousX on an ongoing basis.

How to apply

Please submit a brief CV (maximum one page) including your date of birth and contact details, along with two op-ed style articles on a current issue. These original works by the author may either be previously published or unpublished/new. The articles should be:

Minimum 700 words
Topical
Authoritative but written in conversational English
Focused on the ethical and social justice dimensions of the topic
We highly recommend familiarising yourself with both Eureka Street and IndigenousX before submitting, in order to get a feel for the kinds of topics and angles the editors prefer.

Please email your CV and articles as three separate attachments to eureka@eurekastreet.com.au. Include the subject line APPLICATION - MARGARET DOOLEY FELLOWSHIP. If you don't use this subject line your application will be missed.

Applications are open to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers under the age of 35 as of 1 January 2018 and must be received by midnight 5 May 2018*. The successful applicant will be contacted to discuss start dates for the Fellowship. Good luck and happy writing!

*Original 31 March deadline has been extended.

Announcing 2018 Fellow

We are thrilled to announce that Amy Thunig is the recipient of the 2018 Margaret Dooley Emerging Indigenous Writers Fellowship.

Amy is a Kamilaroi woman and a researcher at the University of Newcastle. We can't wait to present her writing to you over the coming year!
Being sick in Australia is harder than ever

AUSTRALIA

El Gibbs

Illness is part of our lives. When people get sick, we bring flowers and soup, wishing them well. Yet our public policies work in the opposite way, unable to respond in a supportive or understanding way.

The policy settings for sick people seem to operate as though they are yelling 'get up and stop slacking off in bed', instead of the far more usual 'look after yourself' that we tell our sick friends. Policies around income support, disability and health all combine to make being sick incredibly hard, sapping savings and making being sick even more stressful and difficult than it is already.

I first got sick when I was 19. I am now in my 40s and still sick. I have had periods of time in total remission, and others when I have been hospitalised for weeks on end. I have tried and taken myriad medications and treatments, and live with a now permanent degree of disability. The various public systems that I have engaged with over this time have become increasingly adversarial, in particular the income support system. The gaps between systems are getting wider, and the expenses higher.

Falling between these gaps are people who are sick, disabled, struggling. Policies are increasingly designed to be punitive and harsh, with little room for anyone’s human frailties, let alone to acknowledge the real financial costs of being sick.

The basic income support payment for people who are deemed disabled is the disability support pension (DSP). This payment has undergone significant change over the last few years, leaving many people who need it trying to survive on the much lower Newstart payment. Newstart is now so low that people who rely on it have no rental properties they can afford in most capital cities in Australia. People are missing out on essentials, like food and medical treatment, because the payment is totally inadequate.
In 2011, the then ALP federal government tightened the so-called 'impairment' tables for eligibility for the DSP, and changed the work test to exclude people who could work between 15 and 30 hours per week. This narrowed the scope of the DSP to those who could work less than 15 hours per week. This drew arbitrary lines around who was sick and who wasn't; who needed that extra money each fortnight, and who didn't.

Before this, the DSP contained some flexibility to accommodate fluctuating conditions, and to ensure that people with chronic illnesses and changeable disabilities could move in and out of the paid workforce.

"Raising the rate of Newstart is not just about making sure that people out of paid work can eat and put a roof over their heads, but also will say to the increasing number of sick and/or disabled people relying on Newstart that yes, we do care about you."

I ended up on the DSP in the early 1990s. I had been trying to rely on Austudy and finding it wholly inadequate to meet the high costs of medication, while trying to pay the same rent and food bills of my non-disabled peers. After my fourth hospital admission in 18 months, the social worker insisted I apply for the DSP, and I was accepted. I stayed on the DSP for the next decade.

As my health stabilised, I also found regular part-time work that paid better, was more reliable and my employers were prepared to make the adaptations I needed. The amount of DSP I received dropped as my wages grew - often down to $50 a fortnight. When I got sick again and had to stop work, which was the pattern of my disability for the next decade, the DSP was there to catch me, so I could pay my rent and afford bills, food and medication.

Because I worked at all, I was subject to regular stringent reviews of my eligibility that were stressful and difficult - each time, the verdict was the same. I was still sick, but had found flexible work at the limit of my capabilities. The DSP system back then contained that flexibility, meaning I wasn't penalised for finding work when I could, and was able to have the safety net to catch me when my illness returned, which it did, over and over again, with reliable devastation.

For people coming into the system now, getting on the DSP is much more difficult. Alongside the changes to the impairment tables, there have also been the additional medical reviews of over 90,000 people which have combined to cause a steep decline in the number of people getting on the DSP. There are now 62,882 fewer people on the DSP than there were in December 2013. (Figures are from the Parliamentary Budget Office report into the DSP, and calculations based on DSS Demographic data.)

This huge decline in the number of people eligible for the DSP means that up to 25 per cent of people on Newstart now have a disability or a chronic illness and up to 75 per cent of people claiming DSP being rejected.

The number of people who are deemed to have a 'partial capacity to work' continues to grow, at the same time that the number of people on the DSP has fallen. The number of people who are sick is the same, but many are now expected to try to survive on $170 less per week. (Source: Author calculations from DSS Demographic data.)
Being sick and/or disabled* comes with its own costs, which is what the DSP recognises. This could be increased medication, or accessing taxis because public transport isn't accessible, or the cost of allied health.

A recent survey by the Consumer Health Forum found that 'More than a third of respondents with chronic conditions like multiple sclerosis reported out of pocket costs of more than $10,000.' For many people 'living with a disability may cost an additional several thousand dollars per year'.

These costs are the direct result of being sick and/or disabled and can contribute to the high levels of poverty that many people experience. One study across ten countries found that 'to achieve a reasonable standard of living, individuals who live in households with persons with disabilities must outlay additional resources relative to the population without disability'.

At the same time, finding a work place that is flexible and will accommodate illness or disability is hard, with the unemployment rates for people with disability at much higher rates than their non-disabled peers.

Cracking down on income support payments is done in the name of 'getting people into work', yet the data shows this is clearly not happening. Only three per cent of those who have left the DSP in the last few years have done so because they found work.

What has happened is that people who are sick and/or disabled have been plunged into more extreme poverty, and are now expected to make ends meet on $538.80 per fortnight. They are also expected to participate in the various so-called 'mutual obligation' activities, with few exceptions.

Raising the rate of Newstart is not just about making sure that people out of paid work can eat and put a roof over their heads, but also will say to the increasing number of sick and/or disabled people relying on Newstart that yes, we do care about you, and want you to feel better.

*A note on language: not everyone who is sick is disabled, and not everyone who is disabled is sick.

El Gibbs is a freelance writer specialising in the area of disability and social services and has over 15 years experience in the community and NFP sector, as well as politics. Find her on Twitter @bluntshovels. El would like to thank Pas Forgoine for discussing this piece with her, and for the suggestion to write it.
Remembering the many-sided Brian Doyle

ARTS AND CULTURE

Philip Harvey

Some poets submit their work carefully presented, bio-lines attached, picture perfect. Other poets send a cache of new expressions with commentaries, back stories, a dozen bytes of miscellanea, sometimes regardless of the submission guidelines. A handful treat the submission email address as an opportunity to mailbox every new poem that fits the bill.

The late, great Brian Doyle - who died a year ago, on 27 May 2017 - was one of the latter. Unlike some other poets of the compose-dispose school, however, Brian's poetry was anything but a matter of diminishing returns. No sooner had all the components of his latest composition clicked than it landed in the editor's inbox with some remark in the subject line like 'this one might tickle your fancy'. Frequently it was the one word, 'and'. The poetry just kept on coming.

The evidence, from one line onwards, was unmistakeable Doyle. Imitation was impossible, self-parody ditto. Gore Vidal loved to say that Tennessee Williams knew how to do only one thing, but he did that thing better than anyone else. Brian Doyle's poetry was a bit like that. So many poems, so many ideas, but nearly all of them written in a trained story-telling voice that subtly divulged meaning through asides, exclamations, double takes, and other canny tricks.

His skill at getting your attention ('It was in second grade that I discovered I could not see' is the opening line of 'Sister Anne Marie') and holding it was of a piece with his seemingly effortless digressions, wacky objective correlatives, and witty cultural insights. His confidence with this thing meant he could travel widely for subject matter.

I ponder the consistent squareness of his poems, square-shaped, on-the-level square talk, a square meal. They must imitate in some way his spoken voice as the phrases link and change, build and undercut, a confiding voice wishing to say as much as possible as clearly as possible. Brian himself was no square. He was many-sided and apt to think
right outside the box. Poetry was where he discovered the fullness of surprise. An editor, a reader, you and me, had to be on the alert. Part of his charm was unpredictability.

His belief in direct speech is indirectly explained in his various forays into poetics, as in 'Demerit points for bad poetry', published in Eureka Street in 2009:

'Anyone who has endured brief infatuations with folks who thought they were poets has, ipso facto, suffered through poetry readings during which small quiet poets gripped lecterns like the steering wheels of great ships, explained at incredible length the circumstances under which they committed their poems like raving sins, whispered their elephantine incoherent epic, and then, incredibly, explained at herculean length how the birds in the poem are actually symbols of revenge.

"His poetry is peopled with the humanity he was learning from all the time, themselves dealing with the limitations of being human."

'At which point many members of the audience are contemplating the latter, and imagining a world where poets actually do have to get poetic licenses that require them to swear they will not suddenly use French phrases in their poems, personify favourite body parts of lovers, or write poems in which birds represent anything but birds.'

Brian himself probably broke the rules often enough (we note he is happy to suddenly use the Latin adverb ipso facto in his essay), enough to be a multiple offender who would have his license revoked, but he obviously does not wish to be remembered as someone who gripped a lectern like a steering wheel, whether symbolic or not. He never talks at you, always to you. And he continues:

'For poetry at its very best is the greatest of literary arts (not the greatest of arts, mind you - that would be music, or brewing beer), the one with the most power and passion in the least amount of space, the one that tries most gracefully to find the music in words, that delves deepest into the wild genius of language, that takes the sounds we make with our mouths and uses them as keys to the deepest recesses of the heart and head.'

His themes range widely but an abiding motive of his writing is his great love of others. He writes about his family (the objective correlative may be an objectionable relative), politicians and dropouts, football barrackers and born theatricals, priests and nuns, next door neighbours and the faithful departed. His poetry is peopled with the humanity he was learning from all the time, themselves dealing with the limitations of being human.

At the centre of this is Brian himself, the autobiogapher who would be a poet, shifting from deep reflection on his own failings through to self-certain self-mockery, as in his poem 'On the difficulty of translating the American writer Brian Doyle', in which the exasperated translator concludes:

And a guy who says
He laughed so hard he passed a weasel, how am I to translate that, I ask you? That kind of deliberately ridiculous and illogical image
Is what he trafficks in as the normal course of affairs, and it seems
To me that he savours this, that language for him is a vast wild toy,
Something to play with, something to start like a journey and then
See where it goes, something he walks into rather than commands,
Something that will reveal more of himself than he knew he knew.
Something that here and there is a wriggle or shiver for all readers,
And I have no word for that either - that sudden electric plummet
As an essay opens itself, or the startle of a reader recognising a joy
He or she has felt like a mysterious hand. Maybe we will get better
With our words, maybe that's what he is trying to say, maybe there
Will be better words the harder we try to write about what we can't
Write about very well; or maybe he's just a nutter with a typewriter.

I had the pleasure of meeting Brian Doyle personally over many years, even though he lived in Oregon and I have never been to Oregon. His poems arrived in the inbox with 'what about this?' in the subject line, square and many-sided, energetic and unpredictable, prompting all sorts of surprise responses, just as they do now when I type, and start reading.

Philip Harvey is the poetry editor of Eureka Street. He maintains a word study site, a poetry readings site and a workplace blogspot.
Uluru Statement and a people's movement

PODCAST

Podcast

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was the culmination of a series of Indigenous dialogues across Australia, a painstakingly crafted response to the question of constitutional recognition. It rejected symbolism in favour of a representative voice to parliament, and a process of truth-telling and treaty.

In this episode, we catch up with Thomas Mayor, who has been bringing the Uluru Statement to different communities. He is a Torres Strait Islander and the Northern Territory branch secretary of Maritime Union Australia.

He talks about what the past year has been like and what he thinks it's going to take make the vision at Uluru a reality.

Soundcloud | iTunes

Fatima Measham is a Eureka Street consulting editor. She co-hosts the ChatterSquare podcast, tweets as @foomeister and blogs on Medium.
Close the camps now and stop the posturing

AUSTRALIA

Frank Brennan

Both the Turnbull government and the Shorten opposition are committed to 'stopping the boats'. Tony Abbott's mantra is now the political orthodoxy on both sides of the political aisle in Canberra. Labor knows it has no chance of winning an election unless its commitment to keeping the boats stopped is as firm as the government's.

The political difference is no longer over stopping the boats. Both sides are committed to takebacks and turnbacks, usually to Indonesia, provided the practices of the Australian Border Force and defence forces are safe, legal and transparent. The political brawl is about keeping refugees on Nauru and Manus Island without a permanent solution, and the claim that this is a necessary precondition for keeping the boats stopped.

Peter Dutton, the Minister for Many Things - Home Affairs, Immigration and Border Protection - smelt blood last week after Labor's newest recruit in the House of Representatives, Ged Kearney, told Parliament in her first speech: 'I doubt we can afford the ongoing cost to our national psyche of subjecting men, women, and children to years of punitive indefinite detention. We must, as a priority, move the asylum seekers off Manus and Nauru to permanent resettlement and ensure that indefinite detention never happens again.'

Kearney was backed by Labor frontbencher Linda Burney when interviewed by David Speers on SkyNews. Labor then doctored the transcript to downplay the commitment to a deadline for emptying the camps on Nauru and Manus Island.

Then following a death of a refugee on Manus Island, the Greens' Adam Bandt had a go at Dutton in Question Time asking, 'Is it now government policy to leak to the media about the death of someone under your care and not notify next of kin, and doesn't this fundamental lack of human decency show that there's simply no line you won't cross?'
Dutton has no time for what he regards as the moral superiority of the Greens and the Labor Left when it comes to refugee policy. Taking the moral high ground, Dutton responded, 'I haven't put anyone on Manus Island; you did. I am charged with getting those people off, and I'm doing it. This government - not the government that you were in coalition with, the Rudd and the Gillard governments - has brokered a deal to get 1200 people off Manus and Nauru.'

With by-elections just around the corner, including a couple in which the sitting Labor members are on a knife edge, the government is keen to exploit any perception that the opposition parties in parliament are a threat to secure borders and an ordered migration program with strong community approval. The government even received some assistance late in the week from the disgraced Roman Quaedvlieg who had been sacked as Commissioner of the Border Force. He wrote an opinion piece for the Fairfax press declaring, 'Labor needs to find a way to reconcile its internal policy differences and its policy language on this issue or it risks inviting another wave of boats to our borders and it will have to grapple with the consequences if it wins the forthcoming federal election.'

"The boats are stopped, not because refugees on Nauru and Manus Island are being treated badly but because the diplomatic arrangements with Indonesia are in place."

There are 939 refugees and asylum seekers still waiting in limbo on Nauru and 716 on Manus Island. This caseload includes 137 children. Most of them have now been there for almost five years. Having accepted 249 proven refugees in the last year, the USA is committed to taking up to another 1000. This will leave another 655 people to be resettled in third countries or to be returned to their home country. So the point of difference is merely over what is to become of these 655 people.

Quaedvlieg told Fairfax that the US might be convinced to take more refugees 'if the uplifts and settlements go smoothly'. Meanwhile Dutton says, 'I don't want to see anyone on Manus or Nauru. I want them off and we've brokered a deal with the US to take 1200 people. There are no other third countries who are immediately available. That's the reality.' But there is another third country available: New Zealand.

All three of New Zealand's recent prime ministers have offered to take 150 refugees a year from the Pacific camps. When New Zealand has dealt directly with PNG repeating the offer, Australia has vetoed the suggestion on the basis that refugees resettled in New Zealand would be able to travel without a visa to Australia. Dutton continues to argue that this could send a message to the people smugglers. That was never a problem for John Howard when he accepted a similar New Zealand offer. The boats did not start up again.

At the Senate Estimates hearing last year, Air Vice Marshal Osborne, Commander of Operation Sovereign Borders Joint Agency Task Force, said, 'Our ability to detect, intercept and turn back people smuggling boats is stronger than ever. We have a committed and highly capable civil maritime surveillance and border security response fleet with access to the combined resources of the Australian Border Force and the Australian Defence Force.' At the Senate Estimates hearing last week, he told the Senate: 'Our figures have not changed since the last estimates. We've intercepted 32 vessels' since 2013 carrying 800 persons.
Even with the assurance that the majority of the refugees on Nauru and Manus Island will be resettled in the USA, the boats have not started coming again. The boats are stopped, not because refugees on Nauru and Manus Island are being treated badly but because the diplomatic arrangements with Indonesia are in place to stop the people smuggling networks in Java and because the Australian border forces have the resources at hand to engage in any necessary turnbacks and takebacks. There is now no way that Labor is wanting to unpick those diplomatic and security arrangements.

The point of difference now comes down to how promptly an Australian government will take up the New Zealand offer to empty the Pacific camps. Labor will do so promptly if elected. The Coalition wants to continue playing it safe, putting on continued hold the lives of those on Nauru and Manus Island who do not make the cut for the USA. No doubt there is some political advantage for the Coalition with this approach. But is it needed to retain the security of our borders?

If the movement of refugees to the USA is not a problem when it comes to maintaining the security cordon for stopping the boats, then why not simply amend the Australian migration regulations to require that any refugee from Nauru or Manus Island who resettles in New Zealand be required to obtain a visa to travel to Australia? Michael Pezzullo, Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs, told Estimates last week, 'The New Zealand offer is welcome, and it's certainly been the subject of expressions of appreciation on the part of the Australian government, but unless and until that question of on-travel can be addressed and resolved - once we're in a position to do that, it might be more possible to take up that offer.'

By week’s end, Dutton was conceding that the New Zealand offer might be accepted, even without such a change to the visa laws. When pressed on the New Zealand offer, he told journalists: 'So at this point in time, maybe at some stage in the future when you are down to a small number of people, we aren't at that stage.'

For the good of the refugees who have languished for five years on Nauru and Manus Island, and for the good of the Australian body politic, it's time to put an end to this inhumane chapter in Australian history. Keep the boats stopped. Bring New Zealand into the mix now. Empty the camps. And fight your elections on matters of substance which don't impose untold harm on defenceless children. Both Messrs Shorten and Turnbull need to acknowledge that Ged Kearney is right.

Frank Brennan SJ is the CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia.
The joys of teaching adult refugees

EDUCATION

Paulette Smythe

The Dutch have a word - *gezellig* - which roughly translates as 'warm and welcoming'. Cosy, if you like. *Gezellig* the classrooms are not. They are places of angular blandness, white-walled, sharp-edged, purely functional.

Into mine creeps a tide of brilliant colour. Under the cold fluorescent light, vibrant cloth billows gracefully over the sparse chairs, and beaded turquoise slippers peek out from beneath fringed hems, putting the dingy beige carpet to shame.

I'm often surprised at the speed with which timidity and fear evaporate, as stories start to spill out, by word or pen. In broken English, tales of children - missing, injured, dead - of husbands vanished into God-knows-where, bombs, betrayal, flight, perilous treks through strange and hostile lands. The camps. The long, long wait.

On paper, the skilled and better-heeled select their words with care, tinker with verb tenses, parts of speech and form. But the agony leaks onto the page all the same, alive and writhing.

There are few places on this planet where these poignant confessions could emerge with such absence of restraint. Yes, these men and women have swapped tales with fellow-travellers, with soldiers at border checks, with aid workers in the camps, with embassy staff. But these are often sites of peril and uncertainty where the teller guards her tongue and the tale itself is closely doctored.

*Who here can be trusted? Will my date of birth, my faith, my family name, disbar me from escape? What blameless fragment of my past might lead to my arrest?* The classroom may be cool and unencumbered by distractions, but it is also safe, detached, thousands of kilometres from their devastated homelands.
There is safety, too, in the presence of the teacher. To their knowledge, she knows nothing of war, of famine, of dispossession. And she is mostly content to listen.

"When hostility and suspicion are not the default starting positions, the surface differences between us seem to arouse genuine curiosity and are often sources of great amusement and delight."

These journeyers have now arrived. They are no longer jostling with one another, weighing horror against horror, counting loss against loss, comparing the depths of their despairs. Someone is catching their terror, has witnessed their fragility and pain, believes every word spoken or written, and is holding it all closely and quietly.

In the last couple of years, I've begun to reduce my teaching load and look to new horizons. I take an English class once or twice a week and come home exhilarated and very often choked with tears. I love these journeyers, these 'new arrivals', as they're called. And love is not an overstatement.

Over the years, I've watched many of them build intimate friendships with each other that still endure. Grandmothers who have lost entire extended families bond with motherless young refugees who share with them the joy of new babies. Melancholy young men befriend the class clown from Myanmar or a Venezuelan hip hop artist and rediscover humour and hope in their lives. Men and women who would be bitter enemies in their homelands fall in love, become bosom buddies, find each other jobs and develop loyalties every bit as powerful as any ethnic allegiance.

Astonishing that the classes are such oases of peace when you consider the depth of grief and anguish gathered in this space. Much that provokes distress and heated debate outside these walls seems irrelevant in here. Spend five minutes in a class where the women are scarved and it is remarkable how inconsequential the drapery becomes. When hostility and suspicion are not the default starting positions, the surface differences between us seem to arouse genuine curiosity and are often sources of great amusement and delight.

I often feel I have the best job on the planet. Teaching English to adult refugees should be a dauntingly melancholy task. Yet these classes are especially warm and congenial places to be. Human beings at their most vulnerable possess an extraordinary fund of light and laughter despite - or perhaps because of - the darkness they have left behind.
Paulette Smythe teaches English to adult refugees and migrants in Melbourne.
Robots are not the real threat to work

AUSTRALIA

Osmond Chiu

The more I read about the future of work, the more apparent it becomes that much of the discussion relies on extrapolated models of job losses and technological determinism to justify a course of action rather than critically examining broader trends.

There is no doubt that technological change will shape the future of work, but the extent and nature of that change is still debatable. The oft cited claim that 47 per cent of Americans will lose their jobs due to automation has been challenged by an OECD study concluding the actual figure is more likely nine per cent.

A similar claim by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia citing a figure of 40 per cent was found to be closer to nine per cent after being examined by Professor Jeff Borland and Dr Michael Coelli. The attention given to these initial claims means it is of little surprise that most Australians think the net effect of automation will be less jobs, with a substantial minority thinking it could happen as soon as five years, though the fear may be skewed with a recent Australian study finding young men fear automation far more than women.

While the threat from automation is often overstated, there are big technological shifts occurring which are undermining job security and hollowing out permanent, skilled work. But the experience is that work is created as well as displaced by new technology. Change in social relationships, not technology, explains what is happening in labour markets today.

Rather than a future without paid work, the future is more likely to be a growing polarised labour market with a continuing decline in middle-skilled jobs and growth in high-skilled, high-paying occupations (managers, professionals and technicians), some of which might be considered ‘bullshit jobs’, and low-skilled, low-paying occupations (elementary, service, and sales workers). The most recent OECD Employment Outlook shows that there has been a 9.5 per cent decline in middle-skill as a share of total
employment with most growth in high-skilled employment.

Many of these high-paying roles have taken advantage of global markets and technology to have a huge capacity for growth and for trade. Those in lower paid occupations that have not been off-shored are reliant on face-to-face human interaction but also find it difficult to significantly increase their productivity.

This narrative of inevitability suits corporations that will benefit from the current situation. The implication is that actions cannot stop it, so there should be no attempt to regulate.

"Assuming robots will take all our jobs is an easy way of avoiding the harder but far more important conversation about the gendered nature of work and power in our society, and what we value."

Trajectories are, however, never inevitable. The moves by state governments towards licencing labour hire firms and the Change the Rules campaign by the Australian Council of Trade Unions show there is no inevitability about the future of work. It may change, but it does not occur in a policy vacuum.

We need policies and laws that ensure people are prepared and supported for both the opportunities and threats of a changing world of work. Australians are supportive of having laws that suit the changing nature of work. A 2017 Digital Rights in Australia report found that over 60 per cent believe that these new forms of gig work need new government regulations.

Part of the conversation about the future of work must also be about the quality of work and how technology can be used to improve the nature of work, such as through better redistributing work, reducing working hours and enabling more decision-making by frontline workers.

And despite the appeal of 'post-work', work still has a future in our society. Even if many paid jobs disappeared, work would still exist. Our society depends on the unpaid caring work that is predominantly done by women.

Assuming robots will take all our jobs is an easy way of avoiding the harder but far more important conversation about the gendered nature of work and power in our society, and what we value.

Osmond Chiu is Secretary of the NSW Fabians. He tweets @redrabbleroz
Treaty is more than a white feelgood moment

AUSTRALIA

Sarah Maddison

Early in the night at the 2018 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras party, DJ Gemma dropped the Yothu Yindi classic 'Treaty'. All around me the mostly non-Indigenous crowd responded to the driving beats, the unmistakeable sound of the yidaki, and the call of the late M. Yunipingu's distinctive voice.

The dance floor surged with energy. A friend later commented he’d forgotten how much the track was ‘an absolute banger’.

More than a banger though, the 1991 track remains a political anthem, speaking of unceded sovereignty and calling for settler politicians to honour their commitments to treat with Australian First Nations. It is a song of deep political significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and, as was evident on the Mardi Gras dancefloor, it also moves something in non-Indigenous Australians - and not just their feet.

The negotiation of a treaty or treaties with the Australian state has long been an aspiration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For many progressive Australians too, the lack of any formal political agreements with Indigenous peoples is an injustice and an embarrassment that they would like to see rectified.

Some non-Indigenous supporters of treaty negotiations are only now coming to this position, developing new understanding through the failed campaign to ‘recognise’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution, and through the position on truth-telling and agreement-making advanced in the 2017 Uluru Statement - the one-year anniversary of which we mark on 27 May.

Others, however, have supported the call for treaty/ies since at least the Treaty '88 campaign and the Hawke government's commitment to negotiating a national treaty after receiving the Barunga Statement. Hawke's backdown on this commitment - with the formal reconciliation process offered as compensation - paved the way for John Howard's
definitive rejection of treaty in his claim that 'A unified nation cannot make a treaty with itself.' Such political equivocation - and downright colonialism - remains a source of shame for many.

Both longterm supporters and newcomers to the debate want to address this shame. As the 1992 Mabo case established once and for all, the Australian continent was never *terra nullius*. The legitimacy of the colonial project on this territory was in question from day one, as both James Cook and Arthur Phillip ignored orders from their king that they take possession of the land only 'with the consent of the natives' (Cook), and 'conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them' (Phillip).

"The contradiction is between the progressive desire for moral legitimacy, and the political aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which in many cases are entirely different."

What eventuated was, of course, as far from amity and kindness as can be imagined. Frontier warfare that lasted for over 100 years; massacres and violent dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their land; forced incarceration on reserves and missions; and the mass abduction of Indigenous children in what would eventually become known as the Stolen Generations.

This is not a history of which it is easy to be proud. Despite the claims of certain conservative politicians that colonisation was good for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, evidence of colonialism's manifold harms abounds in daily news reporting and in the Australian government's continuing failure to 'close the gap' in socioeconomic outcomes for Indigenous people.

As a result, many progressives recognise the need to change the terms of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Australian state as a means of redressing these harms. Again, however, this is not just benevolence. Progressives also hope that in restoring some degree of autonomy and dignity to Indigenous peoples, providing long-overdue justice and reparation, Australia might restore its own moral legitimacy.

What is not discussed is the way in which this craving for moral legitimacy may also jeopardise any future treaty negotiations. Underpinning the desire for moral legitimacy is an imagined future in which Australia is a unified political community. Rather than dividing Australia, it is hoped that treaty will bring the nation together. In this imagined future, colonialism would be 'complete', something inevitable but unpleasant and now - thankfully - over.

The contradiction, however, is between the progressive desire for moral legitimacy, which requires colonial completion, and the political aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which in many cases are entirely different.

Far from concern about settler Australia's moral legitimacy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples seek treaty as a form of recognition for their surviving political difference. They seek self-government, autonomy and jurisdiction over their territories.

Treaties on these terms are unlikely to be acceptable to the settler state. More to the point, they would not provide the longed-for moment of unified nationhood and colonial
completion. Treaty/ies will formalise ongoing relations between sovereigns, rather than bringing these sovereigns together under the Australian flag.

The crowd on the dancefloor at the Mardi Gras party enjoyed a feelgood moment. Many progressive non-Indigenous Australians crave that moment in our politics. But we need to be careful. What we crave is really a moment of completion that will always remain elusive, and our craving remains the greatest threat to any meaningful treaty processes between Indigenous nations and the Australian settler state.

Associate Professor Sarah Maddison is Assistant Dean, Research in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, co-director of Indigenous Settler Relations Collaboration, and Research Coordinator in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne.
Must we remain so exceptionally cruel?

AUSTRALIA

Fatima Measham

It would be difficult to pinpoint when it slipped, and different people would have different accounts, but Australia has been bogged in mediocrity for some time. It has sunk in critical areas: climate action, renewable energy, wildlife protection, education, broadband and other infrastructure.

But there is one area in which Australia has been remarkably exceptional: cruelty against people who came by boat to seek asylum.

If we hit pause for a moment on the moral ramifications of treating humans inhumanely, we can see clearly how innovative we have been at it. It does not matter which party is in government; neither seem to run out of ideas. The European far-right absolutely envies us for this.

Contracting private security firms to run facilities on sovereign islands. Designating a cut-off date for arrival after which no seaborne asylum seekers could ever be settled in Australia, even if found to be refugees. Criminalising public disclosure by offshore detention workers about conditions there. Keeping those conditions as humiliating as possible. Deliberately prolonging the determination of protection claims.

The driving concept has been deterrence, but this falls short in explaining why income and housing support is about to be cut from up to 90 asylum seekers and refugees already in the system. They are part of a group of 400 from Manus Island and Nauru who had been brought to Australia for medical treatment and other critical needs.

They are being shunted onto a 'final departure bridging visa E', valid only for six months and which comes with a right to work (which refugee supporters lobby for). The catch is that they must find a job and shelter in three or six weeks.
These are people living precariously: pregnant women, families with young children, and elderly people from backgrounds of strife and encampment. A right to work does not capture all their needs, nor automatically meet them. Yet they are being 'transitioned out' of Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) based on 'job-readiness'.

"Human dignity is not conditional nor negotiable. It is not something that must be earned. It is the foundation of an honourable society."

The move not only illustrates the arbitrary nature of immigration policy, which sets people up to fail; it is institutionalised sadism. As Human Rights Law Centre director Daniel Webb puts it: 'These families have endured years of suffering and abuse in offshore detention and then more years of daily uncertainty in the community. They just want to get on with rebuilding their lives. But instead our government is ripping the roof from over their heads and forcing them into destitution.'

Based on a plan revealed last April, thousands more could lose the measly allowance for which they had been eligible while waiting for the government to decide their case. SRSS is not just income support (around $240 per week) but help with casework and accommodation, as well as trauma counselling. Many recipients have been in the community for years, attending school or university.

A proper orientation toward such supports would recognise that they are provided to help people live. Human dignity is not conditional nor negotiable. It is not something that must be earned. It is the foundation of an honourable society.

This means that we do not let asylum seekers or refugees starve and be evicted while they wait for our capricious government to decide their fate. It means that we do not let politicians get away with distorting our values, including our sense of what life is worth and what we owe to each other.

Time on earth is short. Yet we have let one immigration minister after another squander what time asylum seekers and refugees have left - after they had left homelands, after surviving brutalities of detention. How much longer must they wait to really live? Must we remain so exceptionally cruel?

Fatima Measham is a Eureka Street consulting editor. She hosts the ChatterSquare podcast, tweets as @foomeister and blogs on Medium.
If we ever got to be what we so want to be

ARTS AND CULTURE

Brian Doyle

The kindergarten bus

My daughter, now a lean wry young woman, tells me
This morning that on her first day of kindergarten she
Sat in the back of the bus on the way home and all the
Other kids got off in gagles and duos but she did not
Because she didn’t recognise any familiar corners. So
She sat quietly as the bus emptied. She wasn't scared,
She says. It took a while but the driver finally noticed
One last quiet child sitting in the back; the driver then
Slowly retraced the whole route, until the right corner,
Complete with worried parents, presented itself. There
Are many ways to look at this story. You could ponder
The mature calm of the child, the frantic of the parents,
The way the child was confronted by unfamiliar angles
And unknown geometries; but this morning let's salute
The driver, who understood that the quiet child was not
Quiet inside, who took the time to slowly and carefully
Help her find where where she fit, where she was home.

If we ever got to be
What we so want to be

One time years ago when I was at the end of my rope

I was standing by the fireplace at my brother's house

Explaining haltingly why I was at the end of my rope

And I started to cry and could not stop no matter how

I tried; and I tried. It's hard for a guy to cry endlessly

And helplessly. It is. Some remote part of you shouts

Man, get it together, this is totally beyond the bounds.

But I couldn't stop. My brother and his wife sat quiet.

They didn't say anything or try to calm me down. I'll

Always be grateful for that, for some reason; for what

They didn't do. After a while my brother stood up and

Reached out and just cupped his big hand on my neck.

That's all. Seems like a small gesture, doesn't it? Tiny,

Even, the sort of slight touch we bestow without much

Thinking. But it was huge to me. I suspect touch is big

All the time, bigger than we can articulate. I believe in

Fact that touch is an articulate wordless huge language.

You know what I mean - those times when words give

Up and all you can do is touch an arm or neck or cheek

Or shoulder and something is said and heard and that's

Eloquent and ancient and haunting and the best of what

We could be if we ever got to be what we so want to be.

Poem for Father's Day
No one talks about this, but every dad who ever had a son
Had and loved this moment, during which he and his boy,
About age two, stand in the woods or at the beach, or even
In God help us the bathroom, and the father says, son, first
Rule is don't wet yourself. All production is out and about.
After that you want to try for accuracy if possible, but only
Sometimes does that matter. Just as in basketball, footwork
Is key. Never pee on your own feet. Some idiot friend will
Someday tell you that you can toughen your feet by peeing
On them. This is a canard. When you are sure you are done,
Close up shop. Never leave the door open. Think of it all as
Returning water to the generous earth; we are mostly water,
And water runs through us, and we should be grateful for it
More than we generally are, even during times like this that
Seem pedestrian. But there is no such entity as a pedestrian
Moment, only moments in which we have not looked close
Enough for the huge thing hiding behind the ostensible tiny.
Questions? No? Then, son, let's zip up and get back to base.

**There are many ways to be a man,**
**And all of them have to do with honest**
Or here's a story. A man finds himself acting as the dad
Of a kid who has no real dad. It's not anything dramatic
Or colorful, he just is generous and friendly with the kid
When she hangs around with his kids, and they feed this
Kid a lot, and he listens to her problems and gives smart
Advice in a Dad tone of voice, and eventually, when she
Is ready to marry, she asks him real shyly if he will walk
Her up the aisle. He says sure yes of course I'm honoured.
So he gets ready to do that, and digs out his one good tie,
But then the prospective husband cancels everything and
Won't answer the girl's calls and she's crushed but Time
Marches on and after a few weeks people generally walk
On. But listen to this. One day the dad travels all the way
To where the man works, and he somehow walks past all
The lines of corporate defence, and he startles the guy by
Suddenly standing there saying quietly, You have to man
Up and talk to her. You don't have to marry her. But you
Sure do have to tell her if you don't love her, or you love
Someone else. Be a man. I'll wait here if you want to call
Her right now from somewhere private. Or I can go when
You promise me you'll call her today. Are we clear here?
Then he went home. I just love that story. There are many
Ways to be a man, and all of them have to do with honest.
Stigmatising those in need is a grubby game

AUSTRALIA

Andrew Hamilton

Every society has ways of marking out, and sometimes marking, people who are considered a lesser breed.

The Greek word stigma originally referred to the branding of slaves and traitors. In other societies adultery, desertion, Jewish descent, imprisonment, ignorance and other crimes also earned branding or wearing distinctive clothing. The scold’s bridle, the scarlet letter, the yellow star, the white feather and the striped uniform are just a few of the ways to exclude people from the benefits of society by marking them as outsiders.

In Australia such external forms of stigmatising are generally seen as a bit crude - though the recent withdrawal of medical benefits from people brought back from Manus Island for treatment shows that crudity and cruelty are alive and well. But the expectation that the state will ensure that the weakest and most disadvantaged in society can live with self-respect has caused problems for governments. They balk at making the wealthy fund their share of that care through higher taxes, but fear the electoral consequences of being seen as heartless.

The solution has been to allow the real value of Newstart and its equivalents to decline. Those whose life is diminished by this deprivation are then stigmatised. That has traditionally been done by straightforward blackguarding. People who are unemployed were called dole-bludgers and refugees called illegals, and accused of ripping off the community. People would then regard as justifiable the hardship imposed on the targeted groups.

The brutality and cynicism inherent in this frontal attack is now increasingly recognised as such. As a result, stigmatisation has had to become a little more subtle. Government measures to reduce the welfare budget are no longer presented as just punishment but as a way of addressing social evils. But they imply that the people in need of benefits
compose the social groups infected by the evil.

For example, some tens of millions of dollars are being committed to programs addressing alcohol and drug dependence among unemployed Australians. Who could argue with the need for programs that address drug dependence? But the association of drug dependence with unemployment encourages the public to see addiction as the problem of the unemployed and a problem affecting all unemployed. They will then be seen to need therapy more than income support.

A more blatant example is the proposal that unemployed people receiving benefits should be tested for drugs. There is no evidence that this would be helpful in addressing addiction, any more than that compulsory breath testing would lower alcohol addiction among politicians. But it does suggest that unemployed people as a whole are affected by addiction, and humiliates those tested. Humiliation rarely contributes to the freedom people need to change their way of life.

"The effect of this measure is to encourage the view that Indigenous communities are incapable of taking responsibility for their own lives, and that increased funds will only extend the evil."

In this proposal, too, the effect of the stigmatisation will provide a pretext for depriving people in need, and so reducing the cost to government. These costs can be further reduced by imposing onerous conditions and fining people for non-compliance.

The added advantage to governments is that it draws attention away from the scarcity of jobs available to people who are unemployed, and makes unemployment seem their fault. The blame is shifted from the government for its management of the economy to people who suffer from the injustices of that management.

Another current example of stigmatisation is the cashless card, widely rejected and seen as demeaning by Indigenous communities. It was promoted as a response to the high rates of severe alcoholism, domestic violence, and absenteeism from school in Indigenous communities, and the alleged diversion of government funds from women and children to the support of addictive habits.

But the effect of this measure is to encourage the view that Indigenous communities are incapable of taking responsibility for their own lives, and that increased funds will only extend the evil. To address a problem that has its root in loss of self-respect, associated with widespread unemployment, the response was to humiliate and further reduce self-respect. The white cashless card was like the Dunce's cap emblazoned with a capital D.

Even a flawed government report produced no hard evident that it had done good - more respondents believed it had done harm. It certainly disadvantaged individuals and the life of communities by reducing the cash available for informal transactions within the community. The cost of the program would be better directed to increasing employment.

These initiatives are sideshows, grubby and voyeuristic. They mask the simple truth: that governments have the duty to respect people as human beings and not as ciphers, to provide benefits that help people to live with self-respect, to take responsibility for the disadvantage of Indigenous Australians and to involve them in its healing. And above all to see the support of people who are disadvantaged as a responsibility cheerfully to be
accepted not slithered away from.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.
At the time of his death in July last year, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu was the most commercially successful Aboriginal Australian musician to ever grace this world. Anyone expecting Gurrumul - the film about Gurrumul's career, on which he signed off prior to his death at 46 - to resemble anything like your typical popular music documentary will be quickly dissuaded. After all Gurrumul was a far cry from your typical popular musician.

The film's opening sees the former Yothu Yindi and Saltwater Band fringe-player Gurrumul sitting mum, as a radio interviewer rattles off the most predictable of questions (how does his blindness enhance his musical abilities?). Inevitably, longtime friend Michael Hohnen, co-manager of Gurrumul's Skinnyfish label, steps in. Throughout Gurrumul's career, Michael's is often the voice that connects his art to the crasser requirements of a commercial career.

When it comes to publicity Gurrumul is reticent, but when he sings he is limitless. The film transitions to the studio where we hear his vocals isolated from instrumental tracks, his raw technical ability exalted alongside a depth of soul that, as one family member notes, taps deeply into the songlines of his people. The multi-instrumentalist Gurrumul sings in language, in a form that connects his traditional culture to a mainstream, global audience.

This building of bridges between Aboriginal and white Australia, and between an ancient local culture that exalts family and tradition and a contemporary global one where fame and commercial success are hallmarks of worth, is a recurrent, fraught theme. It's laid bare in an excruciating sequence where Gurrumul is co-opted to perform on a French TV program with Sting a cover, in language, of Sting's hit 'Every Breath You Take'. Gurrumul
has no idea who Sting is.

We see it, too, in the disaster of Gurrumul's first mooted tour of the US. On the eve of the tour, Gurrumul is a no-show at Darwin airport, having stayed behind in his Elcho Island community on family business. The next day, Michael mans the phone to US promoters, trying to explain why the star attraction has bailed. Even the sympathetic Michael has to admit that after this, he can never book Gurrumul for a major international tour again.

This is a salient moment for Michael and for his Skinnyfish accomplice Mark Grose. Both these white men are palpably humiliated and disappointed by the turn of events. But they are aware enough to wonder if their responses are a reflection of their taking their relationship with Gurrumul for granted. Weighing the personal relationship against western conceptions of professional obligation, Mark affirms that the relationship must come up trumps every time.

"Here we see the ultimate merging of Aboriginal themes and music with the epitome of white European musical styles. It is spine-tingling stuff."

Years later, they continue to work with Gurrumul professionally. More significantly, they are present at the funerals of Gurrumul's parents. The film's fly-on-the-wall perspective shifts between Gurrumul's life as a professional musician - say, his typically taciturn appearance on the red carpet at the ARIAs - and the traditional life of the community to which he is inextricably connected. In so doing it constantly asks: Which is the more authentic?

The moment that most perfectly captures both the possibility and difficulty of these two cultures achieving synergy - through mutual listening - comes in the final act. During the recording of Gurrumul's fourth and final studio album, Djarimirri (Child of the Rainbow), we witness the inimitable sound of the didgeridoo being adapted and annotated for classical orchestral instruments; a task as formidable for the arranger as it is for the performers.

Here we see the ultimate merging of Aboriginal themes and music with the epitome of white European musical styles. It is spine-tingling stuff, of which Gurrumul's voice and songwriting, with their ancient roots, are the stars. Gurrumul would die before the album was released, but not before the songs were heard live by audiences at the Sydney Opera House. The gift of Gurrumul's commercial output is that we can hear those songs, still.

Tim Kroenert is the editor of Eureka Street.
The Labor way

CARTOON

Fiona Katauskas

Accountability a virtue in churches and banks

RELIGION

John Warhurst

Accountability, that is individuals being held accountable for those matters for which they are either formally or practically responsible, is a vital link between leaders and their communities, whether they are members, supporters, shareholders or voters.

It can be achieved in various ways. For instance, both individual and collective ministerial responsibility are built into our Westminster system of government, which links the government and the public service to the parliament and ultimately to the people through a chain of accountability. But in other areas of life the links are less clear.

In practice accountability can be a crude and sometimes harsh instrument when used in daily life. I often have sympathy for those who pay the price of collective failure even though they may not be personally responsible.

We see it in practice each time a football coach is sacked for a team's poor results even though there might actually be nothing wrong with the coaching; it might be the players who are at fault. But sacking the coach is a necessary intervention for confidence to be restored among members and supporters and to show that at least someone has taken responsibility for the group's failure.

We are also seeing accountability in practice in public life following the startlingly adverse revelations of crime and corruption by the Royal Commission into the Banking and Financial Services Industries. The prime examples have come from the insurance giant, AMP, where the chair, Catherine Brenner, and three other board members have announced their resignations. Brenner has also effectively been forced off another board, and the rumblings have been heard right through the corporate sector.

For all their apparent harshness such outcomes, which may be more symbolic than anything else despite the individual pain and cost, are almost always positive. They serve as a pressure valve being released on built-up tension, as well as showing that the board...
must take ultimate responsibility for the actions of those in the organisation.

There are lessons here too for other major institutions under fire, like governments and the Catholic Church. In both areas the mechanisms of accountability are weaker than they ought to be, or sometimes practically non-existent.

"Accountability in action is best when it is proactive. It loses its impact when it is resisted and comes as a last resort. Institutions of all sorts must be seen to be on the front foot in this regard."

Despite the inbuilt mechanisms of individual and collective responsibility in government we see little of either in practice these days. When individual ministers do resign or are sacked it is now almost always because of personal crimes or sins, like evidence of travel rorts, conflicts of interest or sexual harassment, rather than because of the policy and administration failures of those for whom they are responsible.

Governments are so defensive that they will do almost anything to prevent the Opposition claiming a scalp. To do so would be an admission of failure in government policy or administration. A minister may be quietly dropped much later, but not with any admission of failure because that would implicate the leader or the government as a whole.

Within the church the same applies. The recent offer of resignation made as a group to Pope Francis by the entire Chilean hierarchy is a breath of fresh air. The sexual abuse crisis in the Chilean church, which has also engulfed the Pope himself, needed such a dramatic action as a sign of accountability to restore some credibility with the Chilean Catholic community and the wider public. As in politics, whether the resignations are accepted may even be less important than the gesture of responsibility which has been made.

Accountability in action is best when it is proactive. It loses its impact when it is resisted and comes as a last resort. Institutions of all sorts must be seen to be on the front foot in this regard.

In Australia what the church has lacked is an obvious sign of accountability by leaders, whether of religious orders or dioceses, for the crimes covered up by institutional responses to child sexual abuse. General apologies don't go far enough. Compensation is necessary, but also not enough. The reputation of the church would now be higher if there were more obvious signals of accountability by those in charge. This would not imply personal but official responsibility.

Let's hope recent events in many sectors lead to a widespread outbreak of accountability across Australia.

John Warhurst is an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian National University and chairs Concerned Catholics Canberra-Goulburn.
Remembering Palestine from Greece

INTERNATIONAL

Gillian Bouras

A little more than 77 years ago, Allied forces fighting in northern Greece were speedily overwhelmed by German strength, and so forced to withdraw from the mainland.

The campaign was very brief: the Germans invaded on the 6 of April 1941, and the decision to evacuate the troops was made on 17 April. The Allies' main task thus became that of engaging in delaying tactics in order to ensure that the removal to Crete was as effective as possible: roads had to be kept clear, and ships readied and put in place.

Some thousands of men escaped from Megara, Corinth and Nafplion, but thousands also found themselves at the end of the trail, in the south-western Peloponnesian port of Kalamata, where ships were coming to take them off so that they could, it was hoped, live to fight another day.

The Allied forces included many Australians and New Zealanders, who fought bravely along the Kalamata beach: they lost the beach, won it back, and then lost it again during the 28 and 29 April. Although approximately 9000 men got away, it has been calculated that about 8000 were taken prisoner. They were marched up the main street of Kalamata while the locals defied German rifle butts to cheer them and wish them well.

In these days of spring sunshine and early tourists, it is hard to imagine the battle, but for years now there has been a wreath-laying ceremony at a small memorial close to the waterfront. The dedication on the short marble column remembers those who fell or were taken prisoner, and those who escaped 'to fight again for the world to be free'. The flags of Greece, Britain, Australia and New Zealand are hoisted for these occasions, and in the past veterans from each country's services attended. Now their descendants come to represent them.

The service conforms to a set pattern. Kalamata's mayor and other dignitaries attend, as does the Bishop of Messenia and the vicar of St Paul's Anglican Church, Athens, along

There are prayers and readings followed by a recitation in English of the fourth verse of Laurence Binyon's poem 'For the Fallen': 'They shall not grow old ...' Wreaths are laid by the representatives of the Allied countries, and by the veterans' descendants. Kalamata's brass band plays the national anthems, and the young soldiers sing the Greek one with great enthusiasm.

"I thought of the Jewish man's words: 'In the end, we are all just people.' Why can't politicians remember that?"

This year things were different. I have attended many of these services, but for the first time that I can recall there was a small Jewish contingent present, and two of their number laid a wreath. I knew that there had been a Jewish community in Kalamata: when I first came to the area many years ago, there were two shops that were always closed on Saturday.

I never learned how big the local community had been, but I did discover that there have been Jews in Greece since the fourth century BC. Before the war, there were about 100,000, 70,000 of whom lived in Thessaloniki. Now there are fewer than 5000 in the entire country. At least 500, fighting in the Greek Army, were killed in action during the Second World War.

The atmosphere after the service is always informal, so I went to talk to the Jewish delegation. One man said he now lives in Israel, but his father had lived in Kalamata for 50 years. 'We can call ourselves whatever we like,' he said, 'Jews, Christians, Muslims, but in the end we are all just people.'

It was 8 May; 14 May is the Palestinian day of remembrance (Nakba) for the 700,000 people who became displaced when the state of Israel was established.

This year marks 70 years since that happening, and was also marked by the moving of the American Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a development that has always been considered too controversial to contemplate in the past. Within hours, protests had broken out in Gaza, and the Israel army had started firing. The last reports I read had the number of dead at 60.

I thought of the Jewish man's words: 'In the end, we are all just people.' Why can't politicians remember that?

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.
Main image: Battle of Kalamata commemorated on its 75th anniversary in 2016 (Neos Kosmos)
A painter's lament

ARTS AND CULTURE

Clotilde Lopez

Selected poems

A painter's lament

They say the art of painting is dead
Not so say I
Just temporarily mislaid
Bright pixels dazzling, blinding the eyes and astonishing the senses
Vacant
But a distant memory lurks and the Elders still have something
to say
In the shadowy past
I recall Vermeer's assistant grinding the crude pigments made of minerals crushed by mortar and pestle
Bought from the Apothecary
A shopping list of madders, vermilion and weld

If you listen carefully, the sound of each colour can be heard,
The scrunch of each mineral discerned
Each cadence, a trace of its former life
A finer distinction
Relieved of its cumbersome form
it becomes lighter and mixes with white spirit like a cocktail blast of violets, mauves and
ochres

Ground to a fine powder and wet with new life

When you look at a painting something of the creator's spirit is mixed with the paint

Traces everywhere if you can feel hard enough

There is a need for painters still in this rushed existence

Something shaped by hand,

Immediate, awake

the artists' touch, the artists mark

The deft short brushstrokes that convey the stiff feathers of an upright bird

Or a brocade of dying colours on an old worn sofa,

An accent of red that heightens the blow

KAPOW Roy Lichtenstein

The languorous swipe of the brush across the canvas as the artist departs the studio.

Thiebaud's iced cakes moistened with creamy white frosting made of a thick impasto spread with a buttery knife across its form

With random swirls and strokes of alternating candy pinks and middle greens

Vivifying the finer vital senses

Their vibration

Kandinsky's music stretches

the succulent paint oozing from its tube, reeking of linseed and turps dribbling towards an unpainted canvas

The luscious stripes of candy oranges and lemons coiled around a stick next to an imitation 18th century blue Chinese vase

A still life of colourful toys

Lent to the imagination on an oily cloth of

spattered blue specks and dots of white and yellow juxtaposed against the

haemorrhaging reds and crimsons bleeding with life dripping like a Pollock onto the
darkened wood floor
A bloody mess
This artist's studio
I stand in the middle and all around me
the heady vapours of mineral turps
are Intoxicating

Bluebeard Incorporated
I hear Bluebeard's cutting up souls these days
An impressive graduate
A PhD in Butchery
severing and classifying
body parts invisible to the eye

He's even got the little guys onto it
They've got that same deadly glint in their eyes
waiting
Going in for the kill
They'll be the Master Builders of the next generation
Castles in the air
of the highest definition of course
Dazzling to the eye
A blinding of consciousness
their bodies relegated to service vehicles
Bluebeard's contemporaries
Conferencing round the table,
Dissecting, planning, loaves of crusty bread and pulp
Repulsive and
Gorging on un-fattened lambs
starved of their Muse
padlocked Double
in rooms of grim and dimming lights

In these times I forget to pray to Jesus
The ultimate Sacrificial Lamb
Served on a platter
And the poets' words get mislaid while the bluebeards
masticate each sinew
laid bare and bloodied
A tremendous violence
A quota of souls marked
The poet's heart hidden
A treasure, nonetheless
A whisper
But ... I have the key

Little Salem
The lofty ones' own
A selfies each
Corroborates their hearsay  
In their own image  
God's image,  
The Sin of Inflation tempts their inadequacies grown with  
Egos ready to pop in greedy excitement  
to be Proved Right  

How that pale blue balloon grows Dangerously large and drifts Upwards  
Into the celestial skies  
Nearer God  
Careful Icarus  

The selfies' narrative, an Artefact of the times  
their phones out on Arthur's round table  
But we don't believe it  
This slab is pointy and barbed  
Pass the phone around, Chinese whispers  
There's a leak and I hear from the Suit the same made up story by the son and the Sage,  

Another version  
It's all the same  
Join the dots and the picture is clear,  
Little Salem  
Elders In cahoots  
Preening their shiny hides and greasing the wheels of their own inferiority  
Convinced Hirst's skull is made entirely of fake Diamonds
Of sugary platitudes of care and sycophancy
Concealing the big dark hole of ruin underneath
The kind of Death that has always existed
Side by side
Since the world began
a record exists of their assemblies
minutes taken of those Accused
further investigation of the lies created by Judges out of work
A platform of Injustice
The Antagonist required for powerful theatre
No audition required
This man is Chosen for his Voice
Dissonant to their drained ears
an Intolerance Immune to the Higher man's words
But below
The murky sea is not entirely hidden from view
A Big Mistake,
For the pedestrian observes with daylight vision and that is enough to see into the waters clearly
Why is it that the Higher Man is not recognised by these counterfeit kings and queens?
Self-appointed and sitting in their velvety thrones
their scepters beautifully polished and filed to a point
Courtly games performed among titty, gleeful applause
Pass the stick,
And poke it in the fire
'More fire' Giles Cory would have said to these Base Creatures
They cannot see the Pearl for the swine
And instead condemn the Highest of men
Their eyes covered with scales glued down Hard
with Ill Intent and
Consenting
artificial light props up their disguise
But within the Higher Man
the sun warms his heart from within and without and
Accompanies him on his way

Clotilde Lopez is a practicing artist, playwright and poet and has recently begun writing poetry in Spanish. She is deeply connected to Jungian Psychology and Carmelite Spirituality.
Karl Marx would find no home in modern China

INTERNATIONAL

Mark Hearn

It is grimly ironic that Karl Marx has been mobilised to justify the Chinese Communist Party's embrace of state-directed capitalism.

On the bicentenary of the communist prophet's birth on 5 May 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared that the Communist Party 'has combined the fundamental principles of Marxism with the reality of China's reform and opening up, and the nation who stood up has grown rich'.

China's economic system bears no resemblance to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism advocated in The Communist Manifesto, published in 1848.

Embracing what Marx described as 'a fetish of commodities' - including the worship of the Barbie Doll, at the world's largest store dedicated to the plastic princess in Shanghai - has delivered astonishing economic growth and has lifted millions of Chinese out of poverty, as Richard McGregor acknowledged in The Party, a study of the world's most powerful political machine.

Declaring that a desire to be rich is good has also yoked the Chinese Communist Party to the fortunes of the economy.

From the inauguration of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in 1980, the Communist Party has been a captive to capitalism. As Richard McGregor observes, 'the Party's legitimacy' in the eyes of the Chinese people depends on maintaining the pillar of strong economic growth.

Marxist mythology provides an ideological veneer for the Communist Party's monopoly of power. The China Daily reported that Xi hailed Marx 'as a mentor for the revolution of all the working people ... Marx strived his entire life for the revolution of mankind, the
pursuit of truth and the building of a new world.'

"The contrary dissident would find no refuge in the stultified, bureaucratic conformity of Beijing, a political culture as smoothed of dissent as the tightly policed space of Tiananmen Square."

Xi Jinping would have the world believe that China is Marx's spiritual home. But Marx would find no place in modern China. He would be as threatened with imprisonment and suppressed into silence as he was in Cologne, Paris and Brussels before he found refuge in the liberal tolerance of Victorian London in 1849.

The contrary dissident would find no refuge in the stultified, bureaucratic conformity of Beijing, a political culture as smoothed of dissent as the tightly policed space of Tiananmen Square.

Marx might at least have felt awestruck under the stunning towers of Shanghai's free trade zone. The rapacious global spread of capitalism was a phenomenon that he sought to explain to the readers of the New York Tribune.

For a decade from 1853, Marx provided, in a stream of articles, a characteristically shrewd and sharp critique of the global spread of capitalism and imperialism, and not least their impact on China.

Marx observed that through warfare England had forced the Chinese to import opium from India, and opened 'the Celestial Empire' to contact with the world. What would the consequences of this opening represent, Marx wondered, for England and Europe?

Today, Marx would have been a fascinated observer of China's One Belt One Road initiative. The central Asia corridor of the world's largest infrastructure project stretches across the Eurasian continent towards Turkey and Europe, harnessing economic development to the global ambitions of the Chinese state.

In his speech Xi Jinping recommended that 'communists should keep the habit of reading Marxism classics and learning Marxism principles'.

Marx's journalism would not today survive the Chinese censor: caustically opinionated, intently curious, castigating power without a thought for political correctness. The arch critic of liberal capitalism bathed in its press freedom.

In China the rebellious spirit is suffocated by the state. Industrial unrest and real trade union activism is suppressed. Campaigners for human and environmental rights are hounded and confined. The Chinese state fears the power of dissident words.

In early May 2018 the poet Liu Xia, under house arrest since 2010, railed against the brutal suppression of her life and work. Her husband, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, died in 2017. He had been imprisoned since 2009 as a consequence of human rights activism. The journalist and environmental activist Dai Qing has struggled to be published in her own country since speaking out in the 1990s against the construction of the Three Gorges Dam.
Unilateral state control provides the basis of the power the Chinese Communist Party projects within the nation and beyond its borders. Marx understood the unintended consequences of arbitrary power. When the people of India rose in rebellion against their British colonial masters in 1857, Marx observed that 'it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself'. So often reduced to dogma, Marx’s subversive words still speak an uncomfortable truth to power.

Dr Mark Hearn is a lecturer in the Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations, Macquarie University.
Make peace by defying SA nuclear dump

ENVIRONMENT

Michele Madigan

As Aboriginal elder and justice campaigner Kevin Buzzacott has said: 'If we can't make peace for the country, and look after the country - what's the good of us?'

Sunday 29 April 2018 marked the second anniversary for many such South Australian peacemakers. It was on that date in 2016, at 2.30am, that Adnyamathanha Elder Aunty Enice Marsh heard the news that the federal government had 'chosen' the Flinders Ranges to be the 'top of the list' site of the proposed national nuclear dump.

Incredulous at hearing this on the 8am news, I rang Aunty Enice. 'I'm sitting here trying to eat my weetbix and keep my thoughts calm,' she said. 'But do you know what I was thinking? Colonisation is again attacking the First Nations people and poisoning their land.'

For her colleague, Regina McKenzie, it was 'like getting news of a death': death to a 60,000-year cultural heritage.

Since then, South Australia's international grain farming area of Kimba has again emerged as an alternative site. At last month's first joint meeting in Port Augusta, both Kimba and Flinders Ranges peoples opposing the dump reported that after 'a quiet last few months', the pressure from the federal government is now back on with a vengeance.

The announcement of $2 million in 'untied' government grants to various local applicants in each region has been integral to this. What was surprising to the Kimba opponents, faced with the absence of five of their key colleagues, was the unannounced (at least to them) appearance of the Minister, National Party Senator Matt Canavan, at this announcement.
When challenged about this lack of notice, the senior public servant's response was that he hadn't been 'really sure' that the Minister was coming. Kimba opponents cite this as just another example of the government campaign strategy: 'It's all about stealth.'

"This is a national issue, not something that a regional community should be left to deal with." - Barry Wakelin

The Minister also announced that the Australian Electoral Commission local voting for and against either region becoming Australia's national nuclear dump would take place on 20 August. Currently there is a Senate Estimates Committee examining the process of site selection and related matters, with its recommendations due on 13 August - leaving hardly time for a dispersion, reading and respectful cognisance of its findings prior to the vote.

Political maneuvering is again evident in the insistence of the Minister to tightly restrict the voting area - as if the small numbers of local people will be the only ones affected. Kimba farmer opponents warn constantly of the danger to their international markets of other crops and produce (such as Port Lincoln's seafood trade) on the whole of the Eyre Peninsula region.

The oft-repeated government saying: 'We will not impose the federal nuclear dump on an unwilling community' continues to fly in the face of the lately renewed state legislation, which actually forbids the transportation of such waste into South Australia.

On 28 April, some of us 'southerners' joined locals at the glorious Wilpena Pound (pictured) site to inform national and international tourists of the Australian government's intention to make the region home to Australia's highest level nuclear waste - if permitted.

Predictable reactions to the news ('Incredible!' 'Why?') included inquiries about the distance from the Pound. Amazement followed the map sighting: that any government would deliberately jeopardise such an internationally recognised site by proposing, just 40km away, a dump site for nuclear waste. Measured by radioactivity, over 90 per cent of the waste would be intermediate long lived nuclear waste from the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor in Sydney - waste that will be hazardous for thousands of years.

Our dinner at the camping ground was accompanied by ring-necked parrots and, later, flocks of apostle birds. In the morning, my prayer companions included a mother kangaroo, who fossicked among the leaves while keeping herself discreetly behind the wire fence. Her joey however was a close encounter type, constantly circling within a metre of my chair.

The Flinders is an idyllic place. Kimba is important grain farming country. No wonder much of the emphasis in the government campaign, and by local proponents for both regions, continues to be on the low level nuclear waste component.

With the campaign stretching past its third year since the announcement of the respective leaseholders simply 'offering' their respective properties, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal opponents are rock solid in their constant efforts 'to look after the
country’. But it has come at huge personal and communal costs.

Barry Wakelin, the retired Coalition federal member, is one of the farmers fiercely opposing the plan. In the face of groundwater, transport and serious, hugely long-term safety risks, Wakelin insists, 'This is a national issue, not something that a regional community should be left to deal with.'

**A national response (in the form of a petition being circulated by Conservation South Australia) can be made in solidarity with the country and peoples who will be affected by the proposed site. Click here to sign the petition.**

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.
The profit motive in Vic. public housing sell-off

AUSTRALIA

Madeline Gourlay

The Victorian state government is continuing to evade its responsibility to provide affordable housing.

Widespread community concern about the state government’s proposed plans to sell the majority of public land on existing public housing estates for private development has meant a public inquiry into the matter will be delayed.

The response date for the Public Housing Renewal Proposal (PHRP) inquiry has been delayed from 20 March to 5 June due to an overwhelming amount of evidence received. The Legislative Council Standing Committee’s (LCSC) inquiry asked for submissions about PHRP but, according to LCSC administrative officer Joanne Bush, the committee needed more time to look at the evidence, including the 172 inquiries submissions.

Of the 159 publicly available submissions, only 22 were in favour of the PHRP, claiming they agreed with the government that current public housing estates were old and in short supply. The plan includes a ten per cent increase in social housing after the redevelopment; the majority of submissions, including those in favour of the plan, said a ten per cent increase was inadequate. This is because there are currently over 35,000 Victorians on the public housing waiting list and many people are on the waiting list for 15 years.

Submissions expressed confusion about the term ‘social housing’, which is an umbrella term for public housing and community housing. The distinction is that public housing is government owned while community housing is privately owned. Unlike community housing, public housing provides security and affordable housing.

Yet the state and federal governments continue to use the term ‘social housing’ in what seems to be an attempt to confuse people. As they rarely explain the term, it is almost impossible to know if they are referring to community or public housing. When people are
continuously confused about the terms government officials use, it is extremely difficult to fight against them. Public housing tenants’ rights are dissolved as they are unable to know if they will lose their homes or if their homes will be improved.

Community housing tenant and public housing advocate Martina Macey said the government would profit by selling off public housing properties. 'The land was "stolen" under the Reclamation Act for the exact purposes of public housing. For any government to do a backflip on this to make a profit, especially since there are 35,000-plus on the waiting list, is disgraceful,’ she said.

"This plan will not improve the housing crisis, nor provide upgraded living conditions for current public housing tenants."

An email obtained under a Freedom of Information request by members of the Ashburton Residents' Action Group (ARAG) has confirmed this. The document contained an email which said the state government expected a 'super profit' from the sale of public land. This raises questions as to the real intention behind selling these properties. Perhaps it is not to increase and improve public housing but, rather, to sell it off to private housing associations or companies just to make a profit.

Many submissions identified the government's lack of transparency with the plan. Many public housing tenants claimed they had received misleading or incorrect information about the proposed housing layout. There is also confusion about whether the ten per cent increase will include one, two or three-bedroom units. Some submissions said if their three-bedroom unit was redeveloped into a one-bedroom unit, they would no longer have a home.

ARAG's submission included this concern, stating that residents 'were told in very forceful terms that any changes to the size and scale of the plans were non-negotiable' - a further indication that this sell-off of public land may be more concerned with profit than with rebuilding and improving public housing estates in Victoria.

West Heidelberg Community Legal Service and the City of Darebin Council stated in their submissions that the ten per cent increase of social housing would actually result in an overall decrease in public housing by 31 units in West Heidelberg and 66 units in Darebin’s Walker Street redevelopment.

The selling-off of public housing will increase homelessness because there will be a decline in affordable rental properties due to a huge decrease in public housing. This plan will not improve the housing crisis, nor provide upgraded living conditions for current public housing tenants.

As Jorge Luis Borges wrote in The South, 'Blind to all fault, destiny can be ruthless at one's slightest distraction.' The state government’s misleading, confusing and incorrect information should not distract us. Public housing is being reduced and the state government is not attempting to address the housing crisis.
Madeline Gourlay is a Monash University student, originally from Narromine, NSW.
Main image: Artist's impression of the proposed redevelopment at Walker Street in Northcote, Vic.